RETURN MIGRATION FROM THE U.S. TO MEXICO: NEW CHALLENGES OF AN OLD PHENOMENON[1]

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An enormous change has been observed in migration flows between Mexico and the U.S.: the net migration rate has fallen to zero as a result of the decline in emigration, while return and U.S.-born immigration has increased. Over the past decade, an unprecedented number of Mexican migrants returned to Mexico due to immigration enforcement and deportation, and the erosion of opportunities in the post-2008 U.S. labour market. Recent return is unique because of the changing composition of returnees and their motivation, as well as the diversification of destinations on their return. Data show greater challenges for economic integration than before due to the deterioration of wages and the increase in precarious work from 2000 to 2015. Partially driven by discrimination, stigma towards deportees, and a deficient labour market where returnees cannot transfer skills, the situation calls for a new approach to integration.

Se ha observado un enorme cambio en los flujos migratorios entre México y los EU: la tasa de migración neta ha caído a cero como resultado del descenso en la emigración, en tanto que la inmigración de regreso y de los nacidos en los EUA, ha aumentado. A lo largo de la última década, una cifra sin precedentes de migrantes mexicanos volvieron a México, debido a la implementación de las políticas inmigratorias y a la deportación, así como a la erosión de oportunidades en el mercado laboral estadounidense posterior a 2008. El retorno reciente resulta único debido a la modificación en la composición de quienes vuelven y sus motivaciones, así como a la diversificación de los destinos de su regreso. Los datos muestran mayores retos para la integración económica que antes, debido al deterioro salarial y al incremento del trabajo precario entre los años 2000 y 2015. Impulsado en parte por la discriminación, por el estigma hacia los deportados y por un mercado laboral deficiente en el que los retornados no pueden transferir habilidades, la situación insta a encontrar un nuevo enfoque para la integración.

1 Based on the presentation entitled "Different profiles and challenges: Demography and geography of Mexican return migration" in the workshop "Migration and integration: Bridging divides and building resilient communities" at the Metropolis North America Policy Forum held in Washington, D.C.in November 2017. Results included those from the study on economic (re)integration patterns of returnees undertaken in collaboration with Nicole Denier (Assistant Professor at University of Calgary) from "The Payoff to Mexican Return Migration Before and After the Recession," presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America in April 2017.

Un changement considérable a été observé dans les flux migratoires entre le Mexique et les États-Unis : le taux de migration nette est tombé à zéro en raison de la baisse de l'émigration, tandis que les retours et l'immigration d'origine américaine ont augmenté. Au cours de la dernière décennie, un nombre sans précédent de migrants mexicains sont rentrés au Mexique en raison de l'application de la loi sur l'immigration et l'expulsion, et de la dégradation des possibilités sur le marché du travail américain après 2008. Le retour récent est particulier en raison de la composition changeante des rapatriés et de leur motivation, ainsi que de la diversification des destinations à leur retour. Les données montrent des défis plus importants pour l'intégration économique qu'avant en raison de la détérioration des salaires et de l'augmentation du travail précaire de 2000 à 2015. Entraînée en partie par la discrimination, la stigmatisation envers les expulsés et un marché du travail déficient où les rapatriés ne peuvent pas transférer leurs compétences, la situation exige une nouvelle approche de l'intégration.

CONTEMPORARY PATTERNS OF MEXICAN RETURN MIGRATION

Return migration is by no means a new phenomenon in Mexico but was transformed as a result of the Great Recession and changes in immigration enforcement, which increased deportations of long-term residents. An enormous change has been observed in migration flows between Mexico and the U.S. since 2009: net migration rate fell to zero as a result of the decline in emigration, and the reversal of the flow (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012, Passel and Cohn 2016). This North-South flow includes Mexican returnees and their U.S.-born family members, most of whom are under 18 years old. The challenges of integrating an increasing number of migrants who arrived involuntarily, with broken social networks if they have lived out of the country for long periods, requires more attention to the phenomenon than ever before (Masferrer and Roberts 2016).

