

## Predicting return intentions in Madrid

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### Abstract

Although Spain has only recently turned out to be an immigrant-receiving country, because of the economic downturn, Spanish authorities are becoming increasingly concerned about return migration. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the underlying variables of return intention of migrants in the Autonomous Community of Madrid in order to extract policy implications in the return arena. The microdata source is the Regional Immigration Survey 2011–2012. Our main finding is that having a job in Spain is the most important constraint to returning. In any case, return intentions vary with age groups, so policy design should be different according to this variable.

**Keywords:** Return migration; return intentions; multinomial logit; social ties; economic variables.

### Introduction

In the last two decades Spain has passed from being an emigrant-sending to an immigrant-receiving, and once again a sending country. The change in the migration cycle, together with the economic downturn, began generating both academic interest and social and political debate on return migration.

Moreover, the present article is based on research work undertaken for the Madrid region immigration authorities, who were very interested in knowing the behavioural differences among three age cohorts of immigrants (16–25, 26–45 and 46–64) in order to refine their migration policy design process. They were especially keen on return migration intentions of young immigrants in the midst of the economic downturn. For this reason, we tried to analyse the underlying variables of return intention of migrants in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, segmented by age. The microdata source was the *Regional Immigration Survey* (ERI in Spanish) 2011–2012 (for the Madrid region). The ERI is issued annually by the immigration authorities of the Autonomous

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Community of Madrid, its main purpose being to collect relevant information about the immigrant population settled in the region.

The higher immigrant unemployment rate, together with the precariousness of immigrant jobs and weaker family networks compared to the native population, would lead to thinking that return migration would dramatically increase in Spain. However, as statistics show, emigration flows have experienced slower than expected growth.

The most recent official statistics, 1 July 2013, reveal that there are 4,870,487 foreign citizens in the country, which stands at 10.4% of the total resident population in Spain. In addition, 1,636,889 people must be taken into consideration, as they have already obtained Spanish nationality. Hence, 14% of residents in Spain could be considered immigrants. However, over the period 2008–2012 the emigration flow, according to Population Now-Cast (estimated migratory flows), stands at 1,696,153 (62,493 of which are naturalised foreigners) movements corresponding to people born abroad. Although it has been gradually increasing from 2008, it has remained a constant rate at approximately 350,000 individuals per year.

### **Return intentions and their determinants**

Traditionally, migration scholars paid little attention to return migration because they took it for granted that migration is a one-way process. In fact, return migration studies commenced in the early sixties (King, 1986) and subsequent empirical works have revealed that migration is often accompanied by return migration (Bovenkerk, 1974; Gmelch, 1983; King, 1986).

Return migration decisions are always preceded by the intention to do so. Return intentions and actual return, therefore, constitute an inseparable component of every migration movement. In the migration literature, migration intention is a planned behaviour based on the actor's free volition, a process by which migrants take the decision (Moran-Taylor and Menjívar, 2005), although this does not negate the possibility of external factors influencing the decision (Senyürekli and Menjívar, 2012).

There have been many attempts to conceptualise migrants based upon their return intentions. The first one was made by Frank Bovenkerk in 1974, who matched migration duration intention with actual migration movement and provided four categories of migrants (permanent or temporary migration and with or without return). According to the intentions of returnees and the course of the return process, Russell King (2000) establishes four types of return migration: occasional, seasonal, temporary and permanent. Cassarino (2004) analysed returnees' preparedness, which would be the voluntary act supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about the sending country's environment. In 2005, Moran-Taylor and Menjívar identified a threefold typology of desires to return: *assertive* (those sure about wanting to

return to their home countries), *ambivalent* (those unsure about returning but thinking of going back at some point) and *no desire* (do not plan to return).

