

**Adolescents from West Africa: Motivations and Reflections on the Migration Process.
A Comparative Analysis**

**Adolescentes del África Occidental: motivaciones y reflexiones del proceso migratorio.
Un análisis comparado**

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the perception of professional experts and adolescents from West Africa on their migration process and their passage through Spain as they head toward Europe. Its objectives are 1) identify the reasons to migrate, 2) analyze family's influence on decision-making, and 3) point out the factors conditioning the migration process. Qualitative techniques such as a life story, a panel of professional experts, Delphi, and SWOT were used. The results further deepen into the scarcity of the families' financial resources, the adult status that adolescents originally receive, low income, and low qualification as main motivations for migrating. In conclusion, this type of migration is identified and built on the same parameters as adults. Different perceptions were found between adolescents and professionals regarding remittances and family influence to migrate. As implications for the practice, it was identified the importance of specializing the protection system professionals who attend the needs of young migrants.

Keywords: 1. adolescents, 2. migration, 3. process, 4. West Africa, 5. Europe.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta la percepción de profesionales-expertos y de adolescentes del África Occidental sobre su proceso migratorio, y su paso por España cuando se dirigen hacia Europa. Tiene por objetivo 1) identificar estímulos para migrar, 2) analizar la influencia de la familia en la toma de decisión y 3) señalar condicionantes del proceso migratorio. Se utilizaron técnicas cualitativas como relato de vida, panel de profesionales-expertos, Delphi y DAFO. Los resultados profundizan en la escasez de recursos económicos familiares, el estatus de adulto que el adolescente recibe en origen, bajos ingresos y escasa cualificación como estímulos motivacionales para decidir migrar. Como conclusión, se identifica esta migración construida en idénticos parámetros que de adultos. Se hallaron percepciones diferentes entre adolescentes y profesionales en cuanto a las remesas y la influencia familiar para migrar. Como implicaciones para la práctica se detectó la necesidad especializar los profesionales del sistema de protección que atienden estos adolescentes.

Palabras clave: 1. adolescentes, 2. migración, 3. proceso, 4. África Occidental, 5. Europa.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration brings together multiple and complex variables. According to Bastenier and Dassetto (1993), it contains vital explorations and irregular dynamics that consider work horizons, the search for security, improvement of the quality of life, and roots versus alienation. It is a process not without contrasts and risks; as set forth by Abdelaziz and Fernández-Alonso (2019), migration is “a process wherein people decide to leave their countries seeking freedom, to improve their living conditions or guarantee for their rights” (p. 28). There is no orthodox profile to migration in terms of sex, age, marital status, nationality, and itineraries, yet some parameters can be established nonetheless, such as those that according to Acosta González (2013) identify the migrant: based on needs and global South-North flows. In this sense, getting to know the origin of the migration process and the characteristics of the migrants who face it, considering the cultural, educational, and social geography of departure becomes a priority.

The research carried out is framed within the ethnographic perspective represented by migrant adolescents (Lems, Oester, & Strasser, 2020), the subjectivities of these individuals being relevant in the oral reconstruction of their process and for the perspective assumed by the researcher, to understand and interpret migration as a vital project. This helps us asking some prominent research questions that served as a common thread to structure this research.

The framework question that revolved around identifying the binomial aspirations and expectations with the subsequent reality was: which expectations drive foreign minors to undergo the migration process? What is the attitude of their families towards this process? What possibilities and adversities influence the decision to migrate? What particularities, if any, differentiate the migration of minors from that of adults? How is the journey affected by support networks and their roots? How does the culture of origin and destination disturb their settlement or itinerant process? What implications does rooting hold for their life project?

From another perspective, they were asked questions related to the other side of the system, and the professionals who assist foreign minors were questioned, to compare their perceptions about the reality of the process, as well the convergences and divergences about it, also focusing on the crossroads between expectations and aspirations: which aspirations are manifested inherent to the migration process of adolescents? What implications represent possibilities that are offered in Spain according to their aspirations? Are support networks a detriment to their initial expectations? Are there differences in the perceptions of young migrants and those of professionals? All these questions being essential to explain the processes of human mobility, both in the imagination of the protagonists and in that of the professionals who assist them.

Geographic Motivations and Approach

The concepts of childhood, adolescence, and youth correspond to a social, cultural, and relational construction that through different historical periods have acquired diverse connotations. In this regard, “youth and old age are not given, but rather socially constructed in the struggle between young and old” (Bourdieu, 2000, p.164); therefore, assigning a specific category to a group is the first step in determining it as such, and in attributing a specific identity to it. In this line, Gualda (2011) stands out as significant in the construction of identities, the influence of the past in connection to memories, the experiential baggage, and the links that determine the sense of belonging.

From another point of view, Suárez-Navaz and Jiménez (2011) point out that the diversity of rituals that mark the passage from childhood to the adult world shows the disconnection between physical and social adolescence; therefore, age divisions are arbitrary, and in many cases merely respond to legal parameters, where the 18-year-old barrier becomes, according to Belloni (2019), a personal but also a family commitment. This article aligns with the notes by Gimeno-Monterde (2014a) in order to interpret its discursive affectivity.

