

# THE PROFILE OF THE MAGHREB RETURN MIGRANTS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of the present analysis is the understanding the demographic and socio-economic profile of return migrants to Maghreb. This general profile is compared with the migrants from Morocco and especially with those living in Spain. The material has been analyzed from the survey on return migrants, performed in 2007 by the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies and compared with that performed in 2009 by the Council of the Moroccan's Community abroad. Additional results, obtained from the survey made by the author with a Moroccan community living in Madrid, Spain, are compared with those from both previously mentioned surveys.*

**Keywords:** *Maghreb, Migration, Return Migration, Spain, Surveys.*

## INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis is noticed in different ways and through different situations. Unemployment is certainly the most obvious that causes the most devastating consequences for living conditions and for the integration process and the development of migration projects.

In the context of Spain, throughout the years preceding the crisis, a large number of immigrants arrived in the country attracted by the expanding Spanish labor market. However, the situation changed and since 2008 a deterioration of the economic conditions and employment has slowed the rate of the immigration flows towards the country.

Many of the immigrants started their immigration experience sharing an apartment with other immigrants. Many of them consolidated later being involved in the labor market, meeting with their families and buying or renting an apartment. Serious problems for many immigrants affected by the financial crisis are the mortgage payments. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants in Spain bought apartments in prosperous times taking advantage of low interest rates, long-term mortgages and precarious

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calling banks. When unemployment increased, especially during 2008, and revenues fell, and many were unable to meet their investment payments.

Detailed statistics regarding Moroccan immigrants, whose community is the most numerous among the migrants communities, reveal that the number of people residing legally in Spain amounts to 788,768 for 2010, with a predominance of immigrants from the age group between 16 and 64 years (INE 2010), while this number corresponding to the previous year amounts to 767 383. The increase of the number of the immigrants is slower compared to the two consecutive years before the beginning of the financial crisis, i.e. 2006 and 2007, when it was more than 100.000 persons. All this reveals the slowing of Moroccan immigrants in the Spanish territory during the years after the crisis (PAJARES 2010).

One can observe similar tendencies regarding the affiliation to the Spanish Social Security system, the unemployment benefits, the work permits and the family reunification permits during the years after the beginning of the financial crisis (INE 2010-2012).

The statistics regarding the irregular migrants from Morocco, corresponding to the period 1993-2010, reveals a pick of the arrived migrants to South of Spain (nearly 17.000 migrants) in 2001, while this number has considerably lowered in 2010 up to less than 3.500 persons (ARAGALL 2012, ZAPATA-BARRERO 2012).

The pattern of the irregular migrants arrived to Spain has changed during the last decade. The pick of the migrants crossing Gibraltar corresponds to the year 2000 and amounts to about 17.000 persons, while the pick to those migrants how have reached Spain by the via the Canary islands corresponds to nearly 33.000 in year 2006. This number is much lower for the migrants crossing Gibraltar the same year (around 8.000) due to the strong migration measures taken in the border regions of Ceuta.

The emitted Spanish visas to Moroccan nationals has decreased considerably after 2008 with more than 30.000, while the number of temporary visas has augmented with the nearly same number (ARAGALL 2012, ZAPATA-BARRERO 2012, ESTEVE GARCIA 2012).

A Voluntary Return Plan for immigrants in Spain was launched in 2008 by the Government. This Plan was aimed at unemployed immigrants from countries outside the EU. Those who decided to return home would have received 40% of unemployment benefits to which they were entitled before departure. The remaining 60% were paid one month after the arrival in the country of origin. The compromise was that the beneficiaries ought to renounce their work and residence permits and not reside in Spain over the next three years. However, the number of Moroccans who have chosen this Plan of Voluntary Return was very low. That could be explained by the importance of remittances for the rest of the family in Morocco and the possibility to use the money saved during their residence in Spain to start an activity after returning to Morocco. Specifically, the majority of the Moroccan men did not go back, but there were many cases where the wife and the children did it while the husband stayed in Spain. There were other cases in which children were sent to Morocco, while the husband and the wife were resting in Spain. The reduction of income make difficult to keep the whole family in Spain, but some members did remain if the family was divided between the two countries. These strategies also helped to maintain links with Spain and to keep the residence permits

(ARANGO 2009, PAJARES 2010, ZARAGOZA 2012, ZAPATA-BARRERO 2012, ESTEVE GARCIA 2012).