### ***Some determinants of return intentions***

There is no consensus on the determinants of (and their effect on) return intentions. In fact, most scholars report contradictory findings while using the same variables. We have tried to group these into three categories, those variables available in our data source that are behind return intentions:

**Personal features:** gender, nationality/ethnic group, legal status, years since migration.

Some of these factors show controversial results: some authors do not encounter explanatory power in gender (Waldorf, 1995), while others do (Roman and Goschin, 2012). In general, (irregular) administrative status prevent migrants from leaving the country (Constant and Massey, 2003; Senyurekli and Menjívar, 2012) except for the highly skilled (Coniglio et al., 2005, 2009) that would more easily take the decision to leave. Nationality becomes relevant when explaining return intentions in Alberts and Hazen (2005) or Coulon and Wolff (2010). Length of stay appears to be negatively linked to the return decision, as a result of greater integration in host societies (Baalen and Müller, 2008; de Haas and Fokkema, 2011).

**Social tie variables,** such as family ties or home ownership in the receiving country.

For this set of variables, a broader consensus seems to have been reached: there is a negative relationship between return intentions and having family ties – partner and children – in the host country (Khoo, 2003; Güngör and Tansel, 2011; Dustmann, 2008; Haug, 2008; Roman and Goschin, 2012). Either owning a house or house satisfaction in the host country (Waldorf, 1995) has positive effects on the return decision.

**Economic variables,** such as participation in the host country's labour market, having access to welfare benefits and remitting behaviour.

Regarding labour market participation, there is no agreement on the interaction of being successful in the labour market and its positive (or negative) influence on return intentions. While some works state that a bad performance in the host labour market (that is, not being able to attain the targeted income) delays the return decision, others highlight that it is precisely the better salaries and the higher income that delay the return decisions (Dustman, 2008; Makina, 2012; Paile and Fatoki, 2014; Roman and Goschin, 2012). As far as social benefits are concerned, Reyes (1997) discovered that those with higher levels of integration are less interested in subsidy settlements. Moving on to remitting behaviour, de Haas and Fokkema (2011) find a positive relationship between sending remittances for individual use and return intentions.

### *The relevance of age*

The factors that influence return intentions vary under different conditions and in different periods of the migrants' life. In fact, return is sometimes part of a life cycle (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007). In this light it can be considered that the intention of (and the level of intention of) return differs depending on the immigrants' age group. We have not been able to find empirical studies that split return intentions by age. However, research shows that older age groups are more prone to return soon (Predosanu et al., 2011; Güngör and Tansel, 2011). Convexity with respect to the odds of return was highlighted by Schmidt (1994). In the same fashion, Klintal (2006) and Larramona (2013) state that younger and older age cohorts have a higher willingness to return. For his part, Yendaw (2013) finds that migrants' reasons for returning (family issues, political restrictions at receiving countries, investments at home) vary with the respondents' age.

### *Return migration in Spain*

With respect to the analysis of the Spanish case, few studies have been performed to date. Nevertheless, in the last few years, and as a consequence of the economic downturn, seminal research on return migration (not yet on return intentions) is starting to emerge, focused on both contextual/labour market factors and personal/family factors.

Contextual/labour market factors are analysed by Pajares (2009), López de Lera (2010) and Larramona (2013), who conclude that worse situations in the country of origin is negatively related to return migration: this would explain that Asian, African and Latin Americans would be less prone to return home. In addition, the restrictive political measures implemented by the Spanish Government, such as the voluntary return plan, that offered return bonuses to non-EU foreigners who agreed to leave for at least three years (Beet and Willekens, 2009; Bastia, 2013) made migrants stay because of the impossibility of returning to Spain in the near future.

As far as family factors are concerned, sociocultural integration appears to have a high explanatory power in return migration intentions (de Haas et al., 2015). According to Pusti (2013), connections with family living in Spain, together with the better quality of life available for the family, encourage decisions to stay. Moreover, Bastia (2013) points out how return decisions are generally taken on the basis of personal responsibilities, separation from children or ill health.

