

Migration interrupted – on the role of return preparedness for post return outcomes

Motivation and aim

Return migration by individual migrants from host to origin countries is an increasingly important feature of contemporary migration. Not only has it increased in scope during the latest decades (Castles et al., 2009; Jeffery & Murison, 2011) its political connotations have also been intensified. Return migration of “third country nationals” has become part of EU destination countries’ migration management of unwanted migrants, which has opened up to return assistance programs promoting ‘voluntary’ returns as well as higher levels of expulsion (Black & Gent 2006; Flauhaux 2017). Increasing numbers of returnees along with current political migration strategies make comprehensive knowledge regarding post return re-integration essential. However, whilst the governmental and organizational interest for return migration is vast, our knowledge of post-return outcomes and how they come about is still much limited (Black and Gent 2006).

In the scholarly literature, return to the country of origin has traditionally been framed as either a failure or success, depending on original migration objectives and whether these are met or not (Constant & Massey, 2002, 2003; Stark & Bloom 1985). Little is known about how returnees fare *after* having returned and why some returnees experience a successful re-integration into the country of origin when others do not. Since the rise of voluntary return assistance programs some studies have tried to examine their impact on post return outcomes (Flauhaux 2017). Whilst the shared results from these studies find strongly limited effects of assistance programs, some instead suggest the importance of being willing and able to ‘prepare’ the return (Flauhaux 2017).

The aim of this paper is to advance the knowledge of the varying conditions pertaining return and their relation to post return outcomes, with the intent to provide greater possibilities of current policy assessment. In order to do so we make use of the theoretical notion of ‘return preparedness’, introduced to the migration literature by Cassarino in 2004. In the yet underdeveloped academic literature on post return outcomes, return preparedness have remained a promising but heavily underexplored phenomenon, describing different degrees of willingness and readiness to return. In our paper we present a thorough assessment of return preparedness and its components, analyse how it comes about, and examine its role in relation to returnees’ financial conditions post return. Additionally, we ask whether migrants returning with low levels of return preparedness still experience better economic conditions compared to those who never migrated in the first place. A last question relates to whether the examined relationships hold in different contextual settings, including not only south-north migration but also north-north migration trajectories.

Our research questions are:

- What are the previous migration experiences and individual characteristics associated with different levels of return preparedness?
- How do different levels of return preparedness relate to post return living conditions?
- Do migrants with low levels of return preparedness still experience better living conditions than non-migrants after return?

- How does the relationship between return preparedness and post return living conditions differ in different contextual settings?

Return preparedness

The concept of return preparedness belongs to a conceptual framework aimed at describing prerequisites of ‘successful’ return in relation to home country development (Cassarino 2004). It builds partly on the notion of Gmelsch (1980) who writes that returnees often are ill prepared for return in terms of re-adjustment and acceptance, as they lack information on the social, economic and political development undergone in origin whilst abroad. However, new communication technology and cheaper transportation costs have enabled maintained relations through transnational social networks and thereby also information on the origin context (Cassarino 2004).

Return preparedness is a theoretical acknowledgement of the time, resources and willingness required for positive post return outcomes presented by Cassarino (2004). The underlying argument of return preparedness is that migrants are prepared for return to a varying degree, which in turn shapes the post return outcomes. Return preparedness is considered by Cassarino to include both *willingness*, by Cassarino described as migration being a “voluntary act” (2004 p.271), a decision taken on one’s own initiative, without external pressure (2014) and *readiness*, conceptualized as having sufficient resources and information to return. An intrinsic part of the parts constituting return preparedness is the aspect of time and migration durations, which partly relate the concept of preparedness to former discussions of return in terms of failure or success.

When introduced to the literature, return preparedness as a concept was situated in the context of south-north migration (Cassarino 2004; 2014). With the depicted outcome of the returnee becoming “an actor for development” it relates to the discussions within the now so called ‘development nexus’ (de Haas 2005; 2010; Schiller & Faist 2010). By making use of this concept for different contextual settings and partly different outcomes the generalizability of this concept is being examined.

Data

The data used for empirical analyses consist of more than 2000 face-to face individual structured interviews with Senegalese, Argentinian and Romanian returnee migrants, all returning from Spain, and their non-migrant counterparts.

The interviews are part of the European Commission financed project TEMPER (Temporary versus Permanent Migration). Finalized in autumn 2018, they cover demographic, financial and social aspects concerning the individuals’ current situation and history, meaning full migration and work trajectories comprising all migration and work periods lasting for at least three months. Considered as return migrants are all of whom have migrated (as non-tourists) and stayed abroad for at least three months and then having returned, at least once, and been present in the origin country for at least three months. All participants included in the analysis are born in each respective origin country.

