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Employment crisis in Spain and return migration of Bolivians: an overview

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Abstract

What are the interfaces between economic and employment crises and the dynamics of international mobility? This paper draws an overview of the Bolivian migrants in Spain taking into account the Spanish employment crisis and how the crisis impacted the dynamics of the return migration. The first section includes the theoretical implications of return patterns and how different perspectives have explained this phenomenon over the last decades. Secondly, we present the Spanish migratory context and its main features with special interest on the main Latin American communities and the evolution of their flows. The third section focus on the specific case of the Bolivian migrants in Spain, presenting an analysis of the main determinants marking the return intention of the Bolivian migrants residing in Spain. To conclude, the paper draws some considerations on economic crisis, migration and return patterns.

Keywords

Bolivian Migration; Employment Crisis; Spain; Return Migration

Author's biographical note

Sònia Parella holds a PhD in Sociology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and she is the coordinator of the research group GEDIME/CER-Migracions from the same university. She published different books, book chapters and articles in specialized national and international journals on migration studies from a gender perspective, feminist theory on intersectionality, migrations and labour market, and also on processes and transnational practices in the context of migration. Currently she coordinates the project funded by the National Plan of Research of Spain: "Return Migration and Re-migration: New migratory dynamics of Moroccans and Bolivians and the challenges for the mobility management" (REMIMAB).

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Introduction

The economic and employment crisis that has strongly affected Southern European countries, changed significantly the migratory patterns and flows of the last decades (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2015; Boccagni, 2011; Boccagni and Lagomarsino, 2011; Colectivo Ioé, 2012; Pajares, 2010). Particularly in Spain, with the arrival of migrants since the decade of the 2000s, the country has discovered its place as a destination country (Cachón, 2002). The profile of these immigrants captured the structure of the Spanish labour market. Thus, the increase of demand in sectors such as construction, tourism and domestic service, to cover mostly low-skilled job positions, led to the incorporation of a great extent of immigrants in the informal economy (Reyneri and Fullin, 2008).

The long-term consequences of the economic crisis of 2007 and the high unemployment rates of the immigrant communities encouraged the most affected ones to return or to shape onward migrations especially from 2011. The voluntary return programs designed by the Spanish government and by the emigration countries, aimed to attract them back in order to avoid extreme vulnerability. Despite the existence of these programs, most of the return projects occurred regardless of the official channels and migrants have developed “silent returns” that the official statistics are unable to capture their impact and intensity (Parella and Petroff, 2014). The restrictive conditions imposed to migrants by the return programs explain in great extent why people chose to return on their own and not through the programs promoted by governments.

With these elements as starting points, this paper aims to draw an overview of the Bolivian migrants in Spain taking into account the employment crisis and how this economic situation translated into return migration among them. In order to do so, we structure the paper as follows. The first section includes the theoretical implications of the return patterns and how different perspectives have explained this phenomenon over the last decades. Secondly, we present the Spanish migratory context and its main aspects with special interest on the main Latin American collectives (Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Peru) and the evolution of their flows. This section presents data regarding the main characteristics of the labour market’ incorporation of these migrants, but also about the impact of the crisis in terms of employment situation, return patterns and main return programs, their features and impacts on the returnees. The third section shows the main determinants marking the return intention of the Bolivian migrants

residing in Spain. The choice of Bolivia as a case study is related to several factors. Firstly, the intensity of the immigrant flow from Bolivia to Spain must be highlighted, mainly in the two years prior to the introduction of visa requirements (1 April 2007) (Gadea *et al.*, 2009). The intensity of flows translated into high percentages of irregularity rates, which plunged migrants, especially men, into an extremely vulnerable situation after the economic downturn. This severe situation explains the increase of Bolivian returnees from Spain and how, in terms of return patterns, this immigrant community becomes one of the most relevant (including both return programs and return projects on their own). To conclude, the paper draws some considerations on economic crisis, migration and return patterns.

Regarding methodology, data from INE (Spanish Statistic Institute), namely Padrón Municipal (Continuous Population Register), EPA (Active Population Survey) and EVR (Residential Variation Statistic) will be analysed in section two. In addition to these secondary sources, we present in section three data from the survey RETTRANS (2011-2012) on Bolivian migrants living in Spain. The survey is part of the research project “Return from a transnational perspective” funded by the Spanish Research and Innovation Council.

The sample included 400 cases corresponding to people born in Bolivia, aged between 18 and 65 and with a minimum of 12 months’ residence in Spain and living. The statistically representative sample was composed of two urban areas, which constitute the most important concentration of Bolivian migrants in Spain: the city of Madrid and the nearby towns of Barcelona and L’Hospitalet de Llobregat. For the purpose of measuring the return intention and make sure that biases stemming from the myth of return discourse were eliminated, the following closed question was included in the questionnaire: “*What are your plans for the following 12 months?*”. The available response options were: return to Bolivia permanently; return to Bolivia temporarily; remain in Madrid/Barcelona/L’Hospitalet de Llobregat; move to another Spanish city; move to another country. Based on this question, a dichotomous variable was created: “*Short-term Return intention to Bolivia*” and used as a dependent variable in the analysis. This variable clusters 35.5% of the sample and is constituted by all those who manifested their intention to return to Bolivia either temporarily or permanently (value “1”), distinguishing them for the rest of the sample (value “0”).

