

# **Determinants of return migration in Spain in its new role as a receiving country**

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## **Abstract**

Around 5% of the foreign population residing in Spain took the decision to leave this country in 2009. Spain has recently become a receiving country for migrants and the phenomenon of temporary migration is on the rise. The aim of this paper is to provide some insights into the determinants that affect the decision of foreign immigrants to return to their country of birth, once the decision to leave Spain has been taken.

Keywords. Return migration, Spain

JEL. *F22, J11, R23*

## **1. Introduction**

The literature on migrations synthesizes the motives of migrants in two main types: economic motives, and natural or political motives. Natural and political motives are so influential as to make the migration permanent until the underlying causes disappear. Economic motives generate both permanent and temporal migration, even when the income gap between the countries involved does not change. If the income gap for the emigrant does not change due to an increase in the home-host income ratio, or greater employment opportunities or an increase in savings, temporal migration can be explained in two ways: 1) failure to integrate into the host country or 2) individuals' preferences for their home country.

From the perspective of the host country, temporary immigration can be classified into transient migration (the migrant stays in the country before going to another place, other than the origin country), return migration (the migrant goes back to the origin country), circulatory migration (the migrant goes back and forth from the origin country to the host country periodically) and contract migration (the migrant stays in the country

analyzed until his contract is finished) when the whole life of a person is considered. The last two types of temporary migration can be considered as return migration when the movement is seen in a specific moment, and thus we can classify temporary migration as transient migration and return migration for a specific moment. The former type of movement could be motivated by a failure of integration in the host country, if economic conditions have not changed, and the return migration, apart from the former motive, could be also motivated by preferences for the home country if there are no changes in economies.

The majority of papers studying migration consider the phenomena as permanent. Temporary migration is not a widely-treated topic in the empirical economic literature for most countries, primarily due to the lack of reliable data. One country with more studies of return migration is Germany, since it has the advantage of The German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), an interdisciplinary, longitudinal study of private households. This database collects information at the micro level of individuals, households and families, during a sufficiently long period to allow for analysis of inter-generational relationships. In the first wave, the sample includes some 1,500 households with a foreign-born head. Foreign-born individuals are asked a number of specific questions regarding their economic behavior, and their economic and social integration.

There is extensive theoretical and empirical analysis of return migration in Germany using this database, from the perspective of the host country, spearheaded by Dustmann (see Dustmann, 1996, 1997a and 1997b; Dustmann, 1999; Dustmann and Kirchkamp, 2002; Dustmann, 2003a and 2003b; Dustmann, 2008; and Dustmann and Mestres, 2009). Although Dustmann makes many empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of temporary migration of Germany, there are other authors who have worked successfully on this topic, such as Constant and Massey (2002 and 2003), among others.

Another country studied, but with a less specific database, is the USA (see Borjas, 1996, Warren and Peck, 1980 and Zakharenko, 2008). Returned migrations in the UK have also been analyzed by Dustmann, in 2007.

These papers examine return migration from the perspective of the host country, and in some papers treating the German case, they include some analysis of Spanish returned

migrants whose host country was Germany. Spain was a net emigration country from 1900 to the early 1970s. From 1900 to 1950, the principal destination was South America, while Spanish emigrants mainly went to Europe for the rest of the period. Spain is only recently a receiving country. In 1999 there were only 648,533 foreigners in Spain (1.6% of population) while in 2009 there were 5,650,968 foreigners in Spain (12% of population). Clearly, temporary migration in Spain as a host country in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is worthy of analysis.