One has to notice as well that in 2011, the new Moroccan Constitution from 2011 has approved a new global approach for the migration and the mobility and the intention from the part of the Government of the President Mariano Rajoy for deepen the economic cooperation with Morocco also in the domain of visa permits, that makes Morocco the country with most Spanish visas issued compared with the rest of the Maghreb's and West Africal countries (ZARAGOZA 2012, ZAPATA-BARRERO 2012)

The present paper has the aim to study the profile of the return migrants and the social characteristics of these phenomena.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next section 2, the methodology for the present research has been presented. In section 3 the additional analysis referred to the survey performed by the Robert Schuman Institute of Advanced Studies, focusing on six different important characteristics is largely discussed. The data offered by the Council of the Moroccan Community abroad have been also analyzed. In section 4 the results from the survey held with a large pattern from the Moroccan's community living in the Northern part of the Madrid Province area have been presented and compared to the results from the previous surveys. The final conclusions are presented in section 5.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the work is based on analysis of surveys conducted by the Consortium MIREM in 2009, by the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad in 2009 and surveys conducted by the author, during the first quarter of 2012. During the last survey, the participants have been asked to reply to a large list of questions regarding all possible aspects of their life in Spain and their decision to emigrate or to go back to their home land. Any age and gender of the participants have been included into the survey.

According to the original analysis, performed by the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies (MIREM 2008), regarding the return migration's pattern, there are three main elements that characterize it: the place of reintegration, the duration and type of migration experience and the factors and circumstances that motivated the return of the immigrants. These factors have been analyzed in detail and the corresponding conclusions have been presented (MIREM 2008).

Here some other details of the survey's results are analyzed, paying attention to some additional aspects of the socio-demographic characteristics, the socio-professional situations and skills, the social and financial capital of the returnees to the Maghreb, the migration experience lived abroad and the patterns of reintegration and finally, the post-return conditions and perspectives of the migrants.

The aim of the present investigation is to make a general analysis concerning the profile of Maghreb's return migrants and to compare it with those of the Moroccans living in Spain and in the Northern Madrid's area (KOROUTCHEV 2012).

The importance of the surveys is twofold: first they compare the similarities and the specific differences between the corresponding communities and second, they empha-

size the effect of the cultural and host surrounding on the decision making process of different groups of migrants. Apart, the surveys make an important contribution for the literature regarding the most recent tendencies in the Maghreb's migration pattern and the economic basis for them. The results they offer are important for the correct interpretation of the facts and the underlying social processes in Western Europe under the effect of the current financial crisis. One of them is the appealing difference on behavior and decision making between younger and older people. With only a minor exception, all young people below 40 years of age reported their feeling to be integrated in the country, as well as their decision to live in Spain or into another European country after retiring. The rest of the group expressed their will to go back to Morocco after retiring.

## ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEYS PERFORMED BY THE ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDIES AND BY THE COUNCIL OF THE MOROCCAN COMMUNITY ABROAD

### *Socio-demographic characteristics*

The empirical data, collected from the MIREM's project survey on return migrants (MIREM 2008) reveal that the profile of the Maghreb migrants corresponds to representatives predominantly from the male population 87% against 13% of representatives from the female population. This is true for the three countries of Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia).

Over half (65%) of the returnees, who decided individually to return, were over 40 years old and 18% - over 65 years old. Especially, the most representative group was between 31 and 40 years of age. The groups of people of age below 30 year and above 65 years had a very similar representation.

Regarding the marital status of the migrants before emigrating, the biggest group was represented by singles (66%), followed by married ones (32%).

The analysis of the households shows that before emigrating, most of the interviewed (about 73%) were living with their parents, brothers, sisters and other family members. However after immigrating, the situation changed and most of them lived with their wife and children (26%) or with other family members and friends (30%). The next group was represented by the immigrants living alone, which was around 17%.

The situation at the time of the survey showed that the biggest group was still represented by persons living with their wife and children (43%), followed by those living with their parents and brothers/sisters (14%) (Fig. 1).

Finally it must be noted that regarding the housing situation before leaving the country of origin, the major group was represented by people living in traditional houses (about 40%), while in the country of immigration, the largest group was formed by people living in flats (about 70%), revealing in this way the change of the kind of settlement after immigrating.

