

# International Return Migration and Poverty in the State of Mexico

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how migrants perceive that international migration and some assets (physical and productive assets, labor knowledge) support them to get out of poverty. The methodology consisted of in-depth interviews with returned migrants living in the State of Mexico. The analysis is qualitative and based on their testimonies but is reinforced by group statistics. The results show that migrants accumulated assets and capacities, even nine out of ten perceive that in return, they live better. However, only one out of five is confident of achieving a stable long-term living environment. The conclusions point out that, at least among the migrants interviewed, migration plays an essential role in improving living conditions on their return. It also contributes to the building of long-term stable livelihoods, although this last effect is much smaller.

**Keywords:** assets, capabilities, international migration, life conditions, livelstyle.

**JEL Classification:** D12, D13, F22.

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## RESUMEN

### MIGRACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE RETORNO Y POBREZA EN EL ESTADO DE MÉXICO

El objetivo es analizar cómo los migrantes perciben que la migración internacional y algunos activos (activos físicos y productivos, conocimientos laborales), los apoyan para salir de la pobreza. La metodología consistió en entrevistar en profundidad a migrantes retornados que viven en el Estado de México. El análisis es cualitativo y basado en sus testimonios, pero se refuerza con estadísticas de grupo. Los resultados muestran que los migrantes acumularon activos y capacidades productivas, incluso nueve de cada diez perciben que al retorno viven mejor, sin embargo, sólo uno de cada cinco tiene certeza de que logró construir un medio de vida estable a largo plazo. Las conclusiones señalan que al menos entre los migrantes entrevistados, la migración juega un papel importante para que la mayoría de ellos puedan vivir mejor al retorno, pero también contribuye a construir medios de vida estables a largo plazo, aunque este último efecto es mucho menor.

**Palabras Claves:** activos, capacidades, migración internacional, condiciones de vida, modo de vida.

**Clasificación JEL:** D12, D13, F22.

## INTRODUCTION

The Estado de Mexico is the most populated State in Mexico. It has 17 million inhabitants. On average, it has the second largest contribution to the National Gross Domestic Product. It also has a significant industrial plant and service sector. Both absorb almost 95 percent of the total occupied population; the rest work in the agricultural sector. This State is also the first national place in the food and manufacturing industry (textile, chemical-pharmaceutical, automotive, metalworking). But it is also notorious that this economic strength has generated diverse problems and poverty. For example, the majority of the productive, political and social development activities (health, education, housing, museums) agglutinate in areas surrounding Mexico City. There, almost 80 percent of the state population is concentrated. Jobs are created but are of low remuneration, 35 percent of the employed population

receives two minimum wages, and no more than half of the occupied population receives three monthly salaries. By contrast, a food basket costs two-thirds of a minimum monthly salary per person.

The last report by CONEVAL (2016) shows that 47.9 percent of Mexiquenses live in poverty (41.8 percent moderate, 6.1 percent extreme), which implies up to 8.2 million inhabitants, of which one million lives in extreme poverty. Likewise, 85 of the 125 municipalities that integrate the State have more than half of their population living in this condition. In contrast, those who have a majority of the indigenous people have 75 to 100 percent of their population living in poverty.

However, the evidence shows that poverty is not homogeneous. Although most people remain trapped for generations, at least a small part manages to get out of poverty (Perlman, 2008; Krishna, 2008; Dercon and Shapiro, 2008), or get social mobility and improve their livelihoods (Cárdenas and Malo, 2010). The last work was carried out in Mexico and estimates that less than three poor people in ten mainly manage to get better livelihoods and sometimes manage to get out of poverty. Likewise, on average, in a society, a small fraction of the population concentrates on production and wealth, but an intermediate group exists between rich and poor. In Mexico, 39 percent of the population lives between the poor and rich. Middle-income groups have more schooling, income, and access to opportunities than the poor, representing half of the current expenditure of the domestic market in the country (INEGI, 2013). The classification of population groups is diffuse, nevertheless more or less, it is replicated in the local societies, so it is possible to infer that in the Estado de Mexico, in addition to the poor population, there is another small fraction that is rich. Another significant group integrated for population neither poor, nor rich. The important thing about the intermediate group is that at least a small part came from poor people and managed to get out of poverty. Thereby, this group verifies the existence of exits to poverty. The odds of jumping from the poor to middle or affluent sectors are very low, but they exist, and poor people can see it in the intermediate population. Then, it is important to explore which ones could work.