Return migration with Spain as the home country is empirically analyzed in Castillo (1980) for the country as a whole. Castillo based his analysis on a survey of more than 1,500 returned Spanish emigrants, examining aspects such as characteristics, integration, reasons for returning, economy in the host country, and in Spain after the return. Return migration can be contextualized in an inferior territorial level, as it is the regional level that is called return internal migration (the second level for European Statistics, NUTS 2, following the Eurostat definition). Return internal migration at a regional level is a change of the residence when the origin is a Spanish region and the destination is the Spanish region of birth. The Spanish phenomenon of return migration is mainly analyzed in Recaño (2004 and 2010). Recaño, 2010, used the 1991 Census to analyze internal return migration, providing a perspective with a family dimension rather than an individual dimension, and allowing him to study the characteristics of the family, the migration background of partners of the couple, and the sex differences. Focusing on internal return migration, several studies have considered this from the perspective of a particular region as home place (see Delgado and Ascani, 1996 for Canary Islands and Rodriguez and Egea, 2002 for Andalusia). These studies show that recent work has been done in the analysis of internal return migration, but not on international return migration.

The main objective of this paper is to determine the variables that affect the decision to return to the birth country, once the immigrant has decided to leave the host country, in this case, Spain. In this paper the decision to make a return or transient migration is analyzed using socio-demographic and localization variables.

The lack of a database similar to the GSOEP does not allow us to differentiate between transient, return, circulatory and contract migration because there is no similar survey

with Spanish data. Instead, the population registries of Spain are used (Estadística de Variaciones Residenciales, EVR), allowing us to differentiate between transient and return migration for the period 2002 to 2009 in Spain as host country. Residents are required to register upon arrival, and to de-register upon departure. These records count entries and exits from the country and can be used to measure departures of migrants. Although there is a survey in 2007, ENI (Encuesta Nacional Inmigrantes) with a sample of more than 15,000 immigrants, it only has individual data for a year. Furthermore, the questions relating to return are only concern with future plans not current actions. The answers show that only 6% of immigrants are planning to return in the following 5 years, but we have no information on whether the plan is realized, or not. The return intention in 1984 was 76.1% of the migrants participating in the GSOEP survey, although the realization rate was only 17.3% of intentions until 1993. This is why population registries are used, because they consider real actions.

The article has the following structure. In Part 2, the database used is described, and its limitations and possibilities are presented. In Part 3, some descriptive statistics are presented for Spain. Part 4 uses Spanish data to determine the variables that affect the possibility of return, and our main conclusions constitute Part 5.

## **2. Database**

The lack of a database similar to the GSOEP, or other surveys with actual and relevant information to capture temporary migration, makes use of population registries. Residents are required to register upon arrival and to de-register upon departure. These records count entries and exits from the country and can be used to measure departures of nationals and migrants, as well as migrations of natives residing abroad.

The main limitation, highlighted by OECD Outlook, 2008, is that people register and de-register on the basis of their planned length of stay in the country (for entries) or the planned length of absence from the country (for exits). Some individuals, then, may leave the country without de-registering if they plan to return shortly. The same holds for people who deliberately fail to “sign out”, so as not to lose certain entitlements associated with residency in the country. The Spanish Statistics Institute (INE) attempted to correct this through the mechanism of de-registration of foreign immigrants by the councils if immigrants do not confirm their residence within two

years (this occurred from 2006), or they do not record the destination (this is included from 2004). Thus, data from 2006 includes not only the return and transient migrants who communicate their departure, but also those who do not renew their residency after two years.

Another limitation of this database pointed out by OECD is that population registries do not include illegal immigrants, and there is no way of measuring their departure from the country. This is not the case for Spain, since registration gives them the possibility of participating in the public health system or in public education, with no risk of detention by the authorities.

There is a third limitation that the OECD does not mention, that is that, at least in the Spanish case, population registries count migrations instead of migrants, which means that a circulatory migrant would be counted several times. The database does not allow us to eliminate this type of migration, which is why the present paper analyzes migration rather than migrants.

In order to analyze return migration to Spain as a home country, we cannot consider dynastic aspects and previous information of returnees because it is not available in the database. There is information about the registries from 2002 to 2009 of age at the moment of registration, gender, nationality, origin, destination, and the size of the host city.