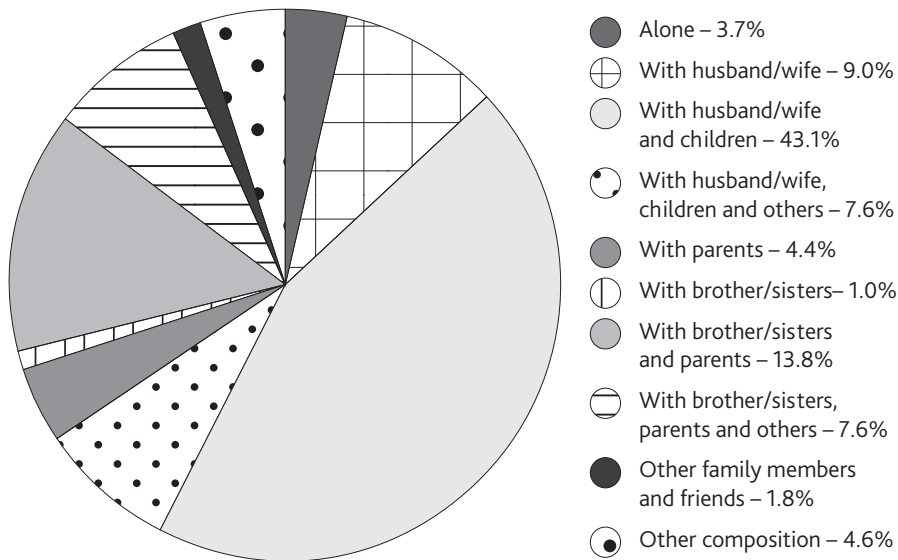


Figure 1. Maghreb return migrants according to the composition at the time of the survey (Source MIREM 2008).

### ***Socio-professional situations and skills***

Regarding the socio-professional situations and skills of the migrants, over 20% of them had a permanent employment contract before immigrating. This group is followed by the students one (17.0%), the group of the seasonal workers (12.3%), the unemployed (12.0%) and the group of legally independent workers (7.4%) (Fig. 2).

Before living their homeland, over 60% of the migrants have been working as follows: agriculture (14%), building (10%), trading sectors (8%).

It is important to note that at the time of the survey, a significant part of the migrants had a permanent employment contract in the main immigration country (26%), followed by those employed on a short-term basis (20%) and by the group of seasonal workers (10%). Migrants who were forced to return to their homeland were employed mainly as seasonal workers (17%), followed by the group of people with permanent employment contract (16%).

Finally, the survey reflects a rather high level of education of the immigrants: 27% had a secondary school certificate and 20% a university degree. The percentage of the migrants who were forced to return to their homeland and who possessed a secondary school certificate was even bigger - around 36%.

On the other hand, over 18% of the migrants who decided to return voluntary to their country of origin had no qualification whatsoever at the time of going abroad.

Let's stress that the professional training acquired in the main country of immigration during the period of living there is very limited: only 17% of the total number of migrants achieved some professional training abroad and only 4% of the total number followed any professional training at their homeland after returning.