1. Theoretical challenges of the return intention, return migration and reintegration patterns

According to Sayad (2000), the “return” is an inseparable element of the immigrant condition, mostly expressed as a myth, and difficult to assign to a specific moment in time. Because of social, economic and political constraints, the return may become a desire, rather than a reality that involves the mobilization of specific resources (Gmelch, 1980). These assumptions require a conceptual distinction between intention to return (motivation) and return migration (behaviour).

1.1 Return intention: a theoretical review

The neoclassical perspective explains return intention as a result of a rational assessment of benefits (economic, human capital, social capital, etc.) that migrants expect to obtain in the destination country. In consonance with this approach, migrants tend to be too optimistic about their future saving, which is why they have to revise their plans and to postpone their return decision, to the extent that they are not able to achieve their initial goals (Van Baalen and Müller, 2008). Another set of theories highlights the importance of personal attributes of migrants as key elements explaining return intention. While some authors conclude that a high level of study reduces the probability of manifesting return intention (Massey and Espinoza, 1997; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes, 2003), others show a positive relationship between these variables (Constant and Massey, 2003). Although migrants’ legal status is a key measure of their success and security, little is known about how return migration may be affected by this variable (Agadjanian *et al.*, 2014). Gender and family features also play a significant role in return intentions. The well-being of children operates both as a constraint and an incentive to return (Parreñas, 2005). Women have an increased propensity to return (Ravuri, 2014) and care responsibilities especially towards children act as strong social pressures for migrant women (Parreñas, 2005). Although transnational economic practices (De Haas and Fokkema, 2011) and visits (Carling and Pettersen, 2014) are positively related to return intention, the link between return intentions and the geographic location of family members remains unclear in its effect. According to Agadjanian *et al.* (2014), neither having a marital partner nor having a child in the country of origin has any effect on the likelihood of stating firm plans to return.

Finally, assimilationist/integrationist theories focus on time-dependent variables and social links with the destination country. In this regard, a longer stay diminishes the

likelihood of returning, even controlling for a set of demographic factors (Jensen and Petersen, 2007). Moreover, Jensen and Pedersen (2007) point out the importance of variables measuring labour market attachment, as unemployment increases the probability of returning (Constant and Massey, 2003). On the other hand, the establishment of an ethnic community in the destination country and the existence of strong social ties are two elements that explain to a great extent a low intention to return (Agadjanian *et al.*, 2014).

1.2 Return patterns from a transnational perspective

Grounded in the transnational perspective, the return is conceived as a way of ‘circulating’ within the dynamic of contemporary transnational migratory circuits (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Rivera, 2015). Following this theoretical approach, return migration raises significant conceptual challenges to mobility studies, as it highlights how certain migrants organize their lives around transnational social spaces that transcend geopolitical borders (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992). De Haas *et al.* (2015) argue that the process of return migration cannot be conceived as a uniform process. First, because far from representing the last stage of a bidirectional process, the return constitutes an additional stage in the migratory cycle, which often leads to circularity patterns involving different places or spaces of interaction (Rivera, 2013). And second, it is important to recognise that the return might be triggered by multiple and interrelated factors (Kunuroglu *et al.*, 2016)

The transnational perspective overcomes some of the conceptual limitations that arise in the Neoclassical, New Economics of Labour Migration or Structural approaches. In these theoretical perspectives, the causes of return are analysed in dichotomous terms (here/there; successful/unsuccessful returnees; permanent migration/temporal return, etc.). The neoclassical theory predicates the decision to return on migrants’ personal features and this decision is a result of the experience of failure in the destination country (Harris and Todaro, 1970). In the New Economics of Labour Migration theory, returning is the consequence of individuals’ assessment of the economic goals they established before migrating (Adda *et al.*, 2006; Rivera, 2013; Stark, 1991). Finally, the structural set of theories do not pay attention to individual elements and are mainly focused on institutional obstacles and the opportunities offered by the receiving and sending contexts as key variables explaining return decisions (Jefery and Murison, 2011). Thus, the degree of economic development in countries of

origin, or severe employment crises in receiving contexts, are crucial aspects marking the decision of whether or not to return (Cesare, 1974; Bastia, 2011).

A third set of theories underlines the role played by social networks in the countries of origin and destination (Durand and Massey, 2003; Rivera, 2013). Returnees are not merely a group of people that share an ethnic background: they are also social actors and members of social networks capable of mobilizing a diverse set of resources available in a transnational space. Here we may include Cassarino's (2004, 2014) concept of "return preparedness". According to Cassarino (2004, 2014) the "level of preparedness" hinges on the ability (though not always the opportunity) to gather the tangible and intangible resources needed to secure return, with a clear impact on returnees' patterns of reintegration back home (post-return conditions).

1.3 Reincorporation and its challenges

Neoclassical and New Economics of Labour Migration theories address return migration pointing out the rationale decisions made by individuals associated to their objective economic conditions. Nevertheless, these theoretical approaches neglect the analysis of the reincorporation processes once the return takes place to the country of origin. Structural theories highlight that the return phenomenon cannot be understood as a particular experience. Instead, it must be framed into a social and institutional context that will mark the reintegration processes of the returned person at psychological, social and economic level. Cesare (1974) argues that the incomplete information regarding the space and context migrants return to, may end up causing a mismatch between the reality and the expectations of the returnees. The structural situation and the set of constraints and opportunities that offer the origin contexts mark in great extent the type of reincorporation individuals will eventually have (Gmelch, 1980). On the other hand, the transnational perspective points out that the potential mismatch during the reintegration phase is reduced by the existence of regular and long-term social contacts between migrants and their families and relatives during the migration (Schramm, 2011). The existence of these transnational links encourages and facilitates the exchange of information regarding resources that can be accessed once the return takes place (Nieto, 2011).