### **Methodology and data used**

In the literature, the most relevant methodological approaches were related to logistic regression. A multinomial logit model has been used to predict a dependent variable with three categories on the basis of categorical independents, to determine the percentage variance in the dependent variable

explained by the independent ones. A pseudo  $R^2$  statistic is available to summarise the strength of the relationship.

As pointed out before, the microdata source is the *Regional Immigration Survey 2011–2012* (for the Madrid region). The ERI is issued annually by the Madrid regional immigration authorities, to collect relevant information about the foreign-born economically-active population (whether naturalised or not).

The initial sample composed of 2,992 interviews was conducted between the months of December 2011 and January 2012, is random and proportionally broken down by nationality (Romania, Ecuador, Morocco, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, China, Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Bulgaria and sub-Saharan). The survey is split into five parts, namely: (1) personal and family features, (2) legal status, (3) housing conditions, (4) employment status and (5) social benefits enjoyed by the respondent.

The information available in the survey together with the determinants of return intentions proposed in the literature allowed us to formulate the model's main hypotheses. We have created the predictors of return intentions using the categories identified in our literature review, and those available in the ERI.

H1: Successful economic performance negatively determines return intentions.

H2: Social ties in the receiving country prevent return intentions.

H3: Explanatory factors of return intention vary by age group.

The dependent variable is return intention, measured as a multiple variable according to Table 1. In the survey, respondents were asked whether they wanted to return soon to their home countries, whether they thought they would go back at some point (in a few years or at retirement) or whether they did not plan to return. This path is consistent with the findings of Moran-Taylor and Menjívar (2005), presented in the literature review section.

The final sample size is equal to 1,985 because approximately 33.6% of valid cases did not show a clear return intention for the purposes of this article.

**Table 1:** Number of cases in each category

	Young (16-25)	Mature (26-45)	Older (over 45)	Total
<b>With intention, return soon</b>	179	649	176	1,004 (50.5%)
<b>With intention, return later</b>	101	523	193	817 (41.2%)
<b>With no intention (refusal)</b>	22	99	43	164 (8.3%)
<b>Total</b>	302	1271	412	1,985 (100%)

We are treating the category ‘With no intention to return’ as the reference group. Two models have been estimated related to the category ‘With no intention to return’: one for the category ‘With intention to return soon’ and another for ‘With intention, return later’.

Therefore, the population has been split into age groups as requested by the Madrid region immigration authority: young (16–25 years old), mature (26–45 years old) and older (46–64 years old). Results for the analyses of variance on the distribution of return intentions among the selected age groups prove statistically significant differences among the three age groups for any of the outcomes.

Moreover, our model is composed of three groups of independent variables, as shown in Table 2.

### **Empirical results**

The empirical results are shown in Table 3.

#### **Young age group cohort**

Concerning *personal-demographic features* the probability of intention to return soon for migrants who arrived between 2001 and 2004 is almost 93.6% lower than for migrants who arrived in 2008 and thereafter. The underlying reason may be that these respondents (who arrived Spain more than a decade ago, and are younger than 25) constitute the so-called 1.5 generation, that is to say people educated among Spaniards, fully integrated in the Spanish society and with a low desire of going back to their sending countries. The earlier the respondents arrived in Spain the lower their willingness to return.

The legal status (those who hold Spanish nationality or those irregulars) turned out to be significantly different from the reference level to the return intention soon and later: migrants with a residence permit appeared to be rather ‘pushed-out’ abroad, whereas naturalised immigrants or irregulars appeared to be more rooted. The probability of early return of naturalised migrants is 94.3% lower than in the case of migrants with a residence permit. In line with the literature, irregular immigrants would not be willing to leave because of the possible difficulties they could encounter when trying to come back to Spain. With respect to those naturalised, as pointed out before, we would be thinking of a group close to the second generation and, subsequently, not very keen on leaving the country.