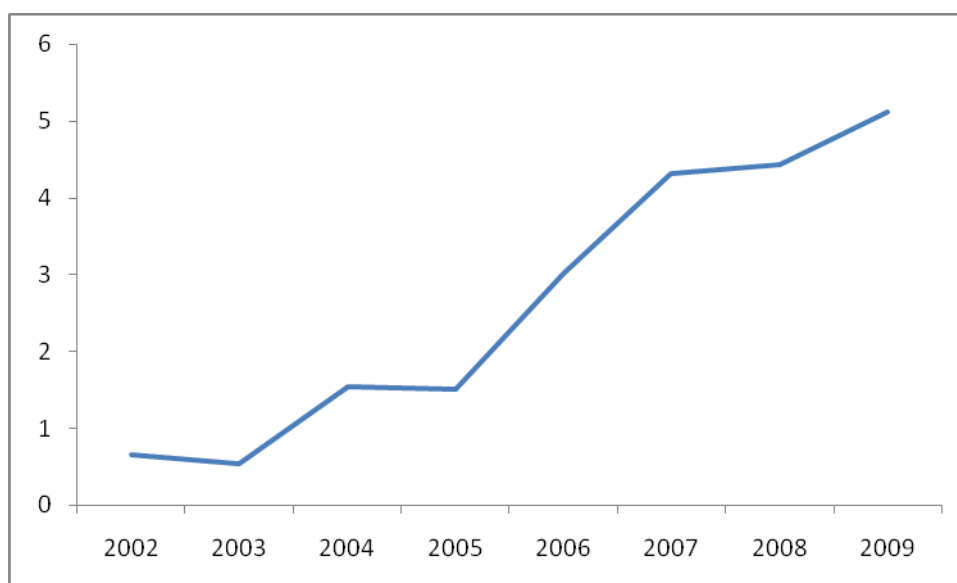
To make sure that we only include individuals who immigrated by their own decision, we restrict the sample to migrants who were at least 18 years old when they left Spain.

### **3. Descriptive statistics**

Temporary migration is an increasingly significant phenomenon, due to Spain's recently-acquired role as a receiving country.

Figure 1 shows the evolution of the percentage of foreigners who move from Spain to another country, independent of the destination country, over the stock of foreigners living in Spain.

*Figure 1. Evolution of temporary migration ratio in Spain, 2002-2009*



Source. EVR, INE and Eurostat.

Figure 1 shows an increasing tendency, with two significant jumps, in 2004 and 2006. From 2004, the database incorporates movements of foreigners out of Spain, in which the destination country is unknown; and from 2006, the database incorporates de-registrations made by councils if the foreigner does not renew the residence. Table 1 illustrates the collection of additional information.

*Table 1. Temporary migrations in Spain classified by destination, 2002-2009.*

	<b>Known destination</b>	<b>Unknown destination</b>	<b>De-registration</b>	<b>Total</b>
2002	10350			<b>10350</b>
2003	11867			<b>11867</b>
2004	15469	27382		<b>42851</b>
2005	20619	30282		<b>50901</b>
2006	26739	39725	54561	<b>121025</b>
2007	34334	33930	130474	<b>198738</b>
2008	44978	51078	137444	<b>233500</b>
2009	47400	92810	149402	<b>289612</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>211756</b>	<b>275207</b>	<b>471881</b>	<b>958844</b>