Research reveals that the access to information is not enough to explain the reintegration process. The limitations of the labour market to absorb or not the competences and skills acquired abroad (Conway and Cohen, 1998); individuals' ability

to innovate (Cassarino, 2004; de Bree *et al.*, 2010) and the socio-cultural mismatches of the labour market in both contexts (Petitt, 2007) are key factors explaining the reincorporation patterns. Another relevant aspect is the reconstruction of family relationships. The rapprochement, especially with children that have remained in the origin country during the migratory process of their parents, is particularly painful for mothers. Those who return express the effort to repair the links weakened by the migratory experience as social suffering (Parella and Petroff, 2017).

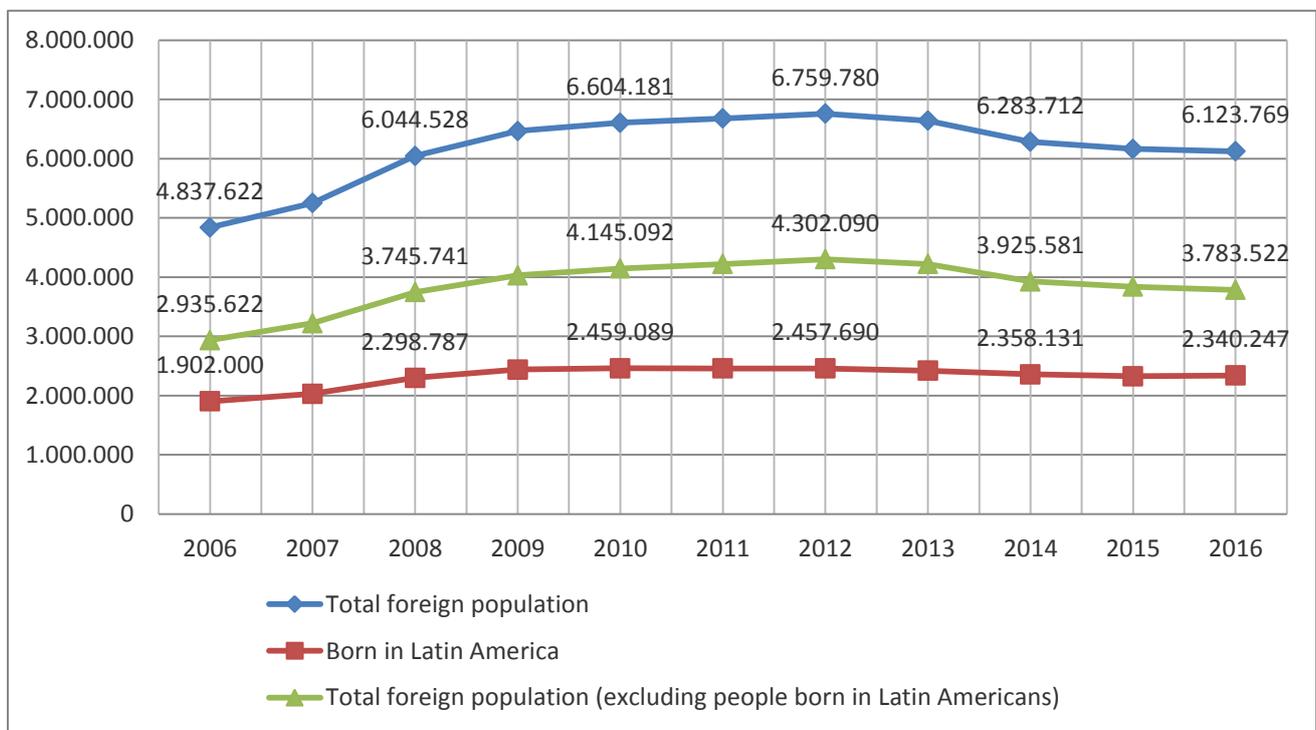
Van Houte and Davids (2008) proposes a theoretical framework to analyse the sustainability of the return based on the concept of re-embeddedness. The authors highlight three dimensions of re-embeddedness. Firstly, the economic re-embeddedness refers to which extent the returnee has access to basic resources such as housing, transportation, education, health, etc. Secondly, the psychological re-embeddedness, which measures the individuals' capability to acquire a sense of belonging and feel connected to the overall society. The position of vulnerability in this dimension has to do with the rejection perceived after returning. Finally, social re-embeddedness is linked to the social networks that provide information and mobilize resources. In the case of returnees, although the social networks are crucial in their reincorporation process, they usually count on a reduced network composed by the family members.

2. Latin American communities in Spain: economic crisis and return patterns

The Spanish economic recession initiated in 2007/2008, has deeply affected the foreign population, and in particular the non-EU citizens, with severe consequences on unemployment rates. The highest unemployment rates were registered in 2013: 42.2% for the non-EU foreign population and 25% for the Spanish population. However, it is important to note that the data only reflect works with employment contracts, since the information about the evolution of the informal labour market is limited. If we focus on the Latin American residents in Spain, their unemployment rate suffered a significant increase especially in the early years of the crisis (2009-2010). While the rate was 27.5% for Ecuadorian immigrants, it was 24.3% for the Bolivians. In the case of the Argentines, the rate reached 26.7% a year later. Finally, almost 3 out of 10 Colombian migrants were unemployed in 2009 (Colectivo Ioé, 2012). From this panorama, this section presents, first, the evolution of the main migratory flows of Latin American migrants in Spain during the last decade. Secondly, the voluntary return programs promoted by the Spanish government are presented.