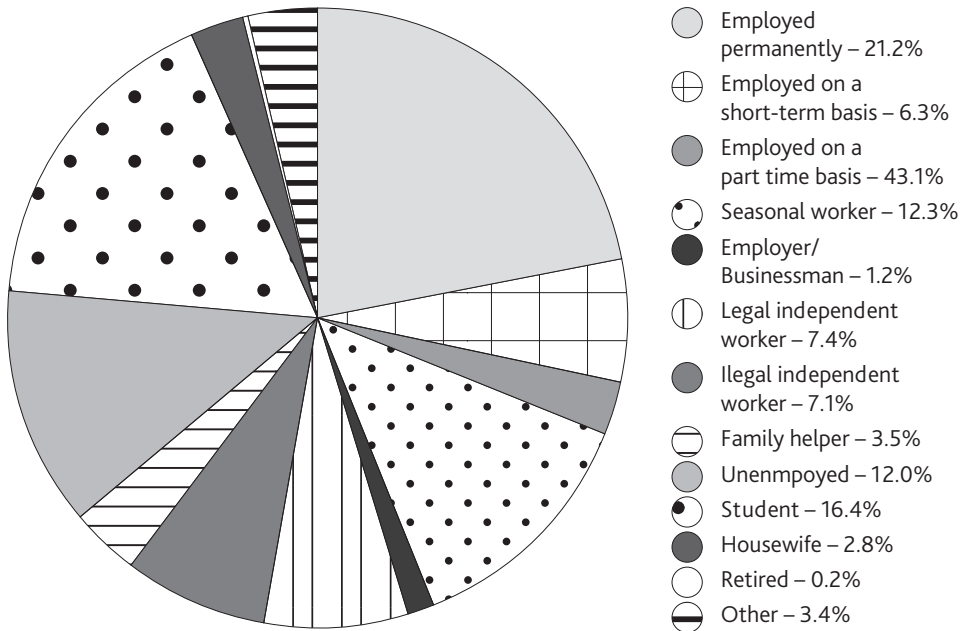


Figure 2. Occupational status of the returnees to the Maghreb before emigrating  
(Source MIREM 2008)

### *The social and financial capital of the returnees to the Maghreb*

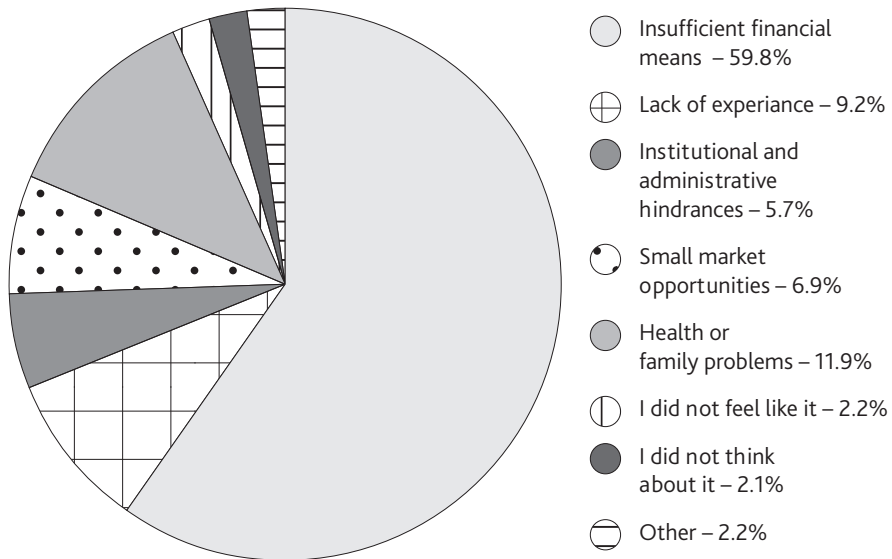
As a measure of the financial situation of the migrants in the main country of immigration, one could use for example the remittances. This rate is relatively high – about 70%. Nearly 30% of the interviewed remitted part of their income on a monthly basis, 25% on a quarterly basis and 27% irregularly. Over 30% of the migrants declared having remitted over 1,000 euros per year, thus being the biggest group, followed by the group remitting between 200 and 500 euros – about 20%. However, there is a fraction of people, about 30% who was not remitting any income to their homeland.

It is interesting to compare these average statistics with a different one, obtained from the surveys, conducted in 2009 by the Council of the Moroccan community living in Spain (COUNCIL 2009). According to the last statistics, 50% of this community was helping financially their relative families living in Morocco.

In the general case of the survey, performed by MIREM, the main reasons for sending remittances are:

- providing for the needs of the family living in the homeland – 87%,
- paying for the building or buying of a house – 37%
- ensuring children’s schooling and education – 29%
- investment in a business project – 13%.

Related to the last data, the majority of the immigrants did not invest in their homeland after returning (66%) and the proportions of those who have invested in one, two and three investments was 26%, 6% and 1%, respectively.



**Figure 3.** Reasons for which some returnees to the Maghreb did not carry out any investment in the country of origin after return

(Source MIREM 2008).