A large proportion of Mexicans define the United States as home as they have strong family, friendship, and work ties there. However, many face the daily fear of deportation and family separation. Today, 11.2 million Mexicans live in the United States, of which it is estimated that 5.8 million are undocumented, and a large proportion are long-term residents. Eight out of ten undocumented Mexicans have lived in the United States for more than a decade, and only approximately 7% arrived in the past five years (Passel and Cohn 2016).

Thousands of Mexicans have returned from the United States to Mexico due to economic hardship, family responsibilities, or health issues. The U.S. authorities have returned many others forcedly, and the involuntary nature of return has increased (Masferrer and Roberts 2012). Data from the Department of Homeland Security (Office of Immigration Statistics 2017) show that approximately 1.56 million Mexicans were deported during the Fiscal Years of the two George W. Bush administrations (2000-2008), and nearly two million during Obama's presidency (2009-2016). These removals are unlikely to be border apprehensions of those attempting to enter the country.[2] In fact, border apprehensions of Mexican nationals have been decreasing since 2000 and in 2017 they reached their lowest point since 1967. The 1.6 million border apprehensions of Mexicans registered in the year 2000 contrast sharply with the 130,000 in 2017.

Economic conditions in the U.S. eroded considerably between 2008 and 2009. Although it remains unclear whether the recession contributed to increasing returns over this period, limited labour market opportunities in the U.S. may have encouraged those who did return to join and remain in the Mexican labour market (Rendall, Brownell, and Kups 2011). The expansion of new migration patterns may in part reflect the changing nature of selectivity in returning: immigration enforcement may have locked up people in the U.S. who would otherwise have engaged in circular migration while increasing the involuntary nature of return through deportations (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2015).

MEXICAN RETURNEES AND THEIR U.S. BORN (AND MEXICAN) CHILDREN

According to Mexican Census and Survey data,[3] the number of Mexicans living in the United States who returned to Mexico more than tripled from 240,000 in 2000 to nearly 800,000

2 DHS publishes statistics on apprehensions and returns at the border *(border apprehensions)* and deportations *(removals)* that occur in the interior, under deportation orders, with or without criminal charges. Fiscal years run from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30 of the following year, whereas presidential administrations begin on January 20.

3 Return migration is defined using indicators of place of birth and residence five years prior to the moment of the survey. Data limitations and challenges to capture Mexicans migrating to the U.S. and coming back using nationally representative data have forced scholars to study this phenomenon empirically using this definition, but we are aware of several limitations and biases. Some data sources also record *circular migration* (emigration and return over a five-year period) but this indicator excludes a large share of long-term U.S. residents who have come back to Mexico, a characteristic of contemporary return.

in 2010. In 2015, the number of recent returnees captured in Mexico who arrived during the period 2010 to 2015 fell to 442,000 (see Table 1). Recent return is unique because of the changing composition of returnees and the motivation for their return. Previous waves of return were often dominated by male labour migrants to the U.S. going back home, often to reunite with their families, after a sojourn abroad (Lindstrom 1996, Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). For some, working in the U.S. provided the capital and skills to start small businesses, reflected in higher rates of self-employment compared to Mexicans with no migration history (Hagan, Demonsant, and Chávez 2014, Parrado and Gutierrez Vazquez 2016).

TABLE 1. SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEXICAN RETURNEE AND NON-MIGRANT POPULATION, 2000, 2010, 2015

	Returnees			Non-migrant		
	2000	2010	2015	2000	2010	2015
Total (N)	266.437	824.023	442.503	80.958.460	95.918.390	104.214.050
Sex (% Female)						
Total (5 years and older)	34.9	28.0	32.1	51.7	51.4	51.8
Age						
Mean	31.4	33.7	36.3	29.4	32.3	33.4
Median	29	32	35	25	27	29
Relationship to the household head						
Head	43.3	49.6	48.3	26.1	28.5	29.4
Spouse	15.4	13.4	17.2	19.8	19.9	19.7
Son/daughter	30.3	25.9	23.2	44.5	40.1	38.4
Other	10.2	10.5	10.3	9.1	11.1	12.0
Non-family	0.8	0.7	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.5
Marital status (12 years and older)						
Single	31.6	25.9	24.1	48.7	44.9	34.2
Common law/married	61.2	65.4	64.4	44.6	46.4	54.9
Separated/Divorced	5.3	7.4	9.5	3.0	4.6	6.1
Widow	1.9	1.4	2.0	3.7	4.1	4.8
Years of schooling (25-64 years old)						
Mean	7.8	8.2	8.7	7.5	8.7	9.4
Median	6.0	8.0	9.0	6.0	6.0	9.0