As for the geographical scenario, Africa is considered the cradle of humanity, characterized by the mobility that is part of the history and culture of the continent. According to Kabunda (2012), the Australopithecus and Neanderthal departed from Africa. The records of archeology and paleonto-anthropology inform us of the permanent mobility of populations, inside and outside the continent, from the Sapiens to postmodern civilizations (Latham, 2019). Africa is, according to Kabunda (2012), the continent of intra- and extra-continental emigration both due to the history of migrations across the continent, and the nomadic cultures of their tribal communities. However, in recent decades, Flahaux (2015) explains that migrations have become a phenomenon derived from climate change, the global economy, the spread of the neoliberal system, or derived from armed conflicts in the southern hemisphere that constrain the processes of human mobility heading north.

According to Oucho (2012), the characteristics of migration from West Africa to Europe hold possibilities, yet also adversities. Western countries find high complexities in responding to the training, work, and leisure demands of adolescents and young people (Beinin & Vairel, 2011). Relief for these States comes from the African diaspora, which is conducive to economic development (Osorio, Cerrolaza, Ketiti, García-Luengos, & Thieux, 2013) yet according to Thieux (2014), it is also conducive to social remittance in the form of ideas, in the values and innovation that partake in the democratization and good governance of institutions and their replication in the African States. For Ikwuyatum (2012), the positive effects of human mobility from West Africa would be linked both at its origin and destination or during the experiences of the process. In view of this, the new theoretical approaches to push-pull migration highlight the cultural richness of immigration itself (Mac Gómez, 2019), the balance between the employment demand of migrants and the labor

supply of receiving societies, the geographical dynamization in the place of origin and the growth of social capital in communities, which favors positive interactions.

Conditioning Factors and Risks Implied in the Process from Migrant Subjectivity

The paradigms on the study of migration have developed into different views; some focus on the individual (Restrepo, 2002) while others on the multiple dimensions derived from the consequences of the migration process (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deux, & Fleischmann, 2019). A corpus has been brought into the theory of migration considering the relationship between mobility and belonging, particularly from the globalization processes that, according to Wilson and Dissanayake (1996), also bring in transnationalism and translocalism. Despite claims on the disappearance of the nation-State concept under the global umbrella, States of the northern hemisphere continue with their border control policies (Bakewell & de Haas, 2007; Beauchemin, 2015; Schweitzer, 2017) that favor the secrecy, irregularity, and fragility of the migrant.

According to Oboukoku (2011), the bitterest face of the exodus to Europe is found in the suffering and anxiety of the loneliness inherent to the trip, in the attitudes of rejection faced by migrants, in the loss of identity with respect to the place of origin and transience as a way of life, as well as the lack of public policies for reception and stabilization that may favor the chronicity of the migration process (Lessault & Beauchemin, 2009). To the above, Pyle and Hung (2019) add the anxiety generated by Western educational systems based on competence, risk tests, and the impact of rankings; the scant education acquired in the place of origin and the reduced chances for higher job positions that this initially supposes in the imaginary intensifies the conflict for curricular training. On top of this, educational policies limit their expectations, orienting them towards frailty in welfare institutions (Horcas, Bernard, & Martínez, 2015; Mendoza & Maza, 2015). In addition, the prohibitionist policies of developed States hinder the aspirations and expectations that first encouraged the decision to migrate (Velandia & Lacassagne (2012), that is to say, “States prefer to have illegal citizens than regularized citizens” (Sadiq, 2005, p. 101).

Migration policies reduce the expectations of migrants (Mcnevin, 2014); these policies endanger them by reducing their rights and legal security. The strong demand for regularization collides with the hardening of the processes. This means as Huysmans (1996) pointed out, entering into other levels of difficulty such as labor exploitation, street life, and mistrust. In this sense, subjective security is compromised by the possibilities of integration, and according to Strange, Squire, and Lundberg (2017), it is important that those labeled as “irregular” become involved in this process, for them to become active subjects for whom their condition as undocumented does not take precedence to that of being human. These factors, unrelated to the aspirations to migrate, condition migration. At times, legislative changes can lead to a drift in situations of irregularity, as was the case of those events that

occurred in France or Belgium at the end of the 1990s. In other words, changes in legislative structures instantly turned large masses of foreign residents into irregular and undocumented persons (Ojo, 2019).

Currently, structural changes affect the economy, employment, and, ultimately, welfare systems. Society has inherited the outbreak of the 2007 crisis and the consequent market distrust during a period of decline; even the Covid-19 pandemic has further weakened resources generating, according to Sułkowski (2020), a slowing down of the globalizing trend, resulting in a “de-globalization.” Somehow, according to Mainwaring (2016), this has modified migration patterns in terms of remittances, consequently reducing them. Therefore, migrants not only resist the changes that accompany their migration process but are also capable of coping with local and global difficulties.

Finally, were the crisis not a sufficiently voracious factor against stability, contradictions appear between regularization and the labor market that puts migrants in vulnerable situations. One can reside somewhere, yet not work there. Is the migrant willing to obtain residence documentation if he cannot otherwise access a job that allows him to improve his quality of life? In response to this question, the studies by Pelican (2012) report that the migration process does not begin with the aim of changing residence, but with the aspiration to change one's living conditions and improve one's status. In this invisible association with precariousness, migration *hardens* and the migrant is *toughened* (Betts, 2010).