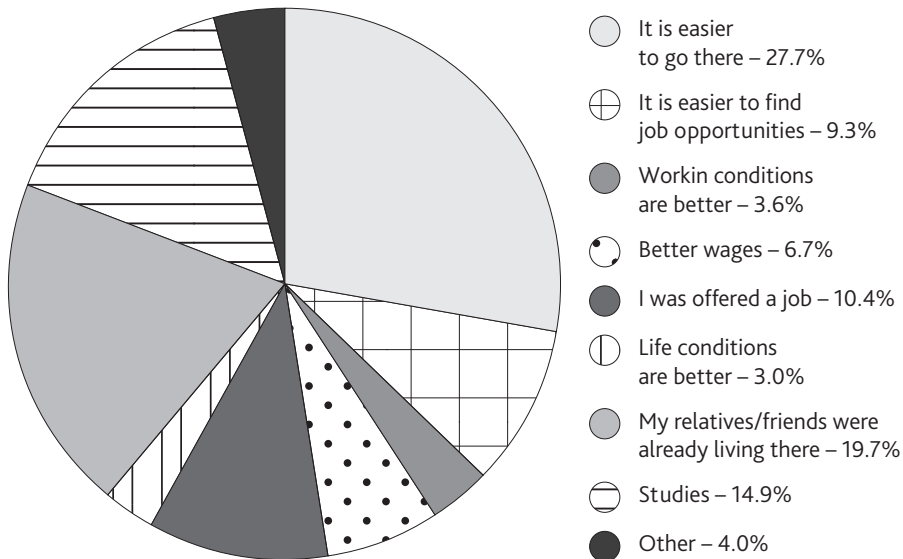
The financial resources used to support the investments carried out by the returnees was distributed as follows: more than 72% was self-financed, 17% used bank loans and about 10% have borrowed money from their parents.

The reasons against investment in the country of origin after returning are presented in Fig. 3. The biggest percentage was attributed to insufficient financial means (59.8%), followed by a lack of experience (9.2%) and institutional and administrative hindrances (5.7%).

Finally, regarding the contacts with the family during the migration experience abroad, about 45% of the interviewed were in contact at least once a week, 24% were in contact few times in a month and 10% once a month. All these data showed a rather strong relationship between the immigrants and their family.

### ***Migration experience lived abroad***

Over 70% of the interviewed left their homeland between 1980 and 2000 with the intention of living in the host country temporarily (45%) or permanently (27%). The biggest percentage of them have left their homeland during the decade of 90 – about 30%. Since 2000, this fraction is about 20%. It is also worth mentioning that 77% of the migrants left their origin country only once, while 10% and 7% of the migrants did it two or three times. The first five European countries of immigration are France (about 50%), Italy (20%), Germany (5%), Spain (3.3%), and the United Kingdom (1.6%). The countries, outside the EU, which have been as well a focus of attraction, are: Saudi Arabia (2.6%) and Canada (1.5%).



**Figure 4.** Maghreb migrant reasons for having chosen the main country of immigration  
(Source MIREM 2008)

Regarding the duration of the migration experience, 20% of the interviewed belonged to the group that had immigrated for a period of 10 to 19 years, followed by those with migration experience of 5-9 years -18% and by those of more than 20 years of experience - 11%.

The reason for having chosen the main country of immigration were the better wages (22%), followed by better life conditions (13%) and better working conditions (12.7%) (Fig. 4).

Regarding the relationships with the public institutions of the main country of immigration, more than 40% of the interviewed said that they were very good, 33% said that they were rather good and about 15% reported that they have had some problems. The relationships with the host society are estimated to be rather good (41%), followed by very good (40%) and 9% have expressed they have had some problem.

Finally, regarding the difficulties faced by the Maghreb’s migrants in the main country of immigration, the majority (40%) reported that the biggest problem was the housing as the rent was too high, followed by those that have revealed some discriminating/ racism problems (31%) and the group that has had problems of integration (30%). Such difficulties became more remarkable for the migrants who were forced to return.

In the case of the Moroccan community living in Spain (COUNCIL 2009), 32% of them reported traveling several times a year to Morocco, while those that were traveling once formed 44%. At the other extreme were those who never return to their country of origin - 10%.



## Return and patterns of reintegration

The return motivations of the Maghreb migrants who decided individually to return to their country of origin were as follows: retirement – 14.4%, manage a business at home – 9% and family problems in the country of origin – 8.9% (Fig. 5).

Finally, the financial situation of the returnees at the time of the survey with respect to the question if their current financial situation had improved compared with the financial situation when abroad, 31% of those that returned voluntarily said that it has rather improved, followed by 26% who reported that it did not change and 22% reported it has worsened.

For the case of immigrants that have returned by force, for 47% of them the situation worsened, followed by 21% who left unchanged and about 18% who expressed some improved situation.

In the case of the Moroccan community living in Spain (COUNCIL 2009), 45% of them had an own home or a property already built or under construction in Spain compared with 38% of them that had it in Morocco. The percentage of immigrants that took part in the survey possessed their own land in Morocco was 31%, 15% had a business or had interests in economic activity in Spain and only 8% had similar activity in Morocco.