The country dummies indicate that, after controlling for other factors, Bolivian, Paraguayan and Romanian migrants were less likely to express an intention to return soon than their sub-Saharan counterparts (67%, 22% and 27%, respectively). On the other hand, Bulgarian and Chinese migrants were significantly more likely to express an intention to return later (1.29 and 3.5 times respectively). Hence, the estimation results show important differences for the probability of return intention by country of origin which are possibly

**Table 2:** Percentage of the weights in the sample of different variables for non-reference (dichotomies) and reference (omitted) categories

Factors	Variable	Dichotomies	%
1. Personal features	Year of arrival <sup>1</sup>	2000 or before	24.3
		2001–2004	28.4
		2005–2007	31.6
		2008 or after*	15.7
	Legal status	Naturalised	14.1
		Irregular	14.3
		Residence permit*	71.6
	Gender	Female	52.5
		Male*	47.5
	Nationality	Bolivian	7.6
		Bulgarian	3.9
		Chinese	5.5
		Colombian	10.3
		Ecuadorian	15.7
Moroccan		10	
Paraguay		4.6	
Peruvian		8.1	
Dominican		4.5	
Romanian		25	
Sub-Saharan*	4,9		
2. Social ties with receiving country	Type of housing tenure (Owning a dwelling)	Non-owner	87.1
		Proprietor*	12.9
	Marital status	Unpaired	38.5
		Paired*	61.5
	Family networks in Spain	Partner and children	37.7
		Partner	15.5
		Children	9.3
		Parents	10.4
	Extended family or without family*		27.5
Dependent children in Spain	Dependent children	39.5	
	No dependent children*	60.4	
3. Economic variables (being successful or not)	Remitting behaviour	Does not send remittances	58.1
		Remittance sender*	41.9
	Current employment status	Employee	50.6
		Self-employed	7.1
		Unemployed*	42.3
	Social benefits (other than healthcare services),	No social benefits	74.2
		Enjoys social benefits *	25.8
		No social benefits	74.2

\*Omitted category

<sup>1</sup> We have split the variable into quartiles. Different nationalities present different lengths of stay in Spain (Fernández et al., 2011). In addition, it is noticeable that the lower value of the fourth interval coincides with the start of the economic downturn.

**Table 3:** Return intentions predictors, by age group and return intention category

Factors	Variable	Dichotomies	Young (16-25)		Mature (26-45)		Older (over 45)	
			Assert	Ambiv	Assert	Ambiv	Assert	Ambiv
1. Personal features	Year of arrival	2000 or before			.531**	.289**	.049**	.011*
		2001–2004	.064*		4.288*	2.81**	.048*	.012**
		2005–2007	.3638**	.221**	.041**		.051**	.010**
		2008 or after*						
	Legal status	Naturalised	.057*	.11**	.029*	.009**		
		Irregular		.13***	.038*	.068***		
		Residence permit*						
	Gender	Female	.936**	0.929**	.926**	0.933**		
		Male*						
	Nationality	Bolivian	.33**					
		Bulgarian		1.29**		.469**		
		Chinese		3.528*	.419**			
		Colombian			.431*			
		Paraguay	.78***					
Peruvian				.429*				
Dominican				.695**				
Romanian		.7**			.611*			
Sub-Saharan*								
2. Social ties with receiving country	Type of housing tenure (Owning a dwelling)	Non-owner	3.915*		1.276*		.752** *	
		Proprietor*						
	Marital status	Unpaired			1.655*			
		Paired*						
	Family networks in Spain	Partner			.416*	.048*	.031*	.035*
		Children	3.769*		.504*		.033*	.030**
Parents		6.622**	3.896**	.573*		.032*	.032*	
Distant relatives or without family*								
3. Economic variables (being successful or not)	Remitting behaviour	Does not send remittances	0.061**					
		Remittance sender*						
	Current employment status	Employee	.642*		.045*	.012*	.042*	
		Self-employed	.1270***	.069***	.027***	.029***	.001** *	.002***
		Unemployed*						
	Social benefits (other than healthcare services)	No social benefits			1.446*		.682**	
Enjoys social benefits *								

Note<sup>1</sup>: Coefficients are presented as odds ratios. Only statistically significant odds ratios are in the table and specified as: \* $P < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.01$ .