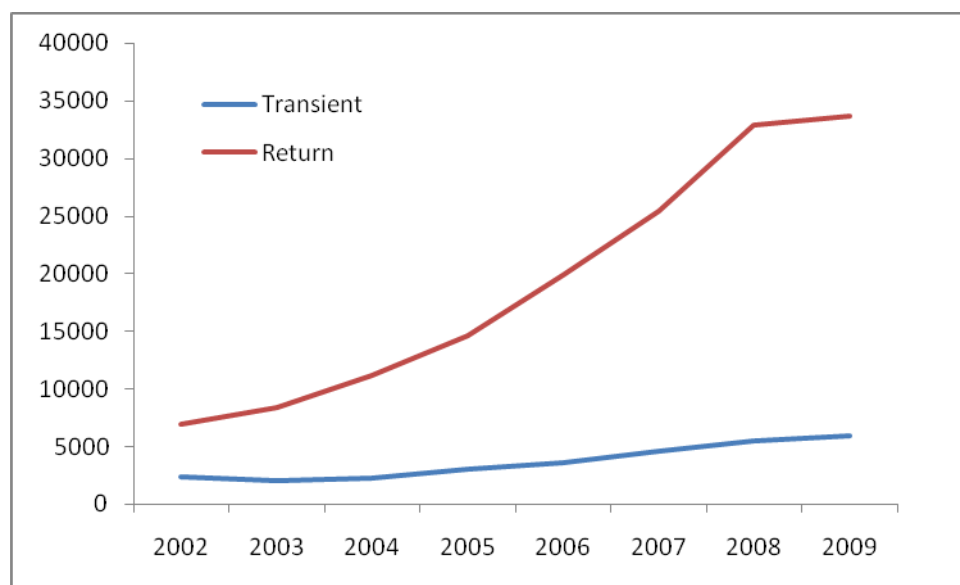
Source. Own estimation from EVR, INE.

The improvement of database collection from 2006 allows us to make a good estimation that returned migrants represent around 5% of the foreign population in Spain, with an increasing tendency. This data is quite similar to the intention to return, captured in the survey ENI, 2007.

From the aggregated data presented in Table 1, only those emigrations made by foreigners in which the destination country is defined are analyzed, and from these we subsample only those with the capacity for self-decision, that is, individuals 18 years of age or older. In this way, our sample is 182,458 migrations in the whole period, 2002 to 2009. The analysis differentiates between return and transient migration, and this is only possible in data with a known destination. This temporary migration in Spain as host country can be classified into two categories. Those immigrants who return to their birth country (153,130 migrations from 2002 to 2009) are designated as return migrants and those who go to a country different from their birth country (29,328 migrations from 2002 to 2009), are designated as transient immigrants.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of both variables during the period for which there is available data.

*Figure 2. Transient and return migration from Spain, 2002-2009.*



Source. Own estimation over EVR, INE.