Adolescence, Migration, Protection: New Protagonists, Same Scenarios

Adolescents who migrate alone pose complex challenges both for those policies aimed at controlling migration flows, as well as for those aimed at protecting children, and for others related to work or criminal status (Navarro, Botija, & Carbonell, 2016), second to age minority. Following Gimeno-Montverde (2014), although the migration of adolescents has traditionally been understood as part of a family strategy, the role of adolescents as protagonists should not be ignored. Along this line of analysis, Suárez-Navaz and Jiménez (2011) report that new technologies allow for the participation and connection of migrant adolescents, and for them to assume the leading role in the planning, decision-making about and ultimately crossing of international borders. Adolescents who migrate alone do so without referential models and, just like adults, have goals both “in the material as well as in the symbolic and personal spheres —to gain experience, maturity and be considered an autonomous person—” (Boubakri & Potot, 2012, p. 126).

However, the expectations at the place of origin and the reality at the destination are very little or nothing alike (Jiménez & Ramírez, 2011). The longed-for autonomy and independence clash against Western civilization and the compliance with international treaties in defense of human rights and the protection of children against the slavery of child labor, compulsory education, and the reaffirmation in the manifest guarantees of public

welfare systems that must ensure the protection of migrant adolescents, at least until they are of legal age. It would then be an adult majority, which according to Oboukoku (2011) has matured with the hardships of the migration process. An old Europe that gives them back the status of a child, but robs them of the dream of free autonomy.

The Minors Protection System and Welfare Policies in Spain

Regarding the general regulatory framework in Spain, from the condition of a foreigner, Organic Law 2/2009 of December 11, reforming Organic Law 4/2000 of January 11 on the rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration, commonly known as the Immigration Law, as amended by Organic Law 4/2015. In addition, for adolescents who are underage without an adult reference, the norms provided for in Organic Law 4/2000 (modified by Organic Law 8/2000), 11/2003, and 14/2003, and the regulations that build on it are applied by RD 2393/2004; also the regulations that the Civil Code (Royal Decree of July 24, 1889) and the Spanish Constitution (1978) express are applied, in addition to the different regional regulations that guarantee the legal protection of adolescents who migrate alone, being under 18 years of age and residing in Spain. In fact, Article 39.4 of the Spanish Constitution (1978) guarantees minors the provisions of international agreements that protect their rights. This way, public administrations must act in a subsidiary manner whenever parents do not timely and adequately comply with their legal obligations and minors lack guarantees of protection and enjoyment of their rights for a dignified life.

Connecting with this protective perspective, on the one hand, public administrations must ensure that young migrants enjoy their rights and, for this, provide the necessary assistance and protection in personal and social circumstances, in the areas of the family or -where appropriate, substitutes for this-, health, education, housing, employment, culture, justice or leisure. To this end, they must act through different welfare systems in order to guarantee access to them. On the other hand, public administrations acquire the commitment to provide public resources and articulate measures to fully address these migrations, which according to Borrego (2014) lack the professional specificity necessary for their social and educational intervention.

For Quiroga and Alonso (2012) the administrative and protection systems for minors should bet on real options for these adolescents, whose expectations in the place of origin and at the destination are divergent. They begin the process with aspirations different from those enjoyed by other young people their age who were born and raised in Western societies. The lack of a family and support networks compels them to face their situation as maturely as possible and, therefore, they would need institutional responses and alternative measures focused on emancipation and economic independence. Graw and Schielke (2012) report that the expectations of adolescents who undertake the migration process are high, and in many cases, disconnected from the reality they will find in host countries. From the

perspective of Schoumaker *et al.* (2013), the global horizon reproduces the asymmetries between expectations and realities.

METHODOLOGY

Traditionally, quantitative and qualitative research methods were presented as alternative and opposing methodological perspectives. After Huberman and Miles (2014), quantitative research analyzes the social world in terms of variables and produces numerical data, whereas qualitative research constitutes a source of rich descriptions about processes in local contexts, narrated in the words of participants themselves.

Design and Goals

A triangulation strategy (Denzin, 1970) was chosen for the research design, defined as a combination of two or more theories, data sources, or research methods in the study of a singular phenomenon. We chose to triangulate the data of our informants in order to stress the push-pull theory, thus identifying the unidirectionality or not of this migration.

The aim was to identify the frameworks within which these migrations are built from the perception of the professionals who make up the protection system, and also of that of the adolescents who are part of it, so as to identify whether the protection system itself constitutes support in achieving the end of the road or rather another stop on it. With this intention, an attempt was made to research the push-pull framework according to classical theories or the new arguments in terms of creative and competence socialization (Mac Gómez, 2019), or in the words of Thieux (2014), social remittances.

The research was carried out from the instrumentalization of different techniques. We tried to research our object from the approaches of Massó (2011) to Senegalese migrants: through the elaboration of life stories. We opted first to approach reality from this ethnographic technique. Simultaneously, we tried to deepen the perception of professionals in socio-educational intervention and expert academic researchers, who could converge or diverge. From both positions, we try to achieve and further explore experiential and reflective goals, that revolve around the migration process, such as:

1. Identifying the factors and motivations that encouraged the decision to migrate.
2. Analyzing the influence of families in the mobility process of young people.
3. Describing the determining factors of the migration process and its collateral effects.