Notes: Migration is defined using the indicator of residence five years prior to the survey. Non-migrants refer to the Mexican population who lived in the same state the year of the survey and five years prior, whereas returnees are Mexicans living in Mexico whose residence five years prior was the United States.

Source: own estimates using 2000 and 2010 Mexican census and 2015 Intercensal Survey

While men remain the majority of more recent returnees, they are increasingly "returning" to new destinations, establishing patterns of migration that are distinct from traditional short-term circular migration to and from home (Riosmena and Massey 2012, Masferrer and Roberts 2012). Destinations for return are not only located in places with long-standing emigration, but also in those with relatively attractive economic opportunities: northern border towns, tourist centers, and large metropolitan areas are increasingly important sites of re-incorporation (Masferrer and Roberts 2012, Rivera Sánchez 2013, Riosmena 2004). Overall, research shows that returnees form a heterogeneous group in terms of age, educational attainment and skills, work experience, time spent abroad, and migratory and family trajectories.

The recent flow of U.S.-born migrants from the United States to Mexico has increased in absolute numbers from around 80,000 in 1990 to 217,000 in 2015. Overall, these flows represent the largest North-South movement in the world. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of U.S.-born arrivals in Mexico reached a record high of more than 350,000. With the vast majority (three out of four) of the U.S.-born population living in Mexico since 2000 (i.e. the stock) aged 17 or younger (Giorguli Saucedo, Garcia-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016). U.S.-born minors in particular are increasingly accompanying parents and siblings back to Mexico as age, sex and education selectivity patterns of returnees changed before and after the recession (Masferrer et al. 2012).

Many arrive with a Mexican parent who faces challenges reintegrating economically and socially upon return. A number of these U.S.-born minors are the children of deportees, and many of them have at least one Mexican parent and so are potentially dual citizens with the possibility of re-emigrating later in life. Immigration at a young age, both for those born in the U.S. and in Mexico, poses unique challenges for integration, especially in the education system due to their limited Spanish proficiency and problems with foreign credential recognition (Glick and Yabiku 2016, Medina and Menjívar 2015, Zúñiga and Hamann 2015).

LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

Historically, studies of the labour market integration of returnees have focused on the role of migration as a means to capital accumulation, and as a corollary of development in communities of origin. According to this approach, target earners migrate to the United States, sending back remittances, and upon returning, also bring back resources, including skills, to start small businesses. Thus returnees are more likely than the native-born to be self-employed. This pattern would also be consistent with those engaged in routine, circular migration to and from Mexico – perhaps reflecting patterns of seasonal work characterizing industries in which many immigrants work in the U.S. Recent studies, however, suggest that this is changing. Seven out of ten male and female returnees who participate in the labour force are wage employees (Denier and Masferrer 2017). With the increase in involuntary return, a significant share of returnees may arrive in Mexico with few resources to start a business, and little hope of returning to the U.S., instead of quickly joining the paid labour market upon return (Parrado and Gutierrez 2016).

Returnees are concentrated in economically productive ages (see Graph 1). Labour force participation rates among male returnees are higher than among their non-migrant counterparts, especially among those aged 25 to 49. Female returnees, however, have slightly lower participation rates than non-migrants. Data show a consistent decline in labour force participation as self-employed workers or employers, with an increase in informal salaried workers from 2000 to 2015.