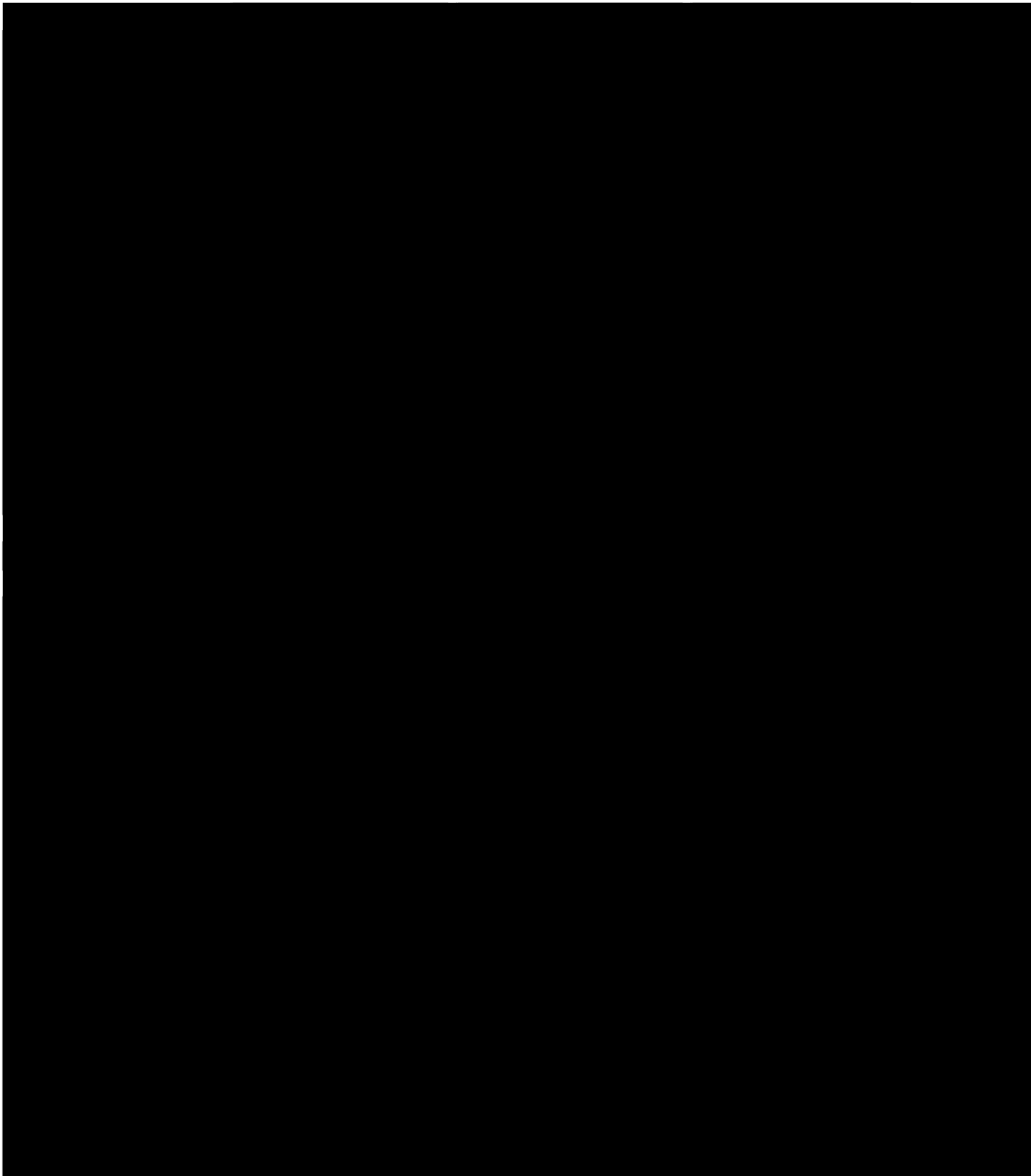
Figure 1 has shown that there is an increasing evolution of temporal migration in Spain, since foreign immigration is a recent phenomenon in this country. Figure 2 shows a more noticeable increase in the return migration than in the transient migration. Transient migration usually refers to migrants who have failed to integrate in the host country, or who have not achieved their economic or strategic goals in the host country. Some authors (see Krieger and Minter, 2009) maintain that some immigrants could use Spain as a gateway for Europe, but this theory is not valid for the majority of

immigrants; foreign immigrants mainly return to their countries of birth, after reaching their economic objectives or failing to integrate successfully.

Once the different patterns for transient and return migration are established, the statistics of the variables obtained from the population registries are presented. Table 2 shows the main statistics classified into four categories for total temporary migration and return and transient migration. Demographic variables include age, and certain dummy variables like gender (with value 1 if the individual is a man), European Union nationality (members of the European Union have free mobility, which can, of course, influence migration), and retirement, reflected as a dummy that has the value 1 if the age of the migrant is at least 60 (this threshold point is taken because, in many jobs, this is the available age for retirement and usually a migrant aged 60 or more is not looking for work). Time variables include a dummy variable for the economic crisis for years 2008 and 2009 and another dummy to capture the mass regularization carried out in Spain in 2005. Immigration policies in Spain underwent changes in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2001 and 2005. The regularization program of 2005 legalized 575,000 foreign workers, more than all the preceding programs put together. Destination variables are formed by dummy variables that group the destination of the migrants into continents. Finally, the category of Origin variables is formed by dummy variables that group the source of emigrants into regions (defined as NUTS2 in Eurostat), and two more dummies to capture the effect of living in a small city, less than 10,000 inhabitants, or a big city that is a capital of NUTS3, or a city with more than 50,000 inhabitants.



