Understanding Return Migration to Mexico: Towards a Comprehensive Policy for the Reintegration of Returning Migrants

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Summary

• About return migration
• Background
• Current context
• Motivation and methodology of the study
• Results
• Conclusions, theoretical implications and policy proposals
# About Return Migration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It is small. Less than emigration.</td>
<td>• It can be substantial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is the end of the migratory process.</td>
<td>• It depends: Re-emigration possible if immigration cycle was ended abruptly, if there was not enough preparedness, or if there is lack of appropriate support or difficult conditions back home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It represents fewer challenges than emigration.</td>
<td>• It has an important impact on development, education, security, health, international and bi-national relations, and human rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About Recent Return Migration to Mexico

• Between 2005 and 2010, 1.39 million people moved from the U.S. to Mexico.
• 70% (985,000) were returning migrants.
• 30% U.S.-born family members of Mexican migrant workers.
• By 2010 the U.S.-born population living in Mexico grew 115% to 739,000 compared with 343,000 in 2000.
• Of those, 77% (570 thousand) were under 18 years of age.
• 300,000 such minors moved between 2005 and 2010.
About Recent Return Migration: a Reverse Population Movement

• Return migration has not been massive but it has been considerable.
• It has generated Reverse Population Movement.
• It has major implications for Mexico’s national and sub-national development processes
  – Unique opportunity if successful re-integration of migrants.
  – A social and economic challenge with implications in education, health, human rights, security, U.S-Mexico relations etc.
About recent return migration: theoretical implications

Its current characteristics and complexity opens up new theoretical questions.

• New Economics of Labor Migration: What happens when there was settlement and return was not planned/goals are not achieved?

• Transnationalism for whom?: A population that has faced major barriers for movement.

• Cross Border Social Network theory mobilization of resources and readiness are crucial. How institutional actions affect capacity to mobilize them?

• We need to identify the ways in which institutional actions have been shaping this phenomenon.
Background: Mexican immigration- A Historical Phenomenon

• In less than four decades the Mexican immigrant population increased dramatically: 12.6 millions compared with 760,000 in 1970. Very large number unauthorized.

• Massive settlement the result of:
  - Increases in the offer and demand of workers.
  - The evolution of migrants’ participation in the U.S. labor market.
  - 1986 amnesty and family reunification policies.
  - Immigration control.
A) Border control policies:

1) 1990s: Prevention Through Deterrence. Operations Hold the Line (el Paso 1993), Gatekeeper (San Diego 1994), Safeguard (Nogales Arizona 1997), Rio Grande (Sur de Texas, 1997) increased risks and costs for circular migrants and created incentives to settle

1) Consequence Policies—Rather than caught and released, migrants were prosecuted. Immigration bars. Example: Operation Streamline in Texas and other border areas.
Context: Return Migration

3) Entanglement of Criminal Justice System and Immigration Control:

• Section 287(g).
• Criminal Alien Program (CAP).
• Secure communities.

Result: Since 2008, more than half of all federal criminal prosecutions are due to immigration violations. (MPI, 2013).
Context: Return Migration

4) Immigration raids and workforce enforcement = difficulty to find jobs; lower wages.

5) Anti-immigrant policies state and local levels.

B) Economic Recession: Affected sectors of the economy in which Mexicans had high levels of participation.

Drop in Mexican migration flows; increase in return migration.
Motivation – Jalisco Study: What we do not know with Certitude

• Who are the returning migrants?
• How many forced? How many on their own initiative?
• Why did they return?
• What happens to them after they return? Do they return to the same place? Do they use skills and experiences acquired while in the U.S.? Do they Invest?
• Do they want to re-emigrate?
• What factors would make them remain in Mexico? What factors would make them to re-emigrate?
• How have their perceptions changed as a result of their migration experience?
Methodology

- Quantitative study 600 interviews with return migrants 3 types of localities:

  1) Metropolitan area: Guadalajara and nearby municipalities.
  2) Middle size city: Lagos de Moreno.
  3) Rural area: Los Altos de Jalisco.