Over this period, mean wages of Mexican returnees declined towards those of Mexican non-migrants, for both men and women. Results of multivariate statistical models (Graph 2) show that this narrowing of the gap holds, even after accounting for demographic, labour, and contextual geographical characteristics, for men and women in different age groups (Denier and Masferrer 2017). The deterioration of returnees' wages documented by Parrado and Gutierrez continued into 2015, after economic conditions improved in the U.S. This downward convergence is not unique when comparing those with and without migration experience. In fact, over this period, convergence occurred of several economic indicators, including salaries, where the more advantaged group grew closer to the disadvantaged one (El Colegio de México 2018).

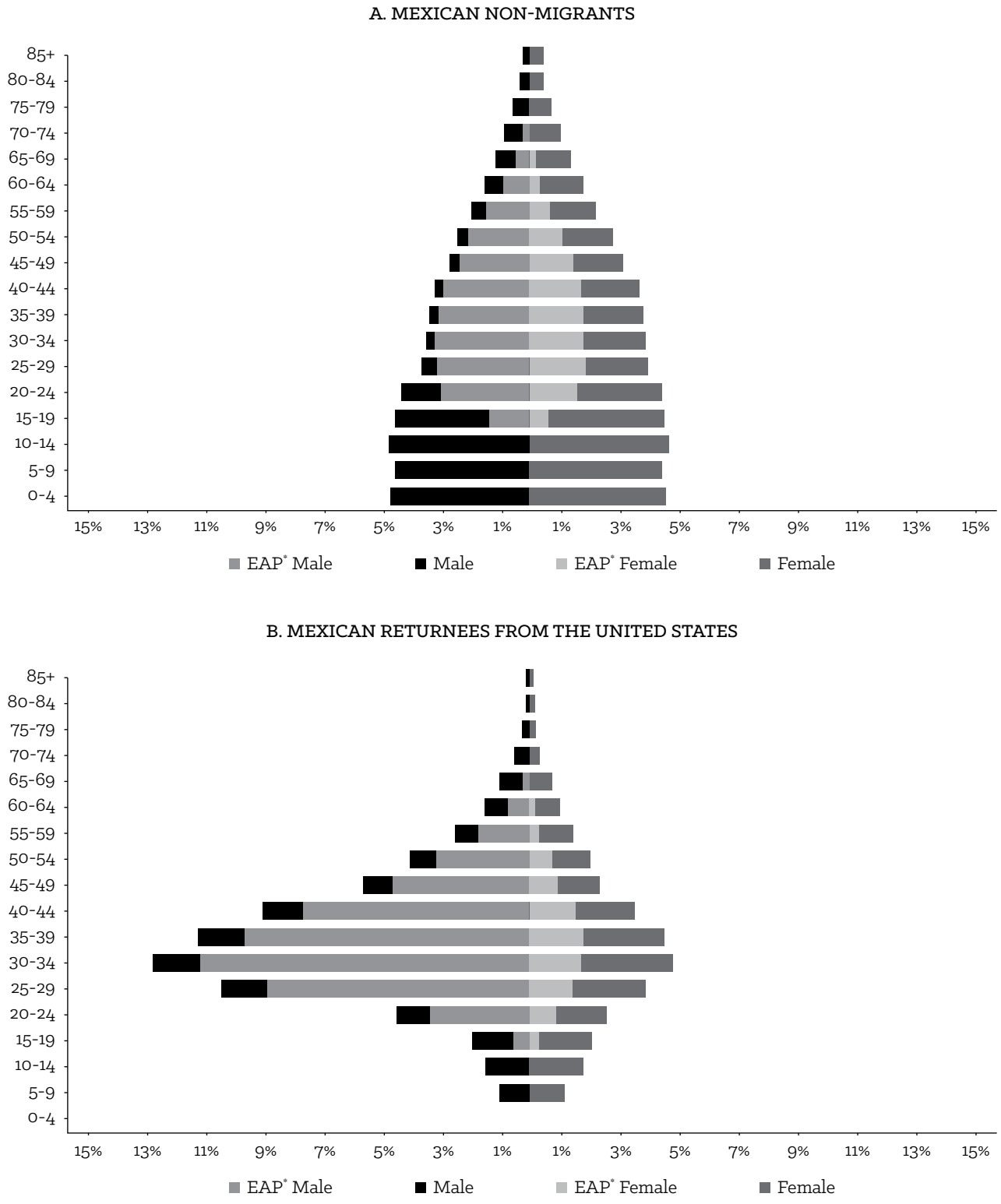
A Mexican citizen who returns has the same human rights as those who stayed put. However, upon return, many face stigma and discrimination. The "mark" of deportation, which is often associated with criminality (Pombo 2010, Wheatley 2011), may create additional challenges for labour market integration. Human rights violations against transit migrants, together with discrimination against the foreign born and nationals coming back create an adverse social context upon arrival.