*Table 2. Descriptive statistics, period 2002-2009*



Source. Own estimation over EVR, INE.

Table 2 shows different behavior in some variables detailed in the following<sup>1</sup>. The proportion of returned people who go back to their birth country for retirement is higher

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<sup>1</sup> Ceuta and Melilla are not considered as another region, but due to their special characteristics of localization in Continental Africa, they have especial regulations and, rather than being called an Autonomous Community (i.e. a region) are referred to as Autonomous Cities. In our analysis, this area will be consider as another region.

that the proportion who retire abroad, but not in their home country. Furthermore, most of the transient migrations made from Spain are by citizens of the 27 countries of the European Union, while most of the return migrations are by non-EU citizens. During the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009, more than 43% of the returned migrants of the period 2002 to 2009 decided to leave Spain, while this percentage decreases to 38% for transient migrants. The biggest differences come from the destination variables; almost 70% of foreigners in Spain who went to a country other than that of their birth chose a European country and 12% chose North America, the two richest areas. If immigrants decide to return to their birth country, the data show that 11% return to Africa, and 41% return to Central or South America, or Mexico. This information can only be analyzed by comparing it with stock migration. The Spanish data of 2009 shows that there were 5,648,671 immigrants in Spain at that time, and that 17.87% of them were born in Africa, 5.25% in Asia, 44.21% in Europe, 0.49% in North America, 32.14% in Rest of the Americas, and 0.04% in Oceania. By assuming that these proportions are typical of the analyzed period, we can infer that immigrants from Europe and North America use Spain as a transitory country, while those from Central and South America and Mexico return home in a higher proportion. One explanation for this could be the special migration policies implemented in Spain for Hispanic migrants, or the more rapid achievement of savings objectives of immigrants from poorer countries. Destination and origin variables proxy the push and pull factors. Origin characteristics are also captured through dummies that attempt to reflect the regional differences inside the country, and the rural-urban specificities. Table 2 shows the percentages of total temporary migration registered from 2002 to 2009 in each Spanish region, and the percentages for return and transient migration. Table 3 complements the previous data, showing the percentage of foreigners residing in Spain in each region over total population, and the percentage of all foreigners in Spain by region (second and third columns, respectively). The fourth and fifth columns are percentages of total temporary migration registered only in 2009 in each Spanish region, and these percentages are classified into return and transient migration. The two last columns show return ratio and transient ratio, presenting information on the percentage that represents the return migration in a region over the total return migration in Spain (column four) over the percentage of foreigners that this region has, over the total migration Stock in Spain. The last column presents the same information for transient migration. Thus, if the ratio is greater than 1, the region has a higher ratio of return or transient migration, respectively.

Table 3. Stock of foreigners and transitory migration at a regional level, 2009.