Note<sup>2</sup>: Assert (Assertive) and Ambiv (Ambivalent)



related with contextual differences between Spain and these countries. Moreover, the results clearly demonstrate that women have a less likely to return intention (soon and later) than men. The better position of women in the current Spanish labour market could support this assertion.

With respect to *tie variables*, the probability of returning soon for those whose parents live in Spain is 6.6 times higher than those without family ties. It means for a group of those who arrived with their parents a decade ago the possibility of returning soon is seen as an output to an uncertain labour period, probably because they have completed their studies and are not working. In addition, their coming back to Spain would be somehow guaranteed, which would mitigate the risks of the departure. Moreover, the probability of home non-owners (single individuals living with their parents) returning soon is significantly superior to that of home owners.

Regarding *economic variables*, the influence of being currently employed (whether employee or self-employed) is statistically significant as regards return intentions for the *ambivalent*. In the case of *assertive*, the probability of intention to return is 35.8% lower for employees than for the unemployed. The effects are strongly statistically significant for the self-employed, 87.3% and 93.1% lower for *assertive* and *ambivalent*, respectively, compared to the unemployed. Those who have a job are not prone to coming back, which means they are making progress in terms of economic integration or, at least, they are better off abroad than in their countries of origin. Non-remitting behaviour (which indirectly implies not having or having weak family ties in the sending country) reveals a negative influence on early migration decisions.

### ***Mature age group cohort***

Regarding *personal-demographic features*, and in relation to the length of stay, the number of years since arriving in Spain has a significant negative impact on the odds of return intention, both between three and five years (almost 95.9% lower than for those who arrived more recently) and more than ten years (less than 50% for *assertive*, and almost 70% lower for *ambivalent*). However, the number of years since arriving in Spain has a positive effect when length of stay is between six and nine years, the odds of return ratio being 4.3 times higher for *assertive*, and 2.8 times higher for *ambivalent*. This fact may imply that the individuals in this group have not fulfilled their expectations.

As for the young age group cohort, for the mature age group, legal status (with Spanish citizenship or irregular) turned out to be significantly different from the reference level (resident permit) for both *assertive* and *ambivalent*. In all cases both naturalised and irregular migrants show much lower return intentions with respect to the omitted category (from 93% to 99%). Return intentions appear to be affected by the migrant's country of origin: Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Chinese and Dominicans were less likely to express an intention to return soon than their sub-Saharan counterparts. However, Bulgarians and Romanians were significantly more likely to express an intention to return later.

Women in the mature age group are less likely to intend to return than men, as occurred with the young age group cohort. Underlying reasons would be very similar to those for the younger group: tight family networks and having relatively secure jobs.

Moving on to *social tie variables*, it appears that migrants, either *assertive* or *ambivalent*, who enjoy close-knit family networks (parents, children or partner living in Spain) had the lowest likelihood of intent to return, while the reverse can apply for those who live with extended family or without family (reference level). In the case of *assertive*, those that do not own a home are significantly more prone to intend to return than home owners. Moreover, having no children or being single considerably influenced return intentions of the *assertive* group.

Regarding *the economic variables* the influence of current employment status turned out to be statistically significant for both *assertive* and *ambivalent*. In all cases both employees and self-employed migrants show much lower return intentions in comparison with the unemployed (over 95.5% in all cases). These effects appear to be in line with other empirical findings, and demonstrate that being economically successful will increase settlement tendencies. Furthermore, not enjoying social benefits (other than access to a health system) increases the probability of immediate return intentions 1.4 times; this fact could be linked to the higher willingness to return of those that arrived in Spain after 2008.

### ***Older age group cohort***

For the older age group most *personal-demographic features* were insignificant, which means the propensity of return intention (for either *ambivalent* or *assertive*) is more strongly driven by social ties or economic factors that have more to do with fulfilling the pre-established objectives.