Studies conducted in rural and urban environments emphasize that quality productive resources (land, livestock, irrigation, knowledge) favor the way out of poverty (Perlman, 2008, Krishna, 2008, Dercon and Shapiro, 2008, Gomes, Petersen, Galvao, 2008). When people have

personal aspirations to get out of poverty, they perform non-agricultural activities and look for new horizons, establish new social and political relationships with actors better positioned and others. This practice could allow migrants to accumulate assets (business, workshops, trades), capabilities (languages, labor knowledge, culture, habits), social relations and others. Migration leads to a better life, provides access to food, educates children, builds a house, buys material things, saves money, and sets up a business. Then, international migration could help to live better than before, or in some cases, to create stable long-term livelihoods.

The evidence of how migration helps to get out of poverty is weak. Some studies indicate that migration does not reduce poverty because it benefits non-poor households (Canales, 2008, Peláez, Martínez and García, 2013). Other studies point out that remittances do not help either to get out of poverty but cause a slight improvement in income distribution, so people living in poverty improve (Olivié, Ponce and Onofa, 2008). As well is pointed out that remittances reduce poverty slightly in areas of greater poverty, experience and migratory tradition, but very little or nothing in places where the poorest live (Hernández, 2008). On the other hand, studies conducted at the community level and through interviews have found that international migration could reduce poverty (Ayvar and Ochoa, 2015) because migration improve some components of development in the households: health, food, education, clothing, housing, savings, small business and house construction. A study carried out in a Zapotec community (Alvarado, 2017) found that although most external remittances arrive at households of higher incomes, food poverty and welfare poverty are reduced in the community. Another study conducted in Oaxaca shows that the remittances come from lower-income families. Food poverty and capabilities poverty were reduced in the community (Espinosa, García, Hernández and Santiago, 2014). Other evidence confirms that migrants invest in assets (livestock, land, implements, small businesses, workshops). They are self-employed, generate income, and savings (Yúnez, Taylor and Becerril, 2000, Massey and Parrado, 1997). When migrants return, they could live on what they learned. Still, this way is more restricted because the environments lack complements to use (lack of employment, violence, support for entrepreneurship, discrimination),

and the returned migrants could demotivate and emigrate again (Espinoza, 1998; Salas, 2016, Zwania, 2013, Leco, 2009, Asis, 2007).

In this sense, this research analyses how international migration supports migrants to get out of poverty. The work is based on migrant testimonies and their perceptions of how they live on return and how they lived before migrating. The study analyzes how the personal aspects, labor knowledge, and diverse assets help them escape poverty and build a stable long-term livelihood. It should be noted that their testimonies have been translated, respecting the sense of the narrative.

## **1. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND EXITS TO POVERTY**

By 2010, there were one billion poor people in the world (World Bank, 2016). Poverty occurs in different forms and times, but a big part of the poor people are born and dies in poverty. The other ones are in and out constantly; they come from the middle class and sometimes from the affluent class. The explanations of why poverty occurs and why it is so persistent, and the proposals to get out of poverty, include macro, micro and personal perspectives, which depend on how poverty is perceived and who specifically tries to reduce it.

In the World Bank perspective (2005), regional, local and individual characteristics produce poverty: geographic isolation, lack of natural resources, corruption, weak citizen participation, lack of productive infrastructure and essential services (electricity, water, schools and health), the size and the head of the households. The proposal is to promote economic growth and improve the environment, boost social participation, reduce corruption. Other institutions conceive that the economic system produced poverty, allowing labor markets to pauperize jobs without obtaining social and labor benefits, rights, and stability. In this sense, it is proposed decent work (with benefits, social security, job expectations) as a solution (OIT, 2003). From a cultural outlook, poverty results from the lack of economic, social and political values that boost the development in society: trust between people and authorities; promote the effort, cooperation, hard work and education; reducing illiteracy; socializing and fostering a good competence among enterprises and individuals, the citizen participation; encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, as well the science (Peyrefitte, 1997, Landes, 2001).