Research and Sampling Techniques

The life story technique was used when interviewing the young migrants; according to Callejo (2006), this technique allows to integrate a subjective view of the experienced

process, intro and retrospectively, by means of conducting different in-depth interviews during a short period.

For the sample selection, the diversity in the origin of the adolescents from different West African countries was taken into account, partaking of the empirical perspective of Sabirón (2006), in order to address the heterogeneity of the ethnographic process. Likewise, we were interested in preparing a sample where life experiences could differ, to know both the migration cycles, the retrospective analyses, and the current situation of young migrants.

Table 1. Informants: Solo migrant adolescents and minors

Pseudonym	Origin	Residence in Europe	Current residence	Age
Latyr	Senegal	8 years	Spain	24
Imbali	Guinea	9 years	Finland	23
Salif	Mali	9 years	Spain	25
Ousmane	Senegal	8 years	Belgium	23
George	Liberia	18 years	Germany	35
Samuel	Ghana	11 years	Holland	27
Peter	Liberia	10 years	Belgium	25

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the elaboration of life stories, several interview sessions were needed to collect all the information and later start the categorization process. They were different for each case, but ranged from a minimum of three to a maximum of fourteen sessions; 19 stories were started, of which seven were completed. Audiovisual technology was used for communication via Skype. Interviewees were contacted through the General Directorate for Children, Adolescents and Youth (Dirección General de Infancia, Adolescencia y Juventud) of the Generalitat Valenciana, a public institution for the protection of minors.

As for the selection of professionals who participated as informants, we decided to deploy a Delphi technique that constitutes an effective means to build group consensus without members having to meet physically (Yañez Gallardo & Cuadra Olmos, 2008). This was possible through Google Drive. For the panel of experts, this versatile procedure can be used both as a research instrument and an evaluation of experiences and processes. It is an analytical technique that according to Howze and Dalrymple (2004) allows covering quantitative and qualitative aspects. The experts participating in the Delphi analysis (see Table 2) optimized the sheet of variables initially articulated by the research team, generating a mixed questionnaire with Likert-type questions, open questions, and a SWOT.

Likewise, the panel had to be answered by professionals-experts and, as such, Delphi members established concurrent inclusion criteria related to professional performance, experience in socio-educational intervention, and the wide geographic origin from all over the Spanish territory as guarantees of objectivity and reliability, in order to favor the

globality of views and heterogeneity of participants. Following these criteria, here we show the coding table in panel and Delphi:

Table 2. Description of participating experts in Delphi and expert panel

Code	Position	Experience	Autonomy
EXP.1	Pedagogue	5 years	Asturias
EXP.2	Psychologist	5 years	Andalucía
EXP.3	Community educator	10 years	Navarra
EXP.4	Community worker	16 years	C. Mancha
EXP.5	Anthropologist	14 years	Aragón
EXP.6	Community educator	6 years	Baleares
EXP.7	Teacher	16 years	Canarias
EXP.8	Teacher	10 years	Cataluña
EXP.9	Workshop teacher	25 years	Madrid
EXP.10	Community worker	33 years	P. Vasco
EXP.11	Psychologist	5 years	Canarias
EXP.12	Community educator	9 years	Murcia
EXP.13	Anthropologist	15 years	Andalucía
EXP.14	College professor	13 years	La Rioja
EXP.15	College professor	14 years	C. Valenciana
EXP.16 De	Community worker	24 years	Andalucía
EXP.17 De	Pedagogue	27 years	Melilla
EXP.18 De	Sociologist	26 years	C. Valenciana
EXP.19 De	Psychologist	15 years	Madrid
EXP.20 De	Teacher	9 years	Cataluña

Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from fieldwork.

The codes EXP.1 to EXP.15 belong to participants of the expert panel, while the codes EXP.16 De to EXP.20 De are members of the Delphi technique. The panel with the questions to answer was sent to 25 experts; of these, 15 (60%) answered it promptly, four did not answer in time (16%), one (4%) returned the questionnaire incomplete, and no response was obtained from the remaining five (20%).

Procedure

The information analysis was obtained through different sub-procedures:

1. Life stories were structured from categories and subcategories of analysis. This was done with MAXQDA 12 qualitative research software. To perform the analysis of the most representative dimensions, we aimed to highlight the text segments (Taylor & Bogdan, 1992) at different levels of codification. To obtain a sample of subjects to address life events, we followed the recommendations of Jolly (2001)

on heterogeneity and number, centering the interval from 5 to 8 subjects of different geographical origins. From this, seven stories were completed.

2. Regarding the SWOT analyzes integrated into the expert panel, the information was collected in discursive segments by levels of coherence in Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths and Opportunities, resulting in a structural system of labels —tag clouds—. As described by Poyatos (2013), the word cloud is a research technique for the objective and systematic description of discourse through verbal communication, intending to reach an interpretation of it. This technique allows us to categorize the responses and subsequently, as reported by the works of Cole, Julien, and Leide (2010), transform semantic fragments into statistical data to complement the results of the interviewed young people in a convergent and also divergent line.
3. For the second part of the panel and by means of a Likert-type survey, statistical analyzes were configured based on the different response levels. There were 14 variables to be subjectively incorporated (each expert), three response ranges (1 = low, 2 = moderate, and 3 = high) that were completed by professionals.