	Foreigners	% Foreigners	% regional stock migration	% regional return migration	% regional transient migration	RETURN RATIO	TRANSIENT RATIO
Andalusia	675180	8,13	11,95	8,62	8,12	0,72	0,68
Aragon	172138	12,79	3,05	2,21	1,42	0,73	0,47
Asturias	47119	4,34	0,83	0,96	1,02	1,15	1,22
Balearic Islands	237562	21,69	4,21	3,54	3,74	0,84	0,89
Canary Islands	301204	14,32	5,33	3,59	4,88	0,67	0,92
Cantabria	38096	6,47	0,67	0,66	0,59	0,98	0,87
Castile-La Mancha	225888	10,85	4,00	2,70	1,42	0,68	0,36
Castile-Leon	167641	6,54	2,97	3,50	1,96	1,18	0,66
Catalonia	1189279	15,91	21,05	21,82	25,65	1,04	1,22
Ceuta and Melilla	11147	7,33	0,20	0,36	0,73	1,82	3,70
Extremadura	37223	3,38	0,66	1,16	1,29	1,76	1,96
Galicia	106637	3,81	1,89	3,72	4,24	1,97	2,25
La Rioja	46931	14,59	0,83	1,66	1,14	2,00	1,37
Madrid	1063803	16,66	18,83	21,16	26,71	1,12	1,42
Murcia	235991	16,31	4,18	4,33	2,22	1,04	0,53
Navarre	70627	11,20	1,25	1,21	0,87	0,97	0,70
Basque Country	132865	6,12	2,35	4,34	3,88	1,85	1,65
Valencia	889340	17,46	15,74	14,46	10,13	0,92	0,64
Total	5648671	12,08	100	100	100	1	1

Source, INE, 2009.

The regions of Spain that attract more immigrants in absolute terms are Catalonia, Madrid and Valencia, although when the ratio of foreigners over population is used, it can be seen that Balearic Islands has the highest ratio, followed by Murcia and Madrid. Regions such as Extremadura, Galicia and Asturias are apparently not very attractive for immigrants; the foreign population is less than 5% of the population. In these regions, the return and transient ratio is over 1, indicating that they present a higher proportion of returned or transient immigrants than the proportion of foreigners. Especially relevant is the case of Ceuta and Melilla, registering a very high transient ratio, much higher than the return ratio. This is easily explained: African migrants use these cities as the gateway to Europe. Galicia and Extremadura also present high return and transient ratios, both are also border regions. Andalusia, Aragon and the Islands attract migration that tends to remain there, since they are regions with low return and transient ratios.

#### 4. Econometric Model and Empirical Results

A model in which demographic and time variables, and origin and destination, affects return migration of the immigrant is assumed. The analysis in this section will determine the probability that one of these variables affects the decision of return to the home country for temporary immigrants. We assume that, in the period analyzed, the income gap between countries or regions does not change, therefore the decision of return migration is due to the achievement of savings objectives, or the know-how to have better employment opportunities in home country, or the failure of integration and/or a preference for the origin country. The variables we have used try to capture some aspects of these four motivations to return to the country of birth.

Table 4 presents the results of a probit model of return migration of temporary immigrants by obtaining robust variance estimates in column 1, because the data suffers from heteroskedasticity. In column 2, a Heteroskedastic probit model is used to estimate the marginal effects at the means of the independent variables. This model fits a maximum-likelihood generalization of the probit model.

Table 4. Return migration

	Coefficients Probit Model	Marginal effects Generalized model
age	-.0093307***	-.001872***
gender	.009319	.0017769
EU nationality	.1443754***	.0274284***
Retirement	.398455***	.0650288***
2008 Crisis	.0751521***	.0150547***
2005 regularization	-.0224044*	-.0043975
Europe	.6112705***	.1231126***
North America	-.5393716***	-.1432789***
Rest America	1.799509***	.2948982***
Africa	1.588708***	.1518076***
Asia	1.119113***	.1170744***
small city	.1423466***	.027335***
big city	-.2068596***	-.0427324***
Andalusia	.840734***	.1289004***
Aragon	1.137315***	.1232486***
Asturias	.8436286***	.1134629***
Balearic Islands	.8215982***	.1178078***
Canary Islands	.589651***	.1070098***
Cantabria	.8485467***	.1128607***
Castile-La Mancha	1.242979***	.126409***

Castile-Leon	1.253101***	.1289558***
Catalonia	.7047287***	.1473632***
Extremadura	.5804208***	.1031469***
Galicia	.6208091***	.1087131***
La Rioja	1.183707***	.1226933***
Madrid	.7808566***	.1546469***
Murcia	1.039286***	.1261693***
Navarre	1.040473***	.1187756***
Basque Country	.9213879***	.1229796***
Valencia	1.089184***	.1560771***
const.	-.5496336***	.122984***
Number of obs.	182458	182458
Pseudo R2	0.1672	
% Correctly classified	85.21%	87.79%

\* -significant at 90%, \*\* -at 95%, \*\*\*-at 99% level.