Explanations at the micro-level show that the population could escape poverty with effort and some help. They emphasize that owning assets and developing capabilities (economic, social, physical, human) in reasonable quantity and quality could allow poor people to build stable livelihoods in the long term. With assets and capabilities, poor people could access opportunities in society. Otherwise, they remain marginalized, and the economic growth could be captured by those who own assets (Chenery *et al*, 1979). Poor people could perform productive, social and cultural tasks by expanding the possession of assets and capabilities. Also, personal aspects and productive, cultural, political and other capacities (Life, Health, Integrity, Senses, Emotions, Reason, Affiliation, Work, Play, Laugh), so that (Nussbaum, 2012). The main idea is that through public policies of education, provision of services, credit, and land, the poor improve their skills and assets and the other features in their life and use them in productive tasks.

In this research, we consider that poverty can occur due to external events: inflation, corruption, economic policy changes, economic crises, lack of growth, plagues in rural homes, unforeseen weather, weak institutions, but mainly we consider that this occurs by lack of productive assets and personal capabilities in the present but in the past too. Thereby, as Chambers and Conway (1992) have pointed out, we assume that a livelihood includes all the capabilities of the home (material and social), the activities that their members carry out with them. Tangible and intangible assets include five (capital: social, human, physical, financial and natural), each one has components with different endowments and quality, so some assets have more strength than others and some can be used more in the local or external settings (political, institutional, other restrictions). Thus, households' strategies and livelihoods depend on their assets and how they use them, including the external environment. Families with low quality or no assets could build a weak livelihood with shortages. Instead, if they accumulate enough assets of good quality and use them, they could get out of poverty, at least in theory. This happens when households build long-term stable livelihood, without significant variation in their resources, when facing economic crises and other shocks and even improving their assets and capabilities (Chambers and Conway, 1992, World Bank, 2001).

It is possible to hope that international migration helped migrants to accumulate assets (livestock, businesses, workshops, tools, land),

acquire knowledge (management of tools and machines, language, trades, schooling), and personal skills (attitudes, values, habits). Migration could help them live better than before migrating or get a long-term stable livelihood. Moreover, we think that the livelihood they have upon his return can reflect the effects of international migration.

## 2. METHOD

We conducted three hundred thirty-four in-depth interviews with persons of legal age who emigrated and returned from abroad to the Estado de Mexico. It was not a random sample, and the actors were located by snowball method in rural and urban localities. The fieldwork was carried out from the end of 2012 to 2013. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, and their testimonies have been translated. The delimitation of returned migrants consisted of choosing that person of legal age in the United States for at least one year continued for working reasons. The voice of the returnee and his experiences and personal appraisals are the basis of this exploration. However, statistics corroborate the influence of migration.

Based on their assessments, they compare their livelihood before migrating against what they have as returnees. Direct questioning is performed with a second and even third question to delimit and reassess how stable their livelihood is on return. In this study, the actors could respond by referring to their family or themselves. Several studies have pointed out a bias to underestimate that people have when asked to self-evaluate their economic situation or when trying to self-evaluate their place within a hierarchical ordering of income or wealth (Krozer, 2018, Palomar, 2005). This study is based directly on the migrant testimonies because they know most about their migration, experiences, and consequences and benefits. They are actors and have a lot to say about themselves. As Long (2007) points out, the actors can process and systematize experiences, associate with actors, formulate strategies and achieve objectives. They can influence the environment and receive influences from there. Having the actor as a direct reference is adequate because, even when the actor is pushed to do an action by external forces, in the end, the actor has capabilities and manages to process and take advantage of them (Long, 2007).

### 3. RESULTS

The analysis is composed of two sections and final comments. The first one, checks out the situation before the migration of the interviewees, living conditions they had, reasons to migrate abroad. The second one analyses their self-assessments on the economic and productive improvements they had with migration. In a second and third round, they were asked to assess whether their gains were stable enough to get out of their previous poverty.