To synthesize the sub-procedures articulated in the empirical process, Table 3 below shows the goals addressed, the areas that make up the migration process, the qualitative categories and associated quantitative variables, and finally, the research techniques employed.

Table 3. Process and empirical approach

Goals	Areas	Categories/variables	Methodology	Techniques and instruments
1. Encouraging factors to undertake the immigration process	1. Personal	1. Age	Qualitative	Delphi
	2. Family	2. Sex		
		3. Family typology		
	4. Improves quality of life			
2. Family influence	3. Education	5. Education level	Quantitative	Life stories
	4. Economy	6. Income		
	5. Work	7. Job situation		
3. Conditioning factors and effects	6. Migration actions	8. Job position	Quantitative	Expert panel
		9. Job qualification		
		10. Migratory baggage		
	11. Pull effect	SWOT		
	12. Social networks			
13. Expectations and aspirations				

Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from fieldwork.

The table was constructed based on the research goals. The indicators provided us with quantitative data measured using the Likert scale, in which experts, through the panel, assessed the incidence of each one (high, moderate, or low). The life stories of migrant adolescents allowed us to analyze reality from their point of view, from their experiences, from the influence of these indicators at the beginning of their geographic mobility processes to Europe.

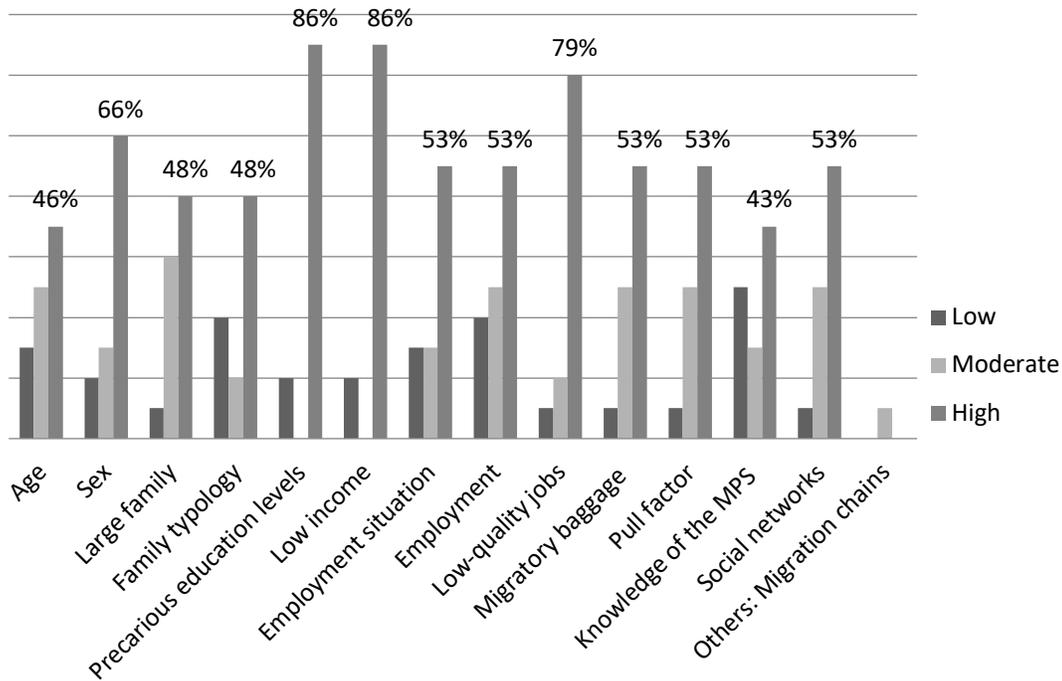
Gender parity was taken into account in the expert panel, yet the same was not possible in the panel of young informants, since this migratory profile corresponds mainly to the male sex (Ikwuyatum, 2012; Marco, 2015). However, other sources such as Martín-Palomino (2015) report the invisibility of young women in this type of migration due to the possible immersion of trafficking mafias and the precariousness of gender flows.

Our research was developed according to the recommendations of the ethics committees of the participating institutions and complied with research standards (Law 14/2007 on Biomedical Research). The results were extracted from broader research approved by the Ethics and Experimental Research Commission (Comisión de Ética e Investigaciones Experimentales) of the institutions associated with the study, reference CEIT17SOC221. People who met the inclusion criteria for this study received information on its goals and gave written consent, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 1964). Participants have explained the possibility of interrupting their collaboration.

RESULTS

From the point of view of the experts, the results related to the *pull-push* point at the educational level as linked to a greater determination to migrate, given the low occupational qualifications and the economic precariousness in the country of origin. They considered of low impact on the decision to emigrate having prior knowledge of the minor protection system (MPS) that favors residential coverage, and that in many cases young migrants know only when they set foot on Spanish territory. Finally, the experts perceive that the type of family, the employment in the place of origin, the migratory background of friends and close relatives or their social networks, as well as other pull effects have a moderate impact on the desire to migrate.

Graph 1. Determining variables to initiate the migration process according to experts, using the Delphi technique



Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from fieldwork.

As it can be seen, a consensus has been reached when it comes to some factors, while for others we find important differences. For 46% of experts, age would be the variable with the best balance. Sex (male) is for experts a variable that determines the undertaking of the process to 66%.