In the context of the economic recession in Spain, there is a significant transformation of the migratory dynamics that characterized the Spanish migration model of the last ten years (Parella and Petroff, 2013). In this sense, data of foreign-born population stocks collected by the Continuous Register of Population (INE) shows how 2012 represents a turning point in the number of foreign people registered in Spain. Despite the decrease of these figures, the migrants' stocks are higher than those of mid-2000 (see Figure 1). This dynamic allows us to affirm, first, that the return to countries of origin has not been massive –as how it was projected– and, secondly, that the decisions to return or to shape onward migratory projects to third countries are not subject only to elements linked to the Spanish crisis and lack of employment, but also to multi-site dynamics that contrast the labour and social protection opportunities in Spain (despite the crisis) and in the countries of origin. On the other hand it also corresponds to multi-scale factors, as per example the link between cycles of international mobility and individuals' life cycles (the return to retirement or to take care of someone in the place of origin).

Figure 1. Evolution of the total foreign population, total foreign population except the Latin Americans and total Latin American population (2006-2016)

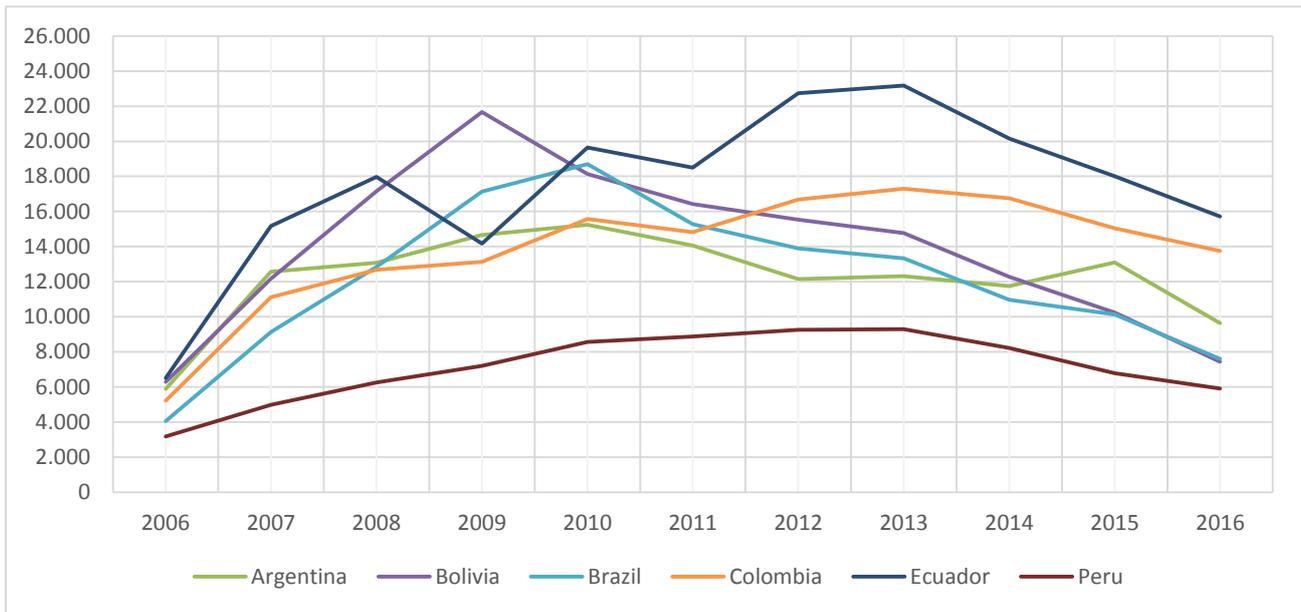


Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Continuous Population Register (INE)

Notwithstanding the presence of a population born in Latin America residing in Spain is still high, there is no doubt that the mobility patterns have changed in recent years. As we will analyse afterwards, especially for specific immigrant communities, the consequences of the crisis translated into a decrease in the number of arrivals and a greater number of departures from Spain. Thus, for the case of people born in Latin American countries in Spain, in 2012, there is a negative migration balance. For this matter, we can refer to the Statistics of Residential Variations (Estadística de Variaciones Residenciales, EVR), the only official source that allows to approach the entry/exit flows of migrant population. Nonetheless, this database has certain statistical constrains. Among the limitations of this source is the fact that there is no obligation to deregister as resident in Spain, a strategy that follow many migrants in order to keep the administrative link with Spain. Therefore, the actual number of individuals leaving Spain may be even greater than what is reported in the data as it is not able to capture the extent of the cancelations. On the other hand, aiming to debug the EVR registry, in 2006 it established that foreign non-citizens without a permanent residence permit are obliged to renew their data in the register every two years. In the situation of not carrying out such renewal, the municipalities cancel the registration. For this reason, not all the outflows that are collected in the EVR are registered at the moment in which they occur. However, in spite of the limitations of the EVR, it is a very useful tool to make an approximation of the outbound migration from Spain (as returns or onward migrations).