#### *3.1. Life in the Estado de Mexico before migrating*

The sample of returnees consists of 62 women and 272 men; 18.6 and 81.4 percent. In this state, the international migration began in the 1940s, in this specific sample migration before 1991, was only 17 percent, while 83 percent migrated abroad between 1992 through 2012. Women started their international migration in the 1990s and other new urban actors, technicians, professionals, small entrepreneurs, teachers, merchants, and employees. These migrants were part of the new wave of urban migration in the country that began in recent decades. They carried higher qualifications, work experience and schooling, urban life, than rural and indigenous people who started the migration in this State. The new features could be a drain on resources, but as specialists point out (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990, Biggs, 2004, Iskander and Lowe, 2010), these features are also capabilities that could allow them to learn and develop other abilities.

The life before migrating. - The previous social, economic and emotional conditions created the reasons and the objectives to migrate. Seventy-four percent of interviewees describe their previous situation as poor with severe economic shortages that included lack of income, job instability, barely live economically and just surviving. The rest of the interviewees (professors, university students, employees of government companies, small entrepreneurs) refer to family problems, violence, meet with the couple, want to improve his life, adventure.

The migration of the interviewees occurred at 23.3 years of age on average (23.2 men and 23.8 women). They had higher education than other migrants in the country, nine years of schooling on average, and almost a third of them already had high school and university studies; moreover, only 12 percent did not have previous work experience. In



their words, the migration occurred due to the poor quality of their jobs, low salaries, lack of expectations and stability, and other personal and environmental problems. It is also remarkable that some migrants wanted to survive, others wished to accumulate assets, some had clear to what they were going, and others wanted adventures. Some of them travelled with their partners or parents (children, wife, sister). As one interviewee points out: "...There was nothing here, there was no work, I used to go to the masonry in Mexico City. I want to work to get some money because my kids are at school. I work on the fields to harvest corn, just that..." (José, interviewed in Temascalcingo). Others had intentions to save, buy things, "... I dedicated myself to sales, agriculture and livestock, my father had a store. I helped him. He also performed agricultural labor farming, raised cows and goats. I migrated to make myself a house, bring a car. My wishes were to go and bring money, to start a little business of my own, I was only an employee of my father" (Manuel, interviewed in San Mateo).

Those with a good economy point out other pressures. One interviewee comments, "I lived well here. My family did not want me to go, they told me to study, but nobody studies here. Forty-five of us graduated from primary school, and everyone went to the E.U... the returnees said it was easy, you arrive and work, everyone brought their car, that pulls you... I wanted to bring a car and money. Here it takes a long time to own things..." (Jesus, interviewed in Acambay).

Family problems and the intervention of additional actors also was detected. One actor points out, "... I was a seamstress, I worked in a textile underwear factory, I studied children's educator, but I had a daughter, and I had many heavy expenses... I lived with my parents, I got along well with my mom, but my dad was very aggressive... Yes, it was sad to leave my daughter, but my brothers convinced my mom. They said it was for my good..." (Dianey, interviewed in Temascalcingo). Another returnee had fantasies: "... I was 17 years old, I was a little confused about what I wanted. I was a year away from finishing high school. Then when I returned, I was able to finish it. Some friends who had been migrants shared with me their experiences. They got money, learned carpentry, masonry, plumbing. They knew how to do it, my boyfriend was one of them, we had been dating for three years, and his family knew me, then I told them I wanted to go. Maybe his parents thought we had plans to marry, and they supported me, I only saved

five thousand pesos, and they put the rest ..." (Abigail, interviewed in Tianguistenco).

The features of the interviewees show the extraction of resources, actors with different levels of life, education and work experience, with specific intentions that push and pull them abroad. It is valid to expect that these same resources they brought serve to adapt to the adversities of the journey, settle abroad, obtain employment, assimilate knowledge, develop skills and others that can bring with them and use to live on their return (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990, Biggs, 2004, Iskander and Lowe, 2010).

### 3.2. *International migration and the poverty of migrants)*

As already mentioned, having a long-term stable livelihood is the criterion used to define who lives outside poverty (Chambers and Conway, 1992). This criterion distinguishes whether migrants' perception of their livelihood corresponds to one out of poverty, or only they live better than before migrating. The results illustrate what happens when migrants return to their original places, the livelihoods they manage to build, the problems they face, and how they perceive that migration helped them to live better or get out of poverty.