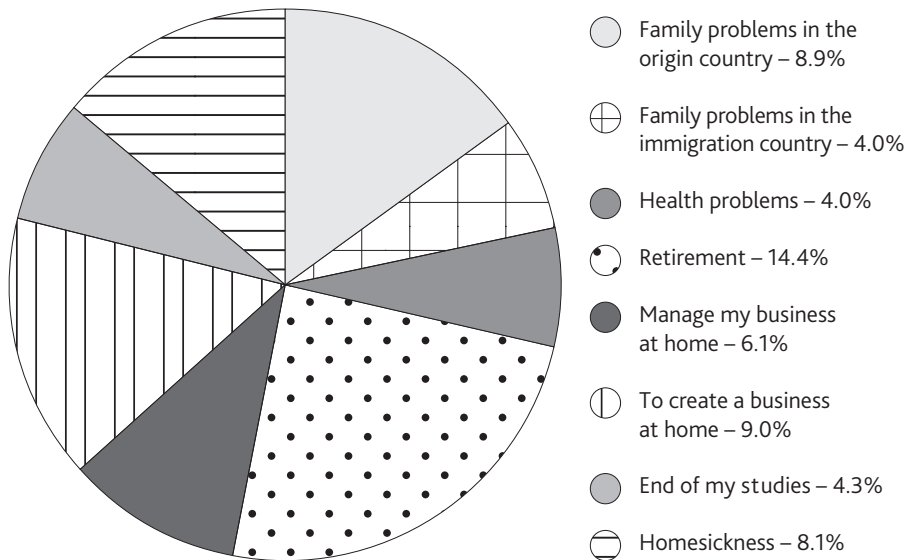


Figure 5. Return motivations of the Maghreb migrants who decided individually to return to their country of origin

(Source MIREM 2008).

## Post-return conditions and perspectives

At the time of their return, 52.8% of the migrants expressed their intention to stay permanently in their country of origin. However in the case of Morocco and Tunisia only less than 28% of the migrants, who were forced to return, considered staying there permanently.

Regarding their intention to leave the country of origin at the time of the survey, 23.4% of the interviewed reported that they would never leave more their country of origin, followed by 20% and 15% that expressed that maybe or absolutely they will leave the country again.

The percentage is different in the case of those that returned involuntary: 32% said that they will leave the country again, followed by 20% that might emigrate further or 15% that will never leave their home country.

The motivations for re-emigrating were the following: new job opportunities abroad (4.6%), no future in the country of origin (3.8%), knowledge of the country of immigration and wishes to stay there (3.5%).

In the case of the Moroccan's immigrants, the corresponding statistics is represented in Fig. 6. According to it, 59.1% did not plan to emigrate again, 10.3% already knew the immigration country and wanted to stay there, 8.5% were willing to do it in order to renew their documents, followed by 3.9% who did not find any job in the country of origin.

Regarding the Maghreb returnees' degree of satisfaction with respect to their post-return conditions in their country of origin, 67% were happy to be back, 16% were both indifferent and unhappy.

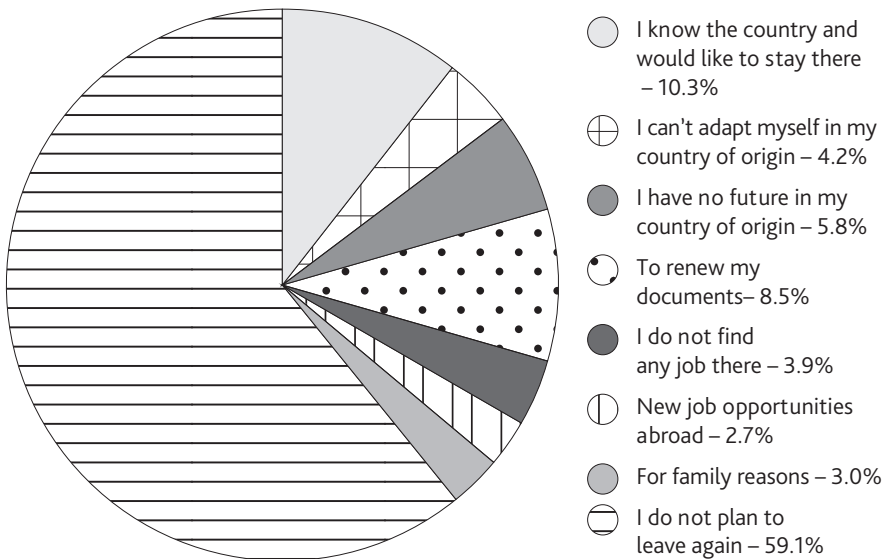


Figure 6. Moroccan returnees' motivations to re-emigrate

(Source MIREM 2008).