Figure 2 shows the departures trends over the last decade focusing on the evolution of flows of people from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In this regard, people born in Ecuador are the ones that have returned most, ranking first with 191,747 residential deregistrations, followed by Colombian migrants (152,099). Argentina (134,487), Bolivia (152,099), Brazil (133,090), and Peru (78,544) are also significant Latin-American countries in this list. The Bolivian community experienced the greatest number of outflows at the beginning of the crisis (2009), and since then, residential deregistrations have gradually decreased. Compared to the main Latin-American collectives in Spain, Bolivian immigrants arrive mostly during the first years of the economic crisis, which could mean a shorter time available to shape and dispose of a more solid social capital and to achieve a more consistent accumulation of resources to face the first stage of the crisis.

Figure 2. Evolution of residential deregister by country of birth per year



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the EVR (INE)

Regarding deregistration by sex, men show a greater propensity during the first years of the crisis. However, from 2013 onwards, women deregister more, a trend that continues until the latest data available (2016). We can infer three main reasons for this change of pattern. Firstly, women show a greater capability to face the early years of the Spanish crisis due to the less important effects on the care sector than on the construction sector that affected in greater extent men. Nevertheless, despite lower unemployment rates, women were deep affected by a significant loss of labour conditions and wages. Finally, the third factor was the devaluation of the Euro and its consequences for sending remittances, which tends to affect women more, due to their central role of social reproduction in the Latin American family structure.

In this scenario, within the framework of the EU legislation, a series of programs have been developed in Spain to manage *voluntary* return migration. One of these programs is the “Voluntary Return Program of Social Attention” (*Programa de Retorno Voluntario de Atención Social*) promoted in 2003. The program basically includes the payment of the plane ticket, as well as 50€ for each family member, and a maximum of 1.600€ per family for the return to the country of origin. This program is based on assistance in the pre-return stage to non-EU foreigners that are in situations of extreme vulnerability, but it does not provide support or follow-up of the process of reincorporation to origin after return. Although the program at EU level is launched

previously to the crisis, from the outbreak of the crisis the number of people who took part in it grew. From 2009 to 2016, a total of 18.812 returned through this program, and the Latin American immigrant communities in Spain rank first in it (17,616 people). Bolivian (3,672), followed by Argentine (2,127), Brazilian (2,125), Ecuadorian (1,909) and Paraguayan (1,654) were the main nationalities. The year with more beneficiaries was 2009, one of the most intense periods of the economic crisis. Afterwards a slight decrease was registered, although in 2013 and 2014 this tendency shifted again with a significant increase. However, considering the outflows in the EVR data, the impact of this program has been very limited, as it is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of people benefiting from the Voluntary Return of Social Attention Program by nationality (2009-2016)

Countries	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	TOTAL
Argentina	616	325	301	170	271	242	152	50	2,127
Bolivia	1,044	480	331	337	583	475	356	66	3,672
Brazil	510	282	359	239	307	216	120	92	2,125
Colombia	249	115	150	98	158	177	171	74	1,192
Ecuador	258	225	275	202	399	294	225	31	1,909
Peru	59	63	41	50	75	101	42	21	452
Total Latin America	3,775	2,048	2,041	1,479	2,624	2,654	2,167	828	17,616
Other countries	247	165	78	89	143	206	185	83	1,196
Total	4,022	2,213	2,119	1,568	2,767	2,860	2,352	911	18,812

Source: Own elaboration based on MEYSS data

Secondly, the “Productive Voluntary Return Program” (*Programa de Retorno Voluntario Productivo*) is promoted in 2010, and it also targets non-EU foreigners who are in a vulnerable position in the country of residence. The main objective of this program is to leverage productive projects in the migrants’ country of origin. People who take part in the program receive between 1.500 and 5.000€ to support a business project. This program provides support and guidance in Spain for the design of the business plan, but also takes into account the post-return phase by conducting a follow-up of the business evolution. In this sense, the program recognises and includes different stages of the return process taking into account the preparation processes and more importantly the reincorporation once the return takes place (at least at the

productive level). However, according to official data, the number of people who have returned through this program is very low, having benefited from it a total of 918 people from 2010 to 2016, as it is shown in Table 2. The great majority are Latin American people (704), the Colombians are the most numerous (239), followed by Ecuador (168) and Bolivian (134). It should be noted that Senegalese nationals have also received a relevant reception (209 people), in proportional terms with the total number of beneficiaries.

Table 2. Number of people benefiting from the Productive Return Program by nationality (2010-2016)

Countries	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Argentina			3			1		4
Bolivia	25	29	16	37	12	11	4	134
Colombia	11	17	55	42	53	37	24	239
Ecuador	33	24	12	15	60	24		168
Peru	13	11	7	11	17	3		62
Total Latin America	82	88	93	130	182	101	28	704
Other countries	17	14	7	21	59	66	30	214
Total	99	102	100	151	241	167	58	918

Source: Own elaboration based on MEYSS data

Finally, the “Program of Early Payment of Benefits to Foreigners” (APRE- *Plan de Abono Anticipado de Prestación a Extranjeros*) is implemented in 2008 with the onset of the economic crisis. This includes the possibility of cumulative payment of the unemployment benefit to those migrants with regular status, whose country of origin has signed a bilateral agreement on Social Security with Spain. As in the other programs, the people who apply receive the plane ticket and an aid for the trip. They also obtain 40% of the payment accumulated of the unemployment benefit before leaving Spain and the remaining 60% once they have arrived in the country of origin. It is an initiative that only provides support in the pre-return phase, obviating any process of preparation and subsequent reincorporation.