Pertaining to the educational level of migrant adolescents, 86% of the experts considered that this is a high probability factor in deciding to emigrate. In the case of three of the informants, the educational level before migrating was precarious or very precarious:

In my country I went to a Course de Soir school, let's say, which is sort of a school for adults, from the time I was 13 to 15 years old (Latyr, personal communication, September 28, 2017).

I went to Koranic school from the time I was seven years old, to learn the Koran, but I couldn't read Arabic, I only [learned] to recite the Koran (Imbali, personal communication, October 3, 2017).

E In my country, in school I learn nothing. In Ghana kids in street, just that (Samuel, personal communication, December 12, 2017).

Along with the precarious educational level, it is also necessary to take into account once again the social, ethnic, and cultural factors at the place of origin in which adolescents fluctuate around work responsibilities. From another perspective, the social reality and the conflicts in the territories of origin of these young people resemble the reality that exists in Europe little or nothing:

“I live at the border and if they come from Senegal, they have to exchange currency from CFA to Guinea francs, I exchange them the money and charge a little commission” (Imbali, personal communication, October 3, 2017); “In the war in Liberia I was at a house with rebels; they beat us, forced us to work... I filled shotgun shells. One day we ran away” (George, personal communication, November 11, 2017).

Delving into the second goal, pertaining to knowing the possible impact of the family environment on the decision to emigrate, the experts reported that for adolescents from countries of the so-called “first” world the nuclear family is practically reduced to the members of their coexistence nucleus: parents and children, not following the same patterns of West Africa, where family practically extends as a lineage. “I don’t know, I would have to count them... More or less 20 people, let’s say” (Latyr, personal communication, September 28 of 2017); “The family does not fit within the walls of a house... You do not know when it ends” (Samuel, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

Even in some cases, culture itself prescribes against enumerating the members of a family, in fear of witchcraft, due to religious reasons, or simply because of a lifestyle far from the canons that are projected in Western countries. Even the question itself of “counting” family members means an effort for adolescents, as these issues are typical of a different culture, not their own: “In my country, we do not count people because the last one you count dies” (Ousmane, personal communication, October 26, 2017); “How many are we? I don’t know, I can’t be 100% sure... I could be wrong” (Salif, personal communication, December 6, 2017).

Polygamy influences the forms of association of the extended family. Informants highlighted for us the role of mothers in the face of the neglect they sometimes receive from their father: “I have two sisters, three brothers... of the same father and the same mother. My father is married to another woman who also lives at home with her children. I worry about my mother. My father always selfish” (Imbali, personal communication, September 29, 2017). Or: “We are many, but there are four of my brothers. I have three brothers, two brothers and a brother. My father has two wives; with whom he has I think five children and they all live in the same house” (Salif, personal communication, December 6, 2017). Another informant noted: “My mother is mother and father” (George, personal communication, November 12, 2017).

Regarding the decision to migrate, our informants reflected that their family opposed the decision to make the trip. They indeed linked their migration project to the future living

conditions of their lineage, but they also detached their family from the ultimate decision to migrate. Migrants stated they were autonomous, both in the planning of the migration journey, as well as in the preparation of it or in the stimuli that trigger mobility: “Other boys come to Europe before me to work. I want for me same that boys in my neighborhood... my mother want not me come here” (Samuel, personal communication, December 29, 2017).

In the retrospective discourse of our informants, the concept of death appears as a particularity that surrounds the migration process. In their stories there is an oxymoron of contradictions where death and life coexist in a scenario of possibilities and adversities: “You die on the way or get to Europe... nothing else” (Ousmane, personal communication, October 30, 2017); “Easy dying in my country or on the way... life there is not worth 1 euro” (George, personal communication, November 12, 2017).

The migration process is kept in the memory of informants as a shocking event in their lives; migration is an important decision that in many cases is forged little by little, with little means and limited guarantees for success; especially in matters that affect their well-being and the possibilities of the process, yet young migrants also pass judgment on the hardness of the desired horizon and their aspirations that have little to do with the reality that they subsequently experience. “You go there, the other to another... organize trip... Goes wrong, no problem... again and again... fourth time can be OK” (Samuel, personal communication, October 12, 2017); “Problems these years... hard. Good, you made the trip... but think a lot” (George, personal communication, November 11, 2017).

Our informants deem the migration process an amalgam of sensations that affects their subjective well-being. It becomes a generalized opinion that the process has no end, and that to give meaning to the initial expectations depends on the combination of policies of regularization of work and residence of the receiving countries and the construction of a sense of identity belonging. Young migrants reported: “You don’t have a job, you don’t have a good life” (Ousmane, personal communication, October 30, 2017); “Only I am responsible for what happens [to me]” (Salif, personal communication, December 8 of 2017); “Many things that happen stay locked in the head” (Peter, personal communication, September 15, 2017).

Our interviewees reported that the market crisis demands an extra from the migrant status. The repercussion of the crisis on the precariousness of jobs and the itinerancy of the process becomes flagrant in their discourse: “With crisis everything worse. More work and less money” (Samuel, personal communication, December 29, 2017); “We never stop! From one place to another” (Imbali, personal communication, October 4, 2017); “When I came to Europe, I had better work conditions than today... and it’s been more than 15 years of that, you know? ... We’re going backwards. Fewer rights” (George, personal communication, November 11, 2017).