The estimates indicate that gender has no significant impact on the return migration behavior of temporary migrants, while every additional year of the temporal emigrant reduces the probability of return by 0.1%, but this effect has to be joint with the retirement variable, since if the temporal migrant reaches the retirement age, the probability of returning home increases by 6%. Another social variable that affects positively the return probability is to have a EU nationality. If a temporal migrant has, or attains, this nationality, the probability of returning home increases to almost 3% because this migrant now has free mobility and there is no additional cost of beginning another migration from the home country..

The economic crisis that began in 2008 has had a positive impact on return migration; the probability that a temporal migrant returns home in the period of crisis increases by 1.5%. The coefficient has the expected sign, but is smaller than previously thought, since the crisis was felt globally, reducing the attractiveness of Spain, but also of the country of birth. The coefficient of regularization of 2005 is not significant at a 5% level. Destination and origin variables have a strong impact on the return probability. Temporal migrants who chose Central or South America or Mexico as the destination when they left Spain have a 30% probability of making that particular choice because it is the country of birth, while this percentage decreases to 15%, 12% and 11% for Africa, Europe and Asia, respectively. On the other hand, if the destination is North America, the probability of the migrant returning home decreases by 14%. With respect to origin

of migration, it can be said that the impact of departure from a small city is positive, while the impact of departure from a large city is negative. The former increases the return probability by 2.7%, while the latter decreases this probability by 4%. Finally, all the regions have a positive impact on return migration of the temporary migrants, except Ceuta and Melilla, which are the areas used as control variables and their location in Africa makes them a gateway to Europe. If the departure of a temporary migrant is from Valencia, Madrid or Catalonia, the probability of returning home is more than 14%, while if the departure is from Canary Islands, Galicia and Extremadura this probability decreases to 10%. The reason for this behavior is that regions with a low GDP per capita make it more likely that the temporary migrant does not reach the savings objective, which increases the likelihood of setting out on another migration (transient migration) in order to try again elsewhere.

## **5. Summary and conclusions**

This paper analyzes how socio-demographic variables, time variables, and destination or origin differences, affect the decision to return home of temporary migrants in Spain. Return migration in Spain has been studied indirectly in papers analyzing the phenomenon in Germany, but considering Spain as a home country. Spain has recently become a receiving country; from 1999, immigration to this country has increased significantly and the stock of migration has risen from 1.6% to 12% in this decade. This new role of Spain makes it important to analyze the phenomenon in Spain as a host country. Our results show that the probability of returning home for temporary migrants increases if the migrant moves after age 60, or has EU nationality, or the movement is made in a period of economic crisis, or the destination is Mexico, Central and South America, or the origin is the richer regions or small cities. When the departure regions are rich and the birth countries are poor, it is much easier to attain savings objectives, and thus to be able to return to the home country sooner. Retirement motives for return migration are understandable, since the typical retiree only has savings, and thus economic conditions are more stable and psychological motives are the reasonable explanation, being the preference for the country of birth a motive more important than a failure of integration.

Variables such as age, North America or big cities as destination, or Ceuta and Melilla as origin, decrease the possibility of return migration of temporary migrants. North America as destination makes a transient migration more probable as a result of not

reaching the economic objectives in Spain, and Ceuta and Melilla as origin area makes it more feasible that a migrant will use them as the gateway to Europe.

Further research would be to aggregate information to explore the possibility of using economic variables of origin and destination, concentration of migrants, networks, and so on. Another promising line of research that interests us is to study return migration in Spain as the home country, and internal migration return, by using population registries.

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