In this instance, out of a total of 11,930 people enrolled in this program, 11,873 are of Latin American nationality, as it is shown in Table 3. Ecuadorian migrants rank first, followed by those of Colombian nationality, Argentine and Peruvian. The program

was more active in its first three years, and afterwards the number of beneficiaries gradually reduced. This may be a consequence of the Spanish labour market, since the first years of the crisis were those of greater destruction of employment.

Table 3. Number of people benefiting from the APRE-Program by nationality (2009-2016)

Countries	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Argentina	497	204	268	125	43	25	9	3	1,174
Bolivia			7	89	70	58	34	22	280
Colombia	802	333	337	200	85	22	34	11	1,824
Ecuador	1,954	1,106	1,115	460	412	88	74	5	5,214
Peru	273	147	232	105	107	16	25	6	911
Total Latin America	4,342	2,165	2,530	1,263	926	291	274	82	11,873
Other countries	23	11	9	6	6		1	1	57
Total	4,365	2,176	2,539	1,269	932	291	275	83	11,930

Source: Own elaboration based on MEYSS data

The low participation in programs of return promoted by the Spanish government highlights that these programs were not attractive, neither for the Latin Americans nor for the immigrants in general. The restrictive criteria for access to return programs (that, for example, prevent people with dual citizenship from taking part), the imposition of not returning to Spain for three years, and the lack of post-return support and monitoring are three of the main drawbacks.

Apart from the programs, statistical data shows that the departures from Spain of people born in the countries approached in this paper have been higher than what is reported by the return programs. For this reason, it is necessary to mention also the "silent returns" that have taken place in the last decade, but which have not been recorded by the official sources. It should also be noted that, although many of these outflows represent a return to the countries of origin, according to Domingo and Sabater (2013), some of these people have been able to develop new migratory projects in other European countries, or in Latin America, as for example, Argentina, a place that has traditionally been a migratory destination for the Bolivian population.

As a balance, it is necessary to mention, the effects that the economic crisis has had on the Latin American population in Spain. It is relevant to not only consider the

high unemployment rates that show the official data, but also the precariousness of the working conditions and the low wages. In this scenario, there is a transformation in the dynamics of mobility, expressed in the fall of residential registers of Latin Americans, as well as greater outflows from Spain, which can translate into returns to the country of origin or an onward migration to third countries. Nevertheless, despite the increase in residential deregistration, the requirements imposed by the Voluntary Return Programs have been unattractive to the migrant population, and their impact has been minor. At the same time, several origin countries have designed and developed a set of policies and return programs in the last years. Some of the return migration policies of Latin-American countries –like Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru– are analysed and summarized in Parella *et al.* (2015). However, these programs have also had an unimportant impact, as they have generally not been endowed with sufficient resources to support the post-return processes.

Based on this scenario, and due to the multiples vulnerabilities –as the legal and labour aspects– that the Latin America communities face in Spain it is important to go beyond the broad picture in order to understand how immigrant groups build their mobility strategies in a context of economic crisis characterized by important consequences for employment. Thus, it is necessary to consider the set of factors that can influence the decision to return to origin, beyond those that directly respond to elements of macroeconomic order. In the next session, we address the particularities of the Bolivian collective and how these features shape the way the crisis is experience and confronted by this immigrant community in Spain.

3. Predicting short-term return intentions of Bolivian migrants in Spain

3.1. Bolivian migrants in Spain: overview

Modern Bolivian emigration may be traced back to the late 19th century. The majority of emigrants up to the 1970s had Argentina and, to a lesser extent, Chile and Brazil, as their main destinations. Emigration rose markedly in the last two decades of the 20th century, and the flow changed its direction mainly to the United States (e.g. Tapia, 2014). The economic crisis in Argentina and restrictive immigration policies in the United States turned European countries such as Italy and, more particularly, Spain into primary destinations for Bolivian emigration before the economic downturn of 2008. Emigration to Spain increased dramatically in the 2002-2007 period. New

destinations for Bolivian (re-)emigrants are emerging worldwide (Hinojosa and De la Torre, 2014; Recaño *et al.*, 2015). According to the World Bank (2015:80), 879.0 thousand Bolivians, 8.5 per cent of the population, were residing outside the country in 2013.

Remittances to Bolivia reached a maximum of 8.0 per cent of GDP in 2007 (World Bank, 2017). Remittance flows decreased during the early years of the global economic crisis, but they had returned to an even higher level than before the crisis by 2013 (Domínguez-Mujica *et al.*, 2014; Coon, 2016). The inflow of remittances in 2016 represented US\$1.2 billion (World Bank, 2017). As in other developing countries, remittances have a great and positive effect on households. Evidence shows that remittances received contribute to reducing poverty levels and child labour, and increasing household expenditures (Acosta *et al.*, 2007; Jones, 2014; López-Videla and Machuca, 2014; Coon, 2016). In a context of credit and insurance constraints, remittances also foster economic diversification by helping rural families to engage in non-agricultural activities (Lazarte *et al.*, 2014). Non-material impacts, derived from ‘social’ and ‘electoral’ remittances, have also been demonstrated (Jones, 2011, 2014; Lafleur and Sánchez-Domínguez, 2015; Ramsøy, 2016).