**Improvements.** At first, interviewees compare their livelihood upon return with those they had before migrating and evaluate whether migration had helped them and in what aspects. The results are in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
IMPROVEMENTS WITH MIGRATION, IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS

Improvements	Fo*	Shortages	Not poor
Economy, business, material things	119 (35.6)	99	20
Have a house, improvements, family welfare	91 (27.2)	83	8
Communication, personal maturity, self-sufficient	73 (21.8)	55	18
The sons, siblings, could study	12 (3.6)	10	2
Diverse apprenticeships, language, labour trades, labour pension	13 (3.9)	9	4
Nothing, family separation	26 (7.8)	18	8
Total	334 (100)	274	60

Source: own elaboration

\*percentage of interviewees in parentheses

Remarkably, 308 interviewees (92 percent) consider that abroad migration helped them have economic and family improvements. The others (7.8 percent) complain about family disintegration, vices and others. In this case, a more significant percentage of those who were not previously poor accentuate more the personal improvements, labor and cultural learnings and language, on the other hand, those who had economic deprivation before migrating emphasize more the economic and material progress. The results are consistent with the literature on migration, which has detected visible and non-visible economic improvements in the initial stages of international migration, which in some way attracts more migrants to this practice.

This first response was automatic, but the migrants have their ways of comparing their livelihood, and although they do not clarify all the things they use to reach, they know their circumstances. A returnee illustrates how he perceives his improvements and the personal, economic and other aspects he takes into account: "... I have improved my economic stability, I have more intellectual openness, knowledge and experience. At first, I helped my parents in the field. Then the Electoral Institute hired me. This type of work helps me socialize, know how to contact other people, know how to organize and direct them, and know how to calm and motivate them. Before migrating, I was a closed mind. Now it is easy for me to socialize. I have implemented projects with my father. I can solve my financial needs" (Alberto, interviewed in Temascalcingo).

A housewife, who had economic shortages and significantly improved but still faces economic hardships, says: "Well, we improved. It was good to have what I wanted, to build my house, my children to be abroad and learn English and a new culture" (Margarita, interviewed in Acambay). Another actor, who received social benefits with migration, points out that family events obstruct him from achieving a better than before. He says: "...as a person I improved, I did many things that I thought I would never do...My daughters still ask for my help. The oldest tells me that I should support her at every expense, in her graduation, her masters' degree. My wife asked me to divorce her. It is sad. You come and think you have family, but no, you do not know what happened in your absence. I had to assimilate. I had difficult times. Now people ask me for trips (land, stones) with the dump truck, and that's where the money comes from" (Andrés, interviewed in Zacazonapan).

**Long-term improvements.** People assign different worth to family, economic and personal aspects, according to their mood, perception, way of approaching problems, and solving in the local environment. To avoid over and underestimating the effects of migration, a second and even third round of questions about improvements was carried out. The returnees were asked once more to assess the importance of their physical and productive assets (business, workshops, trades, tools, studies). They were also asked about their labor knowledge and the application they were given upon their return, jobs they had, and principally to assess the stability of their long-term income. The idea was they could see themselves in long-term and could determine if they lived outside of poverty, whether their domestic economies were stable, or if only they lived better than before migrating.

The results are in table 2. It is appreciated that after the same question but emphasizing the long-run, the self-assessments were reconsidered widely. According to the new testimonies, three groups of migrants were shaped, each one includes the livelihood they have had since their return. The first one consists of those who affirm they have had a long-term stable livelihood. Here, 66 migrants (19.7 percent) have not had severe fluctuations in their domestic economies and consider they live out of poverty. Another 214 interviewees (64 percent) assessed that they have had a much better life than before migrating. They have savings and some assets, semi-stable jobs and other strengths. However, they also said they still had economic shortages in their livelihood. The rest (16 percent) indicated that they always had financial deficits throughout the year. They defined themselves as inferior. In this last group predominate those who have had family problems, vices, debts, illnesses and others.

