

# Promoting the return of human capital

## Policy brief v.1

### KEY MESSAGES

- Return programmes focused on the labour field must value the experience of returnees from a more comprehensive perspective, not only for highly qualified profiles.
- Return policies should focus on attracting "human capital" with an inclusive approach.
- The time horizon of programme interventions should be at least 5 years.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship by returnees is to develop the society of the country of origin.
- Professional and employment networks and connections between receiving countries and the country of origin favour reintegration.

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### RETORNO study

Interventions on Social Determinants of Health  
– A comparative study of returned migrants  
from the UK and Spain post-Brexit referendum



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## Introduction

The principal purpose of the EU-funded RETORNO study is to develop an evidence-based, context-sensitive theory of how intra-EU returned migrants' health could be improved. Their objectives are addressed to investigate how Brexit is affecting social and health issues in returned migrants, especially between the United Kingdom and Spain, but also at a European level. Intra-EU migration policies interact with social determinants of health, which are the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These vary depending on how policies distribute money, power and resources, and have an impact on people's health.

The Welfare State at the European level is designed for a sedentary status (for nationals and permanent residents), and linked to labour (by having contributions), which does not allow citizens to come and go within a framework of guaranteed rights<sup>1,2</sup>. Social citizenship has been dismantled because there is no access to justice or to free legal aid, both civil rights. Other social and political rights are then put at risk<sup>3</sup>. This whole situation has been aggravated by the UK's withdrawal from the EU<sup>4</sup> and by the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, in these countries/regions there are no return plans or they are unclear; in addition, the different levels of government (state, local) generate territorial inequalities<sup>5,6</sup>.

## Our approach

We used an innovative literature review methodology (realist synthesis) with five co-productive workshops with stakeholders (returnees, NGOs, charities, diplomatic representations, policy makers, etc.).

- ✓ The first workshops were held in phase one of the realist synthesis, in order to map initial contextual differences between Spain and the UK, helping to refine initial knowledge and consolidate the scope and objectives of the study.
- ✓ The second round of workshops was carried out in the evidence analysis and synthesis phase, in order to refine and validate the identified recurring patterns of contexts and outcomes and then explain these through the mechanisms by which they were produced.
- ✓ In the final phase, a final co-productive stakeholder workshop was held to develop joint strategies from an inter-sectoral approach on Return Migration and Health.

## What we found

Key findings from our study are:

**Attracting human capital as empowerment versus non-inclusive talent attraction:** Return programmes aimed at "attracting human capital " can generate "feelings of agency" (empowerment to take action to improve the country of origin and their community), having positive effects (self-esteem, well-being and control of life); by contrary, return programmes aimed at attracting talent (based exclusively on higher education profiles, "brain gain") lead to demotivation, a feeling of not belonging and discrimination in many returnees, which can have a negative impact on their well-being and health.

- ✓ Return programmes focused on attracting and retaining professional profiles for the development of the social and productive system **can work** when in the country of

origin there are decentralised policies, with less bureaucracy, need for entrepreneurship and improvements in infrastructures.

- ✓ The **valorisation of returnees' human capital** can provide them with a sense of agency and belonging to the country of origin. A process of empowerment occurs when returnees take action and generate changes, also promoting dynamics of self-identification of individuals with the collective identities of the country of origin.
- ✓ In addition, **to develop networks** during the migration experience is relevant because it contributes to support return policies.
- ✓ The **initiation of income-generating activities** (individually or with their families) and secure employment plans, including the creation of their own business, are facilitated in this scenario, which contributes to the improvement of different skills, to greater self-esteem, well-being and control of life, and to greater health at the end.
- ✓ However, many of these **return programmes basically emphasise "talent"**, offering employment opportunities, grants and business start-up facilities for a very specific profile (mainly returnees with high qualifications and/or professional skills and young people -under 36-40 years old-), and have proven to be successful when the return is to the urban environment, after a longer and positive migratory experience, a business activity prior to the migratory experience, if the returnees had sufficient financial capital to undertake the return and if they were men. In addition to the highly exclusive nature of these programmes, they have tax disadvantages.
- ✓ These "talent attraction" programmes **can lead to demotivation, a feeling of not being needed and not belonging, and discrimination**, because it seems to be a mechanism to select only one type of people, mainly highly educated or highly qualified, and no thought is given to the needs of returnees or those who are thinking of returning. In these circumstances, mental health problems (stress, anxiety, depression, reverse culture shock) may appear.

## Policy implications / Recommendations

- Return programmes focused on attracting migrants to the labour market of their country of origin, should **value the experience of returnees from a more comprehensive perspective**, which does not exclude those who do not have highly qualified profiles.
- These programmes should also contemplate a **time horizon of at least 5 years**.
- Entrepreneurship programmes can be very profitable, as they provide **ideas and financial capital that contribute to socio-economic development**.
- The concept of "talent attraction" is linked to non-inclusive programmes/actions. It would be advisable to change this term to **"attracting human capital"**.
- **Establishing professional and employment networks and connections** between the receiving countries and the country of origin is a measure that contributes to returnees providing more support to return policies, and therefore favouring their reintegration.

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