Bolivian immigrants in Spain formed one of the latest great waves of Latin American immigration to a (new and) primary destination country in Europe before the 2008 economic crisis (e.g. Sanz-Gimeno and Sánchez-Domínguez, 2009; Hierro, 2015; Prieto-Rosas and López-Gay, 2015). According to the Spanish National Register of Inhabitants, the number of Bolivians grew from 8,422 in 2001 to 240,912 in 2008 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2017). The deep economic crisis and new visa requirements for Bolivians (1 April 2007) considerably reduced the number of new arrivals and increased return migration. The number of Bolivian immigrants in Spain had fallen to 169,352 in 2016. Legal irregularity has arisen among Bolivians, and is a new facet of the extremely vulnerable economic situation that many Bolivian immigrants have faced during the crisis (Escandell and Tapias, 2010; Bastia, 2011; Tapias and Escandell, 2011; Colectivo Ioé, 2012; Parella, 2015).

3.2. Evidence from short-term return intentions of Bolivian migrants in Spain

In this section, we present the data from the RETTRANS project that aimed to understand the transnational dynamics of Bolivian migration in the context of the Spanish economic crisis. To the closed question: “What are your plans for the next 12

months” with different response categories, the results of the RETTRANS survey show that 32.5% of the sample plan to return to Bolivia whether on temporary (20%) or permanent bases (12.5%). By contrast, 57.8% of the sample responded that they will remain in Spain and almost 5% are planning an onward migratory project (mainly to Argentina or Chile). The economic crisis in Spain is relevant for 82.3% of those who plan to return temporarily and for 90% of those whose intention is to return permanently. This suggests the everyday engagement of individuals’ decisions with different structural environments in order to explain return intentions (King, 2000). Table 4 shows a bivariate analysis and presents the association between key predictors of return intention and outcomes in terms of percentage distributions, as well as the chi-square tests of significance. Two blocks of variables are included: socio-demographic variables, on one hand, and a block of variables that reveals the transnational ties.

In terms of sex distribution, the analysis shows that the Bolivian community in Spain is slightly feminized, as 6 out of 10 of the respondents are women. Despite this fact, males show higher probabilities of manifesting return intention. Another socio-demographic feature, level of education, reveals that over half of the overall sample (56.5%) is constituted by Bolivians with secondary education. Nevertheless, this variable is not significant in terms of predicting return intention. The analysis reveals that 56.5% of the respondents are married or living with a partner. Marital status is a significant variable in relation to return intentions. Therefore, being single is a strong trigger that plays a significant role in the migrants’ intentions to remain in Spain. Migrants’ employment situation is another variable that correlates with return intention. More specifically, those who are unemployed show a higher probability of expressing a return intention. It is also relevant that 46% of the overall sample is self-employed/employed and affiliated to social security.

Concerning legal status, when focusing on the distribution of the overall sample, the biggest category among Bolivian immigrants is constituted by those with temporal residence permits (49%). Those who only own a passport (irregular status) represent 13.3%. Legal status is a significant predictor of return intention, although to a lesser extent, the probability increases for migrants with an EU card or permanent residence permit. One possible explanation could be linked to the flexibility inherent in the possibility of developing circular migratory projects if the return to Bolivia turns out to be unsuccessful. Finally, the propensity to express return intentions in the case of those immigrants with the most vulnerable status (who count on a pending residence permit or

passport only) is also significant: nearly 4 out of 10 who report this legal situation want to return. In the situation of migrants with temporal residence permits, expecting to obtain the permanent residence permit may represent an inhibitor of return intention. The year of arrival was included as the literature highlights it as a strong predictor for return intentions. Nevertheless, as expected, this variable in the case of Bolivians does not have a significant effect due to the recent arrival of this immigrant community in Spain.

When focusing on the second block of variables (transnational ties), although 56% of the overall sample declared that they do not have children in Bolivia, the analysis reveals that having children in Bolivia operates as a strong predictor of return intention. In fact, this finding reinforces the relevance of family reasons given by the respondents when asked about their motivations to return. Secondly, staying informed about the situation in Bolivia is also significant for those who manifest return intention. On the other hand, the fact of having sent remittances in the last year does not appear to be a variable that affects return intention, although in both studied samples (of those who manifest return intention and the overall sample) a large number of respondents report having sent remittances (around 65%). While sending remittances does not affect return intention, identifying the person who manages these remittances reveals a strong correlation with the decision to return. Parents are to a great extent those who manage the remittances of Bolivian immigrants and, at the same time, the parents' role is statistically associated with a higher probability of return intentions.

Table 4. Bivariate analysis of the main predictors of return intention

Variables	Categories	% of row: sample return intention	% of column: overall sample
Personal features, family and life cycle factors		Chi-square P	
Sex	Male	39.1%	37.8%
	Female	28.15%	62.2%
	Total		100%
Education level	No formal schooling	40%	1.3%
	Primary	32.6%	11.5%
	Secondary	36.3%	56.5%
	Tertiary	25.2%	30.7%
	Total		100%

Marital status	Married	33.3%	18.477 0.002**	33%
	Living with partner without being married	41.5%		23.5%
	Two partners (Spain/Bolivia)	75%		1%
	Single	17.2%		24.7%
	Separated/divorced	37.3%		14.8%
	Other situations	41.7%		3%
	Total			100%
Employment situation	Self-employed /Employed affiliated to social security	25.8%	7.118 0.028*	46.5%
	Self-employed /Employed not affiliated to social security	37.9%		29%
	Unemployed and other situations	38.8%		24.5%
	Total			100%
Legal status	Permanent residence permit	36.9%	15.408 0.031*	16.3%
	Temporal residence permit	27.7%		48.8%
	EU card	60%		3.8%
	Pending residence permit	45.8%		6%
	Student residence permit	0%		1.5%
	Spanish citizenship	25%		10%
	Passport only	39.6%		13.3%
	DK/NA	0%		0.3%
Total		100%		
Year of arrival	2006 onwards	34.2%	0.470 0.493	54%
	Before 2006	31%		46%
	Total			100%
Transnational ties				
Having children in Bolivia	Yes	39.7%	7.187 0.007**	43.5%
	No	27%		56.5%
	Total			100%
Informed about	Yes	36.4%		65.3%