In this case, of the 66 interviewees who say they have had a stable livelihood since their return, 44 lived poor before migrating, the other 22 did not define themselves as poor at that time. These 44 migrants constitute 17.8 percent of the 247 interviewees who were poor before migrating. That is, with the assets and capabilities that they managed to accumulate with migration, and other real and subjective features that they take into account, we can say that only two migrants in each eleven who were poor before migrating managed to get out of poverty with the migration. It is a low proportion, but it verifies that international migration is a long-term solution to poverty, at least in some migrant house-

TABLE 2  
LIVELIHOODS, TO LONG-TERM, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS

Return and livelihoods	Stables	Shortages in all year	Always shortages
Not suffer, it has established	55	43	0
Lack of work, lack of money...	0	60	45
The end of year, the gifts, expenses...	6	54	2
Sales, income variability	1	30	1
School expenses, diseases...	3	18	6
Live alone, the wife/husband lives abroad	1	6	0
Agricultural labour expenses	0	3	0
Total	66 (19.7)	214 (64.1)	54 (16.1)

Source: own elaborations

holds, not in all of them, nor all communities. Moreover, according to the specialists and the ways of evaluating it, we can say that these few migrants who managed to get out of the swamp ratify that the accumulation of productive assets, knowledge and skills, allows building long-term stable livelihoods, this is equivalent to get out of poverty (Chambers and Conway, 1992, World Bank, 2001). The 18 share is indeed meager, but this is in the average that previous studies have found in different localities (Ayvar and Ochoa, 2015; Alvarado, 2017; Espinosa, García, Hernández and Santiago, 2014), which reinforces how difficult it is to get out of poverty despite having diverse assets.

A returnee with a stable livelihood underlines the importance of bringing qualified labor knowledge, having personal aspirations and others, "right now I work in an American company dedicated to the agricultural industry. It is not exactly my career [obtained in U.S.]. Still, it is related, I use measuring instruments, electronic things, welding, an inspection of machines and equipment. It helps me know English. I can modify car computers, but I cannot do that here. Electronic parts of machines come from abroad..." (Héctor, interviewed in Acambay). Another perspective is exposed by a returnee who has a business, works in construction and applies his knowledge, "when I returned, I started working in industrial mechanics on my own. I was looking for clients, I made them some works, and they paid me, so I spent almost eight months, afterward, I took this construction work, here I have stayed two

and a half years. All the plumbing I did, blessed be God, I learned many labor things, here I live from them, and I am doing well" (Wilfrido, interviewed in Santo Tomas).

On the other hand, the results similarly imply that 247 interviewees who lived poor before migrating, the majority (82 percent) did not manage to get out of poverty. However, upon return, they only live better. Of this large group of interviewees, one in five still fight with substantial economic shortages during the year. The other four in five believe they live much better than before migrating. Still, they face little financial needs, especially these last migrants mention that they have economic improvements but insufficient and themselves do not feel stable in the long term. These results cannot be generalized. It is not a random sample. It is a study based on perceptions and not on direct measurements of assets and wealth or income. Also, as other works have pointed out, people are not very assertive in locating themselves in their proper income level. People tend to underestimate their economic situation, especially among the richer (Krozer, 2018). In other cases, the poor could overestimate their income to get away from other poor (Palomar, 2015). All this restricts the generalization too. But somehow, this small sample provides an approximate picture of what happens with the migrants when they return. Now, abroad migration facilitates the migrants to accumulate diverse assets and capabilities (as in Table 1). The majority of interviewees achieve to live better than before upon their return. Almost one in six thought they live worse. In a certain way, verify that effectively there is a very low probability of getting out of poverty, as other studies have pointed out (Perlman, 2008, Krishna, 2008, Cárdenas and Malo, 2010).

The difficulty to leave the swamp is aggravated because, within the group that lives better but does not feel out of poverty, they also have productive assets, skills and labor knowledge. In the second and third similar questions, some businesses provide income but are not enough. Also, their small investments carry risks and reinvestments, some returns fail to meet these needs in their business, and they feel deprived. In other cases, they have small businesses, and these produce unstable income. The migrants declared lack of knowledge in personal finances, mix the company with the home, family separation, vices, discouragement, these circumstances influence the assessment of unstable livelihood that they mention.

In this sense, having quality assets and good quantity help but does not guarantee getting out of poverty. But as the interviewees show, upon return, most migrants can live much better than before. They have better houses, businesses, furniture, cars, animals, plots, stores, income, and other material and immaterial benefits. In some cases, the benefits could be temporary or negatives, but in at least a few migrants, the benefits were enough to build a long-term stable livelihood. Everyone believes that assets and capabilities accumulated could have a more significant effect on their lives. However, there is a lack of options to use them in productive tasks. Almost all migrants do not feel supported with adequate jobs to their labor knowledge. They do not see entrepreneurship support, mention paperwork, corruption, want the reduction of violence, some miss the North, and pointed out other options.

