

Session

International Migration and Migrant Populations

Title

Managing transitions in European labour markets – the case of young Spanish migrants in Germany

Authors

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Extended Abstract

Spain got severely affected by the economic crisis that started in 2009. Up to that point Spanish-German migration had been comparatively low with about 7,000 to 8,000 people migrating to Germany each year. By now these numbers have tripled. Spanish migrants constitute temporarily the fastest growing group among Southern European immigrants in Germany (Pfeffer-Hofmann 2014). This is one of the immediate consequences deriving from the recent economic crisis. High unemployment rates and hindered labour market entries motivate especially young Spaniards to seek for better job opportunities in other European countries. Whether they have just accomplished their vocational training or university degree and seek to either entry or establish in the labour market they face a massive exclusion according to the even higher youth unemployment rate of more than 50%.

And they are well advised to look for jobs within the European Union for several reasons: Formal barriers are now low within a more and more integrated social space of the European Union. The creation of the internal market is a rather unique phenomenon. Without dissolving the meaning of national borders, Europe created a new concept of space that enables movement under new criteria. In former times bilateral agreements were necessary to promote intra-European migration like for example in times of guest worker migration to Germany in the early 1960s. The creation of the European Economic Community in the 1950s has soon established the idea of a single European market. In addition to the free movement of goods, capital and services, the free movement of people constituted from the very beginning one of its "four freedoms". Particularly since the Maastricht Treaty and the introduction of a citizenship of the European Union in the 1990s, the promotion of intra-European mobility gained an increasingly prominent role. Furthermore education systems are corresponding now so that it can be assumed that job entries within the European labour market got simplified. This is flanked by a high level of qualification in Spain and by a high demand of qualified work force in Germany. And last not least there is an established migration relationship between Spain and Germany. Spanish-German migration does have a history.

Given the free movement of people within the European Union and short geographical distances this constitutes an excellent initial situation for fostering (spontaneous) intra-European migration (Bertoli et al. 2013). Previous studies on this form of horizontal Europeanization have constantly been showing that cross-border migration remains limited within Europe (Recchi 2008; Favell/Recchi 2011; Boll/Leppin 2014). An on-going negative net migration with other EU member states and simultaneously an overall decreasing volume of migration were noticed for Germany throughout the early years after the turn of the millennium. Additionally, most intra-European migration was of only temporary nature and immigrants returned to their countries of origin after only short stays in Germany. The decreasing regional disparities between the EU member states combined with a missing mobility culture were expected to explain this phenomenon.

The new situation triggers regional disparities within the EU and energises migration from Southern to Northern Europe. People are “voting with their feet” according to Triandafyllidou/Gropas (2014). Spain has rapidly changed from being a country of immigration into a country of emigration while especially high qualified Spanish nationals emigrate both before and during the crisis (Boll/Leppin 2014; Izquierdo et al. 2015). Young skilled migrants exhibit ideal profiles for fulfilling the requirements of the labour market and for being integrated socially.

Despite these – theoretically – optimal conditions remigration within just one year has also been rising strongly without major improvement of the labour market situation in Spain. This development challenges conventional migration theory and seeks for answers regarding the experiences and expectations of young Spaniards in Germany and the challenges they face.

How do they manage their transitions into the German job market? What are their strategies and what are their expectations?

We seek to find answers to this question by focussing on a life course perspective. The life course perspective and the concept of transnationality have highlighted, that migration is not just a short-term movement from A to B, but involves a deeper understanding of transitions and status passages of lives as well as social contexts. Consequently migration and integration theories get closer to each other.

In order to answer our question, we conducted 30 qualitative interviews with Spanish nationals who were born between 1980 and 1990 and came to Rhine-Main Region in 2014 or 2015. We asked them about their perceptions of the situation and about their causes and motives why they come to Germany, in how far they see themselves affected by the crisis and what expectations they have in the very initial phase of their stay in Germany. We accompany them from the beginning of their arrival in Germany in their first months and see how expectations and desires develop. We obtain a deeper understanding of integration processes from their perspectives and understand how they manage their status passages between leaving the educational system and entering/establishing in the job market in Spain respectively in Germany. What are their strategies in overcoming the status passages between educational system and professional career in the context of migration and intra-European mobility? We found that pathways of coming to Germany can be quite different including their strategies and demands of social and labour market integration.

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