In fact, in this group, not owning a home or not receiving social benefits, make the probability of intention to return soon 24.8% and 32.8% lower than in the cases of owning a dwelling or drawing social benefit. Not having a house might mean the immigrant has not yet attained sufficient economic independence to return home (and thus did not accomplish their migratory project). Then again, the fact of not receiving benefit settlement might imply they have not reached a certain income level or the benefits have been completely used up. That is, migrants should continue to look for a means to support themselves in Spain rather than thinking of returning home.

Nevertheless, year of arrival in Spain has a significant negative impact on the odds of return intention for both *assertive* (probability of return intention for those who arrived before 2008 is almost 95% lower than for those who arrived later) and *ambivalent* groups (probability for those who arrived before 2008 is around 90% lower with respect to the omitted category). This is consistent with prior theoretical developments that set out a negative relationship between the length of stay and return intentions.

When migrants have their family living in Spain (*social tie variables*), the probability of intention of return for both *assertive* and *ambivalent* groups is almost 97% lower than those who live without a partner and children. According to research, close-knit household networks with children or parents appear to have a more negative influence on return decisions than those without family.

Regarding the economic variables, the results for the assertive group reveal that the probability of intention to return soon is 95.8% lower for employees and 99% lower for the self-employed than for the unemployed. Once more, those successful in the labour market are less prone to come back, which means that either they make progress in terms of economic integration or, at least, they are better off abroad than in their countries. The direction of the effect is in line with the hypothesis that economic integration will increase settlement tendencies.

### Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to analyse the determinants of immigrants' return intentions in the Madrid region, through the microdata extracted from the Madrid *Regional Immigration Survey* (ERI).

The present article is based on research work undertaken for Madrid region immigration authorities, who were very interested in knowing the behavioural differences among three age cohorts of immigrants (16–25, 26–45 and 46–64) in order to refine their migration policy design process. They were especially keen on return migration intentions of young immigrants in the midst of the economic downturn.

The source of data used does not include some variables that turn out to be paramount for return intentions analysis:

- It provides details on the date of arrival, but it does not give information on the return dates of interviewees.
- The educational background and professional experience of the individual are not provided.
- There is no information on contextual variables, neither related to the sending nor to the receiving country.

However, there are some relevant issues to be considered in order to improve migratory policy design:

1. No substantial differences have arisen between the two categories of return intentions: *assertive* or *ambivalent*, with respect to the omitted category (*no desire*). This fact is probably due to the difficulty that the respondents may have when defining their own intentions. In this respect, more research should be done to analyse return intentions, especially when referring to the *ambivalent* category.

2. Being employed is negatively related with return intentions. One might then think that unemployment has been the main trigger to intend to return and that, subsequently, the economic downturn leads to emigration. Nevertheless, this assertion is not consistent, neither with research studies on the Spanish case nor with the official statistics. Although our data source does not include contextual factors, when controlling nationality, a negative relationship with return intentions arises in most cases. Everything seems to indicate that a worse situation in sending countries is one of the most important hurdles to return.

3. For the young aged, having ties in Spain such as living with their parents but not owning a house, increases their willingness to move. If authorities were interested in fostering return, circular migration policies could be considered.

4. In the mature group, the number of years since arriving in Spain has a positive effect when length of stay is between six and nine years. In addition, not enjoying social benefits (other than access to a health system) increases the probability of immediate return intentions. These facts may imply that the individuals in this group tend to think of coming back home when they have not fulfilled their medium term expectations. In our opinion this should be the target group when designing return policies. There might be room for bilateral agreements on permanent or temporary return with sending countries.

5. The eldest immigrants seem to be more embedded in Spain, as demonstrated by the negative effects on return intentions that arise from length of stay. Consequently, their return intentions are lower. Hence, the propensity to return intention is more strongly driven by social ties and economic factors that have more to do with fulfilling the pre-established objectives. We have doubts about the effectiveness of return policies targeted to this group, apart from voluntary assisted return in some cases.

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