Gender and education quota. Two follow up studies were conducted in Hidalgo and Coahuila.
Methodology

• Definition of Return Migrant:

Any person of Mexican nationality that returned from the U.S to Mexico during the past ten years, that lived in the U.S. for at least a year, and that has been back in Mexico for at least three months.

Survey included questions about emigration, immigration, return, and intention to re-emigrate.

Snow ball technique, with the support of local, state, and federal authorities, NGOs and other actors. Age: 16 years and up.
Results:
Population Characteristics

Pre-selected criteria:

Geographic distribution: 25% Lagos de Moreno, 25% Los Altos, and 50% Guadalajara Metropolitan area.

Education: 66% elementary and middle school; 24% high school and technical school; 10% university.

Gender: 30% female and 70% male

Age: 80% working age, most of them between 18 and 49 years old.
Results:
Population Characteristics

Legal Status in the U.S. Before and Upon Return

- Before Return
- Upon Return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Before Return</th>
<th>Upon Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bracero</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Card Holder</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Visa (F, J1 or other)</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary visa H1B, TN</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist visa</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Visa</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa H2A or H2B</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results:

Population Characteristics

![Bar chart showing intention to stay in the U.S. when first emigrating.](chart.png)

- Permanently: 16.1%
- Temporarily: 67.7%
- I did not have a clear idea: 15.5%
- No answer: 0.7%
Results: Population Characteristics

• On average they traveled back and forth 4.8 times to work/reside in the U.S.
• They were putting down roots but had spent less time than most Mex immigrants (80% have been for 5+ years; and 50% for 15+ [Masferrer et al.])
• Before return – 60% had been in the U.S. 1-5 years. 17%, 5-10 years; and 9.5 %, 10+ years).
• U.S residence: California (38%), Texas (10.8%), Illinois (10.3%), Georgia (4.2), Florida (3.8%), Arizona (3.2%) and Colorado (2.8%).
Results: Population Characteristics

- It is common to have U.S.-born children and 54% left family behind and of those 59% do not expect relatives to move.

U.S-born children

- 15.2% of 1
- 10.4% of 2
- 5.5% of 3
- 1.2% of 4
- 1.7% of 5
Results: Population Characteristics

• Bi-national experience: Regardless of legal status they had interaction with U.S. society and it was positive

(A) Very good. (B) Good. (C) I had some problems. (D) I had many problems. (E) I do not have an opinion on the subject.
Results: Characteristics of the Population

• Bi-national experience: they had less interaction with U.S authorities but it was positive

(A) Very good. (B) Good. (C) I had some problems. (D) I had many problems. (E) I do not have an opinion on the subject.
After living in the U.S., almost half of all respondents can not read (43.3%) or write (46.6%) in English.
Results: Characteristics of the Population

• Very limited civic engagement
Results: How Many Forced? How Many on their own?

- Pew Hispanic Center: 65%-95% returned on their own and 5%-35% as a result of deportation.
- Jalisco: 11% were deported.
- Hidalgo 10%, and Coahuila 23%
## Results: Reasons for Return

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reasons for return</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>21.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration / Racism / Difficulties with receiving soc</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homesickness and family reasons</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>41.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health reasons</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total respondents</strong></td>
<td><strong>543</strong></td>
<td><strong>90.35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Reasons for return

- Main reason: Homesickness (175 persons).
- Family reasons include taking care of family members, marriage, family problems (e.g. reunification).
- Only 2 persons did because of anti-immigrant environment; 14 because discrimination and adaptation problems; 26 because of fear of deportation; 9 because of lack of documents.
- Unemployment (75 persons). 17 to open or attend a business. Only 8 because they believed economic situation in Mexico had improved.
Results: Where do they return?

Where they have roots
- 53.6% where they were born
- 32.6% where they lived before they emigrated, which was not where they were born.
- 4.6% to a different place but where they have family or friends.
- 8.3% where they could find better opportunities
- 0.8% to a different place.
Results: What Happens When they Return? Use of experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry/Position</th>
<th>In Mexico before emigrating</th>
<th>While in the US</th>
<th>After return to Mexico</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14.80</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities and building maintenance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>19.80</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12.31</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another (not identified)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>24.96</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did no answer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: What Happens When they Return?