As there is no sampling frame of return migrants from which to draw a random sample, the origin countries have been divided into geographical areas where the goal has been to sample migrants from different types of regions. Different types of seeds have then been initiated in these regions to get as wide range of respondents as possible.

For each returnee there is at least one individually matched non-migrant. In the case of Argentina, siblings, cousins or childhood friends were used. In Romania, non-migrants constitute a representative sample from the selected regions and sampling units. In Senegal, the matched non-migrants consisted of individuals from the same street or neighborhood, with similar demographic characteristics. The non-migrants have been interviewed in a shorter but equivalent setting as the returnees.

Returnee migrants constitute a considerably hard-to-reach population. Although increasing as a phenomenon, returned migrants still constitute a small proportion of countries' total population. The data used is unique in its large sampling of returnees *at origin* and *after* return. When sampling returnees at their origin some individuals might have already re-migrated again. As a result we can't claim the data to be a full representation of the entire returnee community in these countries. However, it allows us to provide informative explorations on various yet heavily unexplored aspects concerning return migration.

Romania, Argentina and Senegal are three very different types of countries, with different types of migration flows, and different legal barriers to the EU, as well as different historical, political and economic relations to Spain. In the analysis of this paper the three countries are seen as three separate cases. A direct comparison between the countries would inaccurately confuse context specific aspects. However, examining return preparedness and post return outcomes in three different and separate origin contexts enable us to assess to what extent the role of return preparedness is generalizable to different migration settings. This is especially relevant, since the concept of return preparedness was developed within a south-north migration framework.

Method and variables

Based on the theoretical notions of return preparedness returnee migrants in each country are divided into three levels of return preparedness: low, medium and high. These levels reflect the willingness and readiness to return, based on the three aspects of will, resources and time, in turn comprising several questions from the questionnaire. A full overview of the creation of these variables and the questions they build upon is provided in the paper.

As a post return outcome we look at the financial coverage of the basic needs of the individual and those who depend on him/her. The variable is binary and comprises those who declare sufficient or more than sufficient coverage and those declaring insufficient or sometimes insufficient financial coverage.

The first part of the paper examines the different levels in each country, what they entail and how they relate to individuals characteristics and migration experiences. A second part analyses the relation between return preparedness and the financial coverage of basic needs at the time of the interview. The third and last part compare return migrants returning with low levels of preparedness to those who never migrated in the first place. Main methods consist of rich descriptive overviews as well as logit and multi-logit regressions.

Preliminary results

Results from the theoretically driven division of respondents into different levels of preparedness reflect the theoretical suggestions given by Cassarino (2004). Highly prepared returnees show higher proportions of "voluntary" return, that is, a return that was said to be completely voluntary, with no

feelings of having to return or being compelled to return and where the decision was made either by the individual only or together with others. Returnees with higher levels of preparedness also show higher proportions saying they had time to prepare their return. They are also more likely to return with higher levels of socioeconomic resources, reflecting not only previous socioeconomic conditions but also more positive migration experiences in Spain, e.g. in the Spanish labor market.

Whilst the general tendency is similar for all three countries, some differences are noteworthy and reflect the conditioned differences associated with the three different migration flows. In the Senegalese case, returning as a returnee with low levels of preparation entail a substantial risk of having experienced deportation and not 'only' semi-voluntary return. Fewer respondents declare their return as being completely voluntary, even at higher levels of preparedness. Additionally, even among the returnees coded as with high levels of preparedness, few have planned their return prior to migration, as the case within the Argentinian and Romanian context. In aspect of resources, remittances and owning land or a business is more important in the Senegalese case than in the other two countries. Romanian migrants show the highest levels of having a positive work experience, with a satisfactory salary and matched skill level, during their main time in Spain. They equally show the lowest proportions of people with unemployment as their main work experience. At the same time, Romanian migrants declare the smallest proportions of bringing back larger number of skills. Together these reflect the fact that large proportions of the Romanian migrants came to Spain as work migrants and left the country when no longer working.

Results from the separate country level regressions of experiencing lack of financial resources to cover basic needs show an overall picture of return preparedness as an important aspect, even when other factors are controlled for. In the Argentinian case, significant results show the importance of having made a voluntary return, compared to a return comprised with feelings of obligation. For Romanian and Senegalese returnees, we find statistically significant importance of having the time to prepare for return compared to the return being decided upon and realized all too rapidly. Returning with higher levels of resources are found significantly lowering the risk of experiencing economic difficulties in the Romanian case.

Comparing non-migrants with migrants returning at different levels of preparedness, no association is found in the Argentinian case. In Romania and Senegal, it is clear that medium and high-level prepared returnees have lower risks of experiencing economic difficulties than non-migrants. The same is found when looking at Senegalese returnees with low levels of preparedness, compared to Senegalese non-migrants, however this association is not statistically significant.

Final results will be ready and presented for the European Population Conference in June 2020.

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