INTEGRATION POLICY AND A CHANGE OF NARRATIVE

For decades, Mexicans and foreigners alike have regarded Mexico as a country of emigration. Thus, immigration policy was not a priority, with most programs being implemented in response to specific situations, and mostly to address issues involving Mexicans living abroad (Giorguli Saucedo, Garcia-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016). Irregular transit migration through Mexico intensified in the 1990s during a period of increasing migration from Central America, and increased again recently, gaining more attention since 2014 owing to the large share of unaccompanied minors migrating (Rodríguez 2016). Immigration also increased. The foreign-born population living in Mexico expanded dramatically from 2000 to 2015, but only accounts for 1% of the total population and is far from the 14% or 21% observed in the United States and Canada. When looking at the stocks, 2015 survey data show that 80% of the total foreign-born population living in Mexico is from the U.S., 80% of which is under 18. Contrary to common belief, less than 5% of the U.S.- born population in Mexico was older than 60 in 2015 (Giorguli Saucedo, Garcia-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016).

Although several different initiatives have been proposed and considerably fewer implemented (Giorguli, Angoa, and Villaseñor 2014), programs for returnees fail to acknowledge

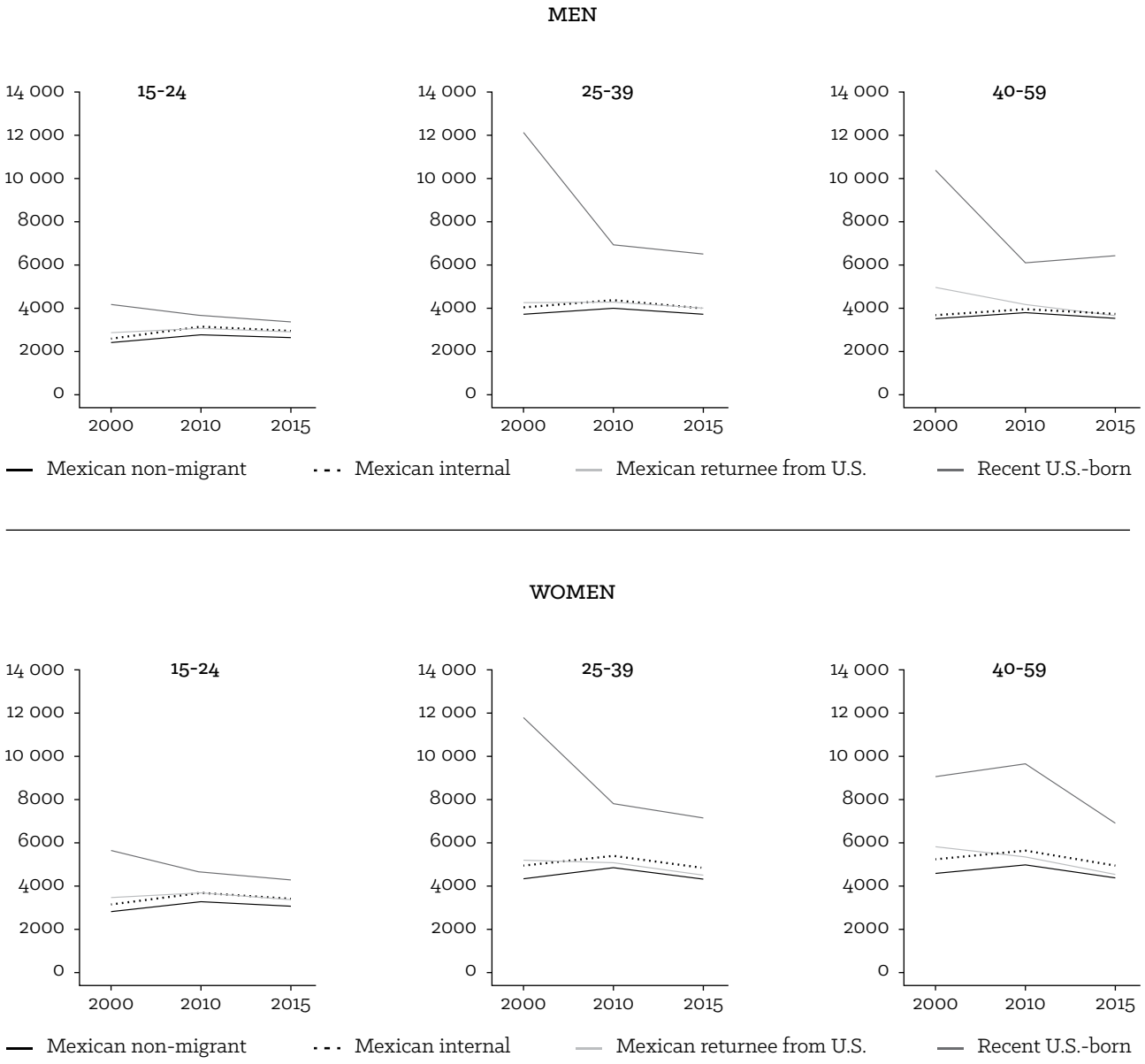
GRAPH 1. AGE, SEX, AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION DISTRIBUTION OF THE MEXICAN NON-MIGRANT AND RETURN MIGRANT POPULATION, 2015