- Most of them are in the informal economy and have limited or no social entitlements.
Results: What Happens When they Return?

- Almost 20% invested in a business after return.

- Most were in small projects – But even with difficulties and no public support, 75% are still in business.
Results: What Happens After Return

- Family and friends are the primary – often sole – source of information regarding return migration.

Information Sources when Moving Back to Mexico

- 57.2% None
- 20.1% Family
- 13.1% Friends
- 2.2% Consulates
- 2.2% Government Offices
- 0.8% Internet
- 0.7% Mass Media
- 0.0% Chambers of Commerce
- 0.0% NGOs
- 0.0% Religious Groups
- 0.0% Clubs from Your State
- 0.0% None
Results: Intention to Re-emigrate

- 30.6% – For sure
- 17% – Maybe
- 24.8% – Not for now
- 17.3% – Never

Main reasons:
1) They know the U.S and would like to settle there
2) Family and personal reasons
3) Because of a lack of future in Mexico
Results: Change of Perceptions

• There is an evolution in the original reasons for emigration in the consideration to re-emigrate from primarily job-related to more related with consequences of settlement: Roots in host country.

• Perception of current situation depends on time of comparison: Better than before they emigrated but worst than while in the U.S.
Return Migration seems to Continue
Hidalgo and Coahuila

• 90% of respondents in Hidalgo were undocumented when they first emigrated. Only 43.9% were so in Coahuila. They relied more on tourist visa (23.2%) and a relevant number had H2-A or H2-B visas (16.1%) or another temporary visa (10.3%).

• Reasons for return had some variation in Coahuila. In both Hidalgo and Coahuila homesickness was the most important reason, but for Coahuila “job in U.S. was over” was almost as high.

• Hidalgo return to agricultural sector was very high but less participated in the U.S. Opposite happened in Coahuila. Overall participation Agriculture diminished after return if compared to when first emigration.

• Unemployment rate in Hidalgo back in Mexico 28%. Coahuila 17%.

• States of residence in the US different. Hidalgo: (FL, NV, CA, GA, TX). Coahuila (TX)
Conclusions of the Study

- Most circular undocumented migrants possibly settled in the context of escalation of border control.
- Limited social capital.
- Family/homesickness always relevant, but seem to have changed in content as a result of greater immigration control.
- Apart from deportation, need to reunify with family members in Mexico + take care of parents when circularity was not possible.
- Homesickness, the most prominent, may reflect lack of integration in host country in a more hostile environment.
- Economic reasons relevant driver but less than imagined. Apart from obvious effects of economic crisis, they may reflect less mobility in the U.S. labor market.
- Further research is needed: Reasons seem to reflect a population with less mobility.
Conclusions of the study

• Many did not plan to return / were not ready.
• Limited information: Primarily from family. Return primarily to where family reside. Family plays key role and needs to be considered in reintegration process.
• Migrants have a hard time using U.S. experience and entering the formal economy. But promising fact: They invest.
• Unclear how many will re-emigrate. Intention is not action. But the most decided seem to be those with roots in the U.S.
Conclusions of the Study

• Need to reconsider theoretical models/questions in the face of recent U.S Mexico migration dynamics:

• Transnationalism for whom?

• How can migrants re-integrate/contribute to development when return not planned/ migrants not prepared?

• What has been the impact of recent institutional actions on return? Need to map out in detail a new, not well understood reality for migrants.
Public Policies

• Return should be addressed in a comprehensive manner and include all relevant stakeholders.

1) Identity:
• Grant access to identity documents both in U.S and Mexico.

2) Information:
• Before and after return (housing, access to services, job opportunities, education etc.)

3) Managed return.
Public Policies

4) Help in social and labor reintegration
   • Demystify criminality and other negative stereotypes of migrants.
   • Social and psychological support.
   • Create job opportunities in places of origin and return.
   • Linked experience with job opportunities or facilitate re-training.
   • Grant access to further education.

5) Investment support
   • Fiscal incentives, access to credit, elimination of bureaucratic bottlenecks, access to know-how.
Public Policies

6) Access to and transferability of social entitlements

8) Generate a bi-national agenda win-win situation
   • Emphasis on development and the restoration of circularity

9) More research and diagnosis.