**The transition.** To get out of poverty is almost a utopia. This is so, with and without international migration. Few people managed to get out of poverty, and a big part succeeded in getting better livelihoods in this sample.

Table 3 shows some features of the transition between being poor and have a stable livelihood in return. It can see that in productive investment, migrants who lived regularly and were previously poor (beforePoor, Ret\_stable) spent \$ 9,407 on average in their businesses. In contrast, those who have a stable livelihood and once lived well (beforeNopoor\_Ret\_stable) spent \$ 10,859. It can be seen that not all migrants invested in productive remittances, but the percentage of those who have a stable livelihood that supported productively outweighs the other groups. Whereas in welfare goods (cars, house, furniture), the average expenditure of remittances is more significant among those who have a stable livelihood on return (17.2 and 18.7 thousand dollars), than the other groups of migrants.

Likewise, the percentage of returnees who have a stable livelihood and had a job promotion abroad is higher than the other groups (36 and 45 percent); the other groups had too job promotions but in a smaller proportion. A job promotion abroad indicates the obtention of qualified formal and tacit labor knowledge, attitudes, language. However, this specific group has not managed to generate stable income with their learning. The third round of interviewees had job promotions in the total sample. Still, on average, half of them do not productively apply

any of their knowledge and no doubt this restricts them to live better in their return.

TABLE 3  
CONDITION TO THE RETURN AND INVESTMENT OF REMITTANCES

	beforePoor_ Ret_ shortages	beforePoor_ Ret_regular	beforePoor_ Ret_stable	beforeNopoor_ Ret_shortages	beforeNopoor_ Ret_regular	beforeNopoor_ Ret_stable
Fo*	40	163	44	14	51	22
Investment	average: 3,985	average: 6,849	average: 9,407	average: 4,306	average: 10,051	average: 10,859
Production***	% investor: 30.0	% investor: 28.0	% investor: 57.0	% investor: 57.0	% investor: 51.0	% investor: 77.0
Investment	average: 14,125	average: 16,221	average: 17,200	average: 6,214	average: 13,710	average: 18,768
welfare	% investor: 65.0	% investor: 40.0	% investor: 66.0	% investor: 57.0	% investor: 58.8	% investor: 81.8
Apply****	Promotions: 30.0	Promotion: 30.0	Promotion: 36.0	Promotion: 21.0	Promotion: 35.0	Promotion: 45.0
	beforePoor_ Ret_ shortages	beforePoor_ Ret_regular	beforePoor_ Ret_stable	beforeNopoor_ Ret_shortages	beforeNopoor_ Ret_regular	beforeNopoor_ Ret_stable
Fo*	40	163	44	14	51	22
knowledge	No apply: 65.0	No apply: 49.0	No apply: 52.0	No apply: 57.3	No apply: 53.0	No apply: 41.3
Buy assets**	20	34.3	73.3	14	35.2	59

Source: own elaboration

\*absolute numbers of interviewees

\*\*percentage of interviewees who have been able to buy assets on return: motorcycles, cars, houses, apartments, business, animals, other

\*\*\*average investment in dollars in each group, the % investor refers to the interviewees who invested remittances in productive assets in each group. Business include: sewing workshops, blacksmithing, welding, groceries, regional and international food, restaurant, computers, agrochemicals, building materials, public transport units, butcheries, mechanics, carpentry, other

\*\*\*\*percentage of interviewees from each group who obtained work promotion abroad, and percentage of interviewees who fail to apply their labor knowledge. The promotions occurred in areas: kitchen, construction, business managers, and industrial machine operator, sales, others.

Something positive is that those who live stable on return use their labor knowledge in productive tasks (48 and 59 percent), which helps their income and long-term stability. Public action could promote and link labor knowledge and assets with local opportunities and collateral supports.