Figure 1. Discursive Prelations. Expert Perspective
 According to SWOT for Wordle



Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from fieldwork.

The experts considered a 53% (see Graph 1) high probability that family conditions or the type of large family are a relevant determining factor impacting the adolescents' motivation to migrate. Along these lines, the SWOT evidenced a greater impact of new opportunities, 93%, and family and lifestyles at 72%.

However, the rule of family consensus is not always fulfilled, since in some cases the family does not partake of the decision to migrate, being adolescents themselves who must seek and finance the ticket to Europe with their resources: "I took all my money and got going... my mother told me 'Okay if you want, get going'" (Imbali, personal communication, October 4, 2017). As another informant pointed out:

It was my idea only, one day I got up and left for Mauritania; I told I was leaving, not even my mother knew, nor my father, I've been trying to make a living there in Mauritania for almost one year, they didn't know if I was dead or alive (Salif, personal communication, December 8, 2017).

Another issue that informants report as of high emotional impact for them is the long period of the solitude of the journey, which sometimes lasts longer over time. The subjective perception of wandering accompanies the process. Roaming is built as a common thread in the migration process. The affective bond with the territory disappears and a bitter feeling of constant helplessness of "men without land" runs through them: "Many memories of my mother and my little siblings" (Imbali, personal communication, October 29, 2017); "I dream that I am in Virage beach (Dakar)... I wake up crying many times... is this I want?" (Ousmane, personal communication, October 26, 2017).

I left Liberia when I was 15 years old, then Sierra Leone, then Guinea and Senegal, then we went on a boat to Malaga in hiding, then Almería, Valencia, Barcelona, and Bilbao. Then to Italy, France, Belgium, and now Germany... I am already 35 years old. Here young and in my country, almost old... and... where am I from? A man without land (George, personal communication, November 11, 2017).

The low economic income of families would be a high factor for 86% of the experts who assessed this fact as a determining factor in the decision to migrate: “Everyone works in agriculture and little money” (Imbali, personal communication, October 3, 2017).

Figure 2. Discursive Prelations. Expert Perspective
According to SWOT for Wordle



Source: Own elaboration based on information obtained from fieldwork.

The SWOT allowed to analyze 35 discursive categories agreed upon by the expert panel. This reported that the opportunities of the mobility process increase the family budget by means of remittances. The improvement of working conditions for adolescents is also noted. The terms increase, economy and GDP stand out with a 93% response rate. On the other hand, 80% of the experts highlight the family concept, and the place of origin or geographical area from which they migrate by 73.33%, remittances by 40%, and references to employment, social, and entrepreneurship 33% each.

In this sense, our informants agreed with the point of view of the experts. However, there was no agreement between adolescent informants and the experts consulted regarding the economic growth at the countries of origin. The adolescents did not provide arguments on this matter. “I send my mother money for the lamb party” (Imbali, personal communication, October 3, 2017); “I have worked the strawberry, the harvest here, in Portugal and France, hazelnut in Reus... always working, and working hard... sending money to family. But... same house, same problems” (Salif, personal communication, December 10, 2017).

Social support networks were important to get the migration journey to Europe started, as they were considered mirrors in which young migrants could look at themselves to improve their life, even risking it on the trip. “In Lérida, I had my uncle working in the fruit” (Salif, personal communication, December 8, 2017); “I did not know anyone in Spain, only some families in France” (Peter, personal communication, September 15, 2017).

Regarding the intra-African and extra-continental migratory baggage, the perception of young people is that this configures the wandering personality of the African, in search of better living conditions. The idea of loneliness appears rises against this, described as an enemy to face every day, together with the difficulties they face to be autonomous: “Reaching the Canary Islands is like the American dream, but from Africa” (Peter, personal communication, September 15, 2017); “Africa is wild, a continent where you have everything and you have nothing... it's life, going from here to there until you find your place” (Ousmane, personal communication, October 28, 2017).

DISCUSSION

This discussion encourages a scientific dialogue between research results and goals. Thus:

Between Precariousness and Growth Expectations

The scarcity of economic resources in the family, their needs together with the lack of positive stimuli condition, as we have seen, the decision to migrate. An internal migration that in many cases advances morphs into an external one (UNICEF, 2017). A new report indicates that the number of uprooted children on the African continent stands at 135 million, including those displaced by conflict, poverty, and climate change (UNICEF, 2020). In addition to this, the meager economic income and low-skilled jobs, added to the effect produced by compatriots who have been successful in their mobility projects, would be the main reasons why underage young people enroll in extracontinental migration projects.

Working and improving the living conditions both their own and those of their places of origin, are the key elements by which underage migrant adolescents from West Africa undertake their journeys to Europe (Millet, 2008). Likewise, and in parallel to the views of Strange *et al.* (2017), the need to regularize their situation becomes a key factor encouraging their subjective well-being, although the condition of homelessness is perennial and perpetuates the migration process. Skeldon (2012) agrees with our results that migration is a chronic process, and a migrant is so for life. Migration constitutes a perennial purpose, given that the decision to migrate implies leaving behind one's roots to progress in a new life.