The difficulties faced by the Maghreb returnees since their return to the country of origin were related to: administrative and bureaucratic problems (42%), ineffective health system (40%) and re-adaptation (30%). This statistics is very pronounced in the case of Morocco: 55%, 58% and 32%, respectively.

Similar statistics were reported by the migrants who were forced to return. They were mostly related to resilient under-employment in their origin country, low salaries, difficulties of re-adaptation and problems with the public authorities in the homeland.

Regarding the current standard of living, compared with the one when they were living abroad, 46% said they had improved the standard after returning, 23% had it a bit worse and about 14% had it unchanged.

Finally, 90% did not benefit from any public support or assistance when they had returned against 8.4% who did it.

In the case of the Moroccan community living in Spain (COUNCIL 2009), 18% of them were planning to live in Spain after retire, compared to 69% who have expressed their desire to return to Morocco. This result is interesting and need an additional analysis as it strongly depends of the characteristics of the pattern.

## MOROCCAN COMMUNITY LIVING IN THE NORTHERN MADRID PROVINCE AREA. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The profile of the people, taking part of the survey reveals that 75% of them had a primary school education, 14% a university education and 11% had a secondary education. A part of these people, 53%, had a paid employment, 17% had their own business and the rest of the people were unemployed, mainly of the age below 25 years old.

For all the participants in the survey it was very important that their children spoke both languages of the country of origin and of the country of immigration (Spanish in this case). A part of them reported that they had major difficulties to find a job or to rent an apartment - 43%, compared to the autochthonous, while only 29% reported the same experience with respect to applying for different professional courses.

The majority (73%) of the interviewed usually went back to their home country every year. This result is similar, but a bit far away from the one cited in (COUNCIL 2009), where only 10% did not travel each year to Morocco.

Regarding the remittances, 43% don't send any money to Morocco, 29% send every month, 23% send once a year and the rest is equally distributed between sending remittances every 3 and 6 months. This result is relatively coherent with the one cited before (COUNCIL 2009), where the percentage was equally distributed (50%) between both groups.

A part of the participants in the survey did not have their own apartment in Spain and were renting was 71%, while 86% of them reported they had their own home in Morocco and 91% did not have any land in Morocco. This result is contrasted to the one reported in (COUNCIL 2009), where 45% of the participants had an own home or a property already built or under construction in Spain. This difference might be due to the high prices of the properties in Madrid's area.

Regarding future perspectives, only 11% expressed their willing to create some own business in Morocco (mainly in hospitality and services), which is relatively coherent with previous results from (COUNCIL 2009), stating around 8%.

The most important result of the survey is that with only a minor exception, all young people below 40 years of age reported their decision to go to another European country if they lose their job in Spain. When retiring they were willing to live in Spain. This is contrasted with the people between 40 and 50 years, who expressed their willing to go to another European country if they lose their job in Spain, but to go back to Morocco once retiring.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the three surveys, presented in the article, confirm the recent tendency of the migration flows showing some age dependency of the decision making by the migrants. This process clearly separates the migrants pattern of subjects aged above 40 years willing to return to their country of origin and younger migrants most decided to stay in the country of immigration even after retiring or to go to other European country in the case they lose their job. This age segregation is not surprising as the younger generation has grown and educated according to the social and cultural values of the host country, they are more integrated in the society and feel a part of it.

The analysis of the surveys also reveals the importance of the remittances and the links with the rest of the family living in the country of origin, expressed not only by the amount of the remittances sent along the year, but also by the regular return every year if there is a way to cover the travel expenses. However under the current economic and social economic and social, and especially in Spain, this percentage is decreasing every year.

As discussed largely in the literature (KHACHANI 2009), there is a well demonstrated lack of interest to invest in the country of origin. In the case it is done, the return migrants prefer to invest in the place where they have lived before emigrating, showing a preference to invest in real estate and in hospitality.

Finally, one can conclude that the three surveys are coherent in the sense that there is a general tendency to maintain links with the country of immigration and to keep the residence and working permits in case there is a need to immigrate there again in the future.

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