Finally, it is appreciated that a more significant proportion of migrants who, in return, live stable can buy assets with the income generated in Mexico (73 and 59 percent), much more than the other groups (almost double). How they say this strengthens their perception of long-term



stability. Another essential variable is education. The increase of schooling through migration in the sample is almost zero. Still, five migrants studied a professional career abroad, two completed their elementary school, eleven interviewees studied secondary and high school, others took courses in trades and crafts in churches and community centers. In this case, the migrants who live stable have eleven years of schooling, which is higher than the 8.87 years, with those who only live better and much higher than the 7.4 school years still have severe economic shortages. In general, 32 percent of stable migrants have 17 and more years of schooling (professional career and postgraduate studies). In comparison, 2.8 percent of those who live only better have 17 years of education, and between migrants with economic lacks, none has this level of education.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the interviewed migrants, we can verify that a mixture of causes pushes and pull their international migration. In this case, personal and family problems, being taken by relatives, escaping some violence, the dreams of the North and others, despite the economic needs, the shortcomings at home, constitute the main force. On the other hand, anti-immigrant laws, unemployment, family constraints, stress, loneliness, and dislike of that life have met the goals, motivated the return, and brought them back home. In both movements participate his family, different actors and events that interact and influence the reasons and intentions of the migrants. While the interviewees were abroad, most of them sent remittances home, and accumulated goods of welfare (home, furniture) and productive assets (business, animals, workshops), brought their learning, behavior, personal skills, learned another language studied abroad.

It is noteworthy that almost 18 percent of interviewees (who before migrating were poor) consider that international migration helps them to get a long-term stable livelihood, and now they no longer think of themselves as poor, nor have severe financial shortages. When we add those actors who were not poor before migrating, upon return is almost 20 percent of the total sample, who feel they have a long-term stable livelihood. This group points out that upon their return, the key was to use their assets and capabilities productively, even if they do not use

everything they know or everything they own. We can also say that two-thirds of interviewees have a better livelihood than before but do not recognize that they have economic stability.

This sample is not random or representative, but we can contrast the results against other studies even with this weakness. For example, migrants who live stable upon return are almost 20 percent, one in five. They are few, but verify that accumulating productive assets and capacities allows them to generate income, face adversities, and get out of poverty. As other studies on poverty detected, the accumulation of quality productive resources (land, livestock, irrigation), potential constructive knowledge, personal aspirations, as well as performing non-agricultural or higher income activities, constitute the pillars to get out of poverty (Perlman, 2008, Krishna, 2008, Dercon and Shapiro, 2008, Gomes, Petersen, Galvao, 2008). In the benchmark sample, these aspects have also been vital among those who now have a long-term stable livelihood. In addition to migration, other forces intervene in this improvement process, such as the influence of the environment, family support, the efforts of migrants, their achievement motivations, the imitation of family examples, among others.

Additionally, this sample also verifies how difficult it is to get out of poverty. As previously stated, 80 percent of interviewees did not manage to build a stable livelihood on return. Still, at least nine in ten managed to accumulate assets and brought labor knowledge, but they only managed to live better than before migrating and facing slight economic shortages. In this way, more migrants remain in weak livelihoods, even having remittances, assets and knowledge, schooling (less), jobs (irregulars). The study confirms that poverty is persistent, and the probability of falling and remaining in it is much greater than to get out from poverty (Perlman, 2008; Krishna, 2008). More migrants can get out of poverty or earn better livelihoods with international migration. Still, the local and regional environment can have good options to reinforce and finance their projects and use their labor knowledge, ideas, and others. For example, about half of them, and much more of those who still have economic shortages, still have underemployed and wasted their knowledge. Some businesses have failed by lack diverse supports. The complaints include that there is nowhere to apply their knowledge, the small salaries, lack of technology, scholar certificates, lack of financial and advisory support for entrepreneurship, violence

and corruption. In this sense, public programs that generate jobs related to migrant knowledge can be stimulated: entrepreneurs (chefs, agricultural workers, mechanics, diverse trades) can obtain financial support, advising, and management venture opportunities. Advice to manage and link their ventures and others. It is necessary to boost the capabilities, knowledge and assets of migrants with options appropriate to their knowledge, intentions and savings. As other specialists point out, the capital, education and expertise that could induce local structural changes are sub-used when it lacks collateral support (Zoltan and Storey, 2004).

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