Notes: Migration is defined using the indicator of residence five years prior to the survey. Non-migrants refer to the Mexican population who lived in the same state in 2010 and 2015. Returnees are Mexicans living in the United States in 2010 and in Mexico in 2015. The economically active population (EAP) refers to the employed or unemployed population.

Source: Own estimates using the 2015 Intercensal Survey, graph based on the one in (Masferrer, Sánchez-Peña, and Rodríguez-Abreu 2017).

GRAPH 2. ADJUSTED MEAN WAGES FOR MEN (TOP) AND WOMEN (BOTTOM) BY AGE AND MIGRANT STATUS, 2000, 2010, 2015



Notes: adjusted mean wages refer to the mean of the estimated wages from OLS regression models stratified by sex and age group with a migrant and year interaction. Dependent variable is the natural log of income from employment, deflated to 2010 Mexican pesos. Controls include demographic (age, sex, marital status, relationship to household head), employment (educational attainment in years, class of workers, industry of employment), and contextual (size of locality, region of settlement, degree of marginalization) characteristics.

Source: Own estimates using pooled 2000 and 2010 Mexican census and 2015 Intercensal Survey, presented at (Denier and Masferrer 2017).

that they form a heterogeneous population with different needs. Migrants arriving in Mexico City will face different challenges from those in Tijuana, a rural community with long-standing migratory networks, or one with high levels of drug-related violence. The experience is not the same if a person arrives in their community of origin, or a new destination, where social networks may have changed over time. Demographic characteristics matter too, not only for integration into the education system or labour market, but for coping with family separation/reunification if children have been left behind, for example.

The changing scenario poses unique challenges. Policy responses should consider Mexico's nature as a sending country and its increasing role as a receiving one. Many countries that consider themselves "immigration countries" – including

Canada – have acknowledged the benefits of migration and diversity, and designed integration policies with the ultimate goal of social unity and national cohesion. Hopefully, Mexico will soon understand that immigration policy goes beyond selection policy and border control, changing the narrative towards migration and with integration in mind. Ideally this policy will not only address the needs of returnees and their U.S.-born children, but also of the foreign-born immigrant population in search of refuge and protection, family reunification, or migrating for other reasons, seeking either temporary or permanent residence in Mexico.

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