Bolivian situation	No	25.2%	5.203 0.023*	34.7%
	Total			100%
Sending remittances in the last year	Yes	31.1%	0.067 0.796	65.5%
	No	33.3%		34.5%
	Total			100%
Remittance management	Migrant him/herself	66.7%	16.345 0.012*	1.2%
	Spouse/Partner/Ex-spouse/Ex-partner	45%		12.5%
	Parents	42%		43.6%
	Son/daughter	17.9%		10.9%
	Brother/sister	18%		19.5%
	Father-in-law/mother-in-law	25%		6.2%
	Other persons	31.2%		6.1%
	Total			100% (i)

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

(i). the sample size (87) refers only to migrants who sent remittances in the last year

Source: Own elaboration based on RETTRANS data

The data exposed in Table 4 demonstrate, first, that despite the economic crisis in Spain, the population surveyed does not uniformly state their intention to return. In fact, in relation to the sample of the survey, the percentage of people who claim to want to stay in Spain is higher than those who want to return to Bolivia. In this sense, it is evident that the crisis scenario does not necessarily directly imply a mass outflow of return. Nevertheless, considering the people who have manifested their intention to return to Bolivia temporarily or permanently, the economic crisis in Spain plays a great role in their decision to return.

Second, men showed a greater intention to return than women. Related to this, it is identified that unemployed are more likely to make the decision to return to Bolivia. The destruction of jobs during the onset of the economic crisis particularly affects the construction sector, where men have mostly been employed. Thus, linking these data with the residential deregisters exposed in the previous section, it is observed that during the first period of the crisis, where the employment opportunities in the construction sector shrank, the outflow of men were higher than that of women.

Third, legal status is a significant predictor of return intention, although to a lesser extent, the probability increases for migrants with an EU card or permanent

residence permit. One possible explanation could be linked to the flexibility inherent in the possibility of developing circular migratory projects if the return to Bolivia turns out to be unsuccessful.

Fourth, regarding the elements of an individual level, marital status is linked to the intentionality of returning, as well as to have children in Bolivia. The reduction in the amount of remittances sent to Bolivia to child care, or the difficulties (legal and economic) of carrying out a family reunification in Spain, may be some of the reasons explain the intentionality manifested. This shows how the crisis can have a significant impact on the decision to return to origin, although it is also essential to consider micro level elements, especially the ones related to the family.

Conclusion

Return migration has received increasing attention in both academia and politics in recent years, largely due to the relevance acquired by this type of mobility during the economic crisis (Jauregui and Recaño, 2014). According to Rivera (2015), although there is a great scientific attention to the models of incorporation, insertion or assimilation of migrants into host societies, there is still a lack of academic progress related to the inverse process faced by migrants when their return to the countries of origin. From a theoretical perspective, this paper pointed out the need to approach return phenomenon from a holistic point of view. As highlighted in section 1, return intentions, return and post-return phases cannot be seen as isolated stages and they must be connected with the overall migratory project in order to understand their meaning.

When focusing on the empirical implications, the Spanish economic and employment crisis is significant for the return patterns in the context of Southern European countries. The high unemployment rates and the deterioration of labour conditions, led migrant communities to extremely vulnerable situations, although it not translated into the expected return numbers. One of the main collectives particularly affected by the economic downturn were Latin American communities, the largest immigrant groups in Spain. Section 2 pointed out the broad picture in terms of statistic data both regarding the situation during the crisis and the return patterns. It shows how men were more affected than women due to the high unemployment rates in construction sector, although women experienced a significant deterioration of wages and therefore of life conditions. This situation reflects on the return patterns, especially in the case of migrants from Colombia, Argentina and Bolivia three countries that rank

first in the list. While men deregister from official statistic more during the first years of the crisis, women follow the same trend during the subsequent years. In the light of the severe situation, Spanish government promoted a set of Voluntary Return Programs framed and designed by the EU legislation a decade before the economic crisis. Despite this fact, the limitations in terms of circularity that involved these programs discouraged most of the migrants to return by using them. This was one of the main reasons to explain the lack of success of the programs as we highly detailed in section 2.

Finally, we argue that the overall picture of data on Latin-American immigrants in Spain in terms of return patterns is not enough to draw conclusions on the consequences of the crisis. In this regard, Bolivian migrants represent an interesting case study in order to a better understanding of an immigrant community that arrived in the early years of the crisis and had not time to consolidate their legal position or their situation into the Spanish labour market. As quantitative data from Section 4 also point out, variables linked to the personal features and the transnational ties are key elements that explain return intentions of Bolivian migrants in Spain. We need more quantitative and qualitative research on how migrants live and interpret contexts of crisis and post-crisis in term of return intention, onward migration and circularity. Comparative data in different Southern European countries, with different immigrant communities is very useful not only from an empirical perspective but also to enrich and broaden the theoretical challenges that the economic and unemployment crisis represented and still represents for the European countries hit by unemployment.

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