Our findings would also be in accordance with the study carried out by Ghamari and Bartoszewicz (2020) in the refugee camps of Libya, in which they warn that the beginning

of the process is stimulated by daily coexistence with flows and experiences of human mobility, contact with armed conflicts, economic reasons—such as difficulties in the family and young people’s willingness to contribute economically—, improvement of social and cultural expectations—working and earning money, in addition to meeting and aspiring to new challenges—. In this sense, our young informants compared the connotations of their age in Africa and Europe. From this point of view, of course, remittances become of greater interest; in agreement with Osili (2019), the results provide an argument for the imbalance that the economic expedition supposes.

Adolescents consider it of interest to improve their living conditions and to improve the status of their families in their place of origin (Kabunda, 2012), yet simultaneously stress the value of their effort. They are also aware of the forced reinvention of their origin in the period contemporaneous with the 2007 crisis, in which the sending of remittances decreased, and therefore, in correlation with Velandia and Lacassagne (2012) and Lacomba and Sanz (2013), remittances improved family living conditions, especially in terms of primary needs (Ogunniyi, Mavrotas, Olagunju, Fadare, & Adedoyin, 2020), yet not enough to make the migration process profitable. This is aligned with the new postulates of push-pull theories, which include in the migrant’s capital not only economic growth but in accordance with Mcnevin (2014) a situation of “ambivalence” that subjugates the material. Opportunities are not only built on economic parameters, but also on cultural, citizen representativeness ones, and so on. Therefore, the main role of the hegemony of modern orthodox theories is debatable in this migration.

Family and the Migration Process

In Western societies, the family unit is made up of parents, children, and sometimes grandparents. This model is known as nuclear family, however, following Beauchemin (2015), some general characteristics throughout West Africa define the concept of family; this refers to a kinship unit that is broader than the nuclear family: that of the extended family, where all men and women are assimilated into the figures of father and mother.

Regarding the process of human mobility, there are differences in the perception of young people and that of experts about it. Let us remember that the protection system provides the services of professionals specialized in addressing vulnerability and exclusion based on Fourth World criteria. However, these adolescents respond to a different childhood profile from that of residential places of protection or foster care. Both young migrants and experts agreed on the importance of family factors such as improved quality of life, status, and new possibilities; however, when it comes to remittances and the decision-making to migrate, there were differences.

The stories of young migrants often revolve around the moral obligation to provide well-being to their mothers, since they assess the treatment, they receive from their husbands

(fathers) as unfair. The umbilical cord between mothers and children is kept, according to Tabi, Doster, and Cheney (2010); emotional parallelism is produced that connects mothers and children when they are integrated into new cultural forms, new views, and somehow “Europeanize” (p.132). In this regard, Kimani (2016) points out that in polygynous societies there is a risk of losing family identifications. In these ways, the caregiver and even leadership role of family members would be assigned to women and girls, criticizing Beechey’s (1979) theories about patriarchy. Our analysis reveals the respect of young people for the mother figure.

Conditioning Factors that Collide with the Aspirations of the Migration Process

The migration process has a starting point, but no final destination (Latham, 2019). Experts have highlighted that the positive consequences of the migrations of underage young people into Spain and in their subsequent transit would be the increase in opportunities, both at the educational and labor levels and from the personal level to collective life: security, rights, wellness, etc. Along these lines and matching some of our findings, Friedberg (2000) relates that adolescents receive proportionally what their aspirations project: an opportunity for coexistence, shared cultures, and the meeting of different yet convergent worlds (Domínguez Mujica, 2011).

According to our analyzes, Lally (2011) reports that the field of education opens new avenues to an interculturality that future societies will inherit for their development. For example, the uprooting suffered lacks territorial identity; in this sense, our informant follows along the lines of Foster (2019) when narrating the loss of ties due to variables such as distance, the impossibility of traveling, the labels set by the host society, the complexity of the regularization and border control processes, the language barrier and cultural differences, as well as the loss of the sense of collectivity that minimizes human contact.

CLOSING REMARKS

In the processes of human mobility, specifically those of West Africa, there are no differences between adult migration and that of underage adolescents. The improvement of life situations, higher and better education, higher status, a better quality of life, and providing support for their place of origin, constitute the drivers for mobility. While in their place of origin adolescents are treated as adults, in host countries, both administrative regulations and daily social reality identify them as minors, subjects of rights yet also object of protection and limited autonomy.

On the other hand, the family appears as a neutral element in the decision to migrate, in contrast to the perception of professionals, who established the drive of the clan as

motivation to start the process. The concept of family in West African countries differs from that of host countries, just as family roles, practices, and patterns are different.

Processes of precarity are closely linked to whether or not young migrants are immersed in the job market. Legal residence does not allow access per se to the working world, and this involves risky circumstances. The subjective reality of young people are conditioned by their access to employment and the consequences for improving their quality of life derived from this association. The crisis in capitalist economies has undergone changes in origin, not only in the impact of remittances on GDP but also in the domestic economy and living conditions at the place of origin. The collectivity of the African imaginary collides with European individualism. Poverty, low income, low job qualification, added to large families, lack of expectations to overcome difficulties, the pull effect of others who have previously migrated with relative success; these are the main reasons why these young people embark on a high-risk immigration adventure.

Limitations: This study presents a sample of adolescents represented by five of the sixteen countries that make up West Africa.

Practical applications: the system for the protection of minors does not specialize those professionals who care for these minors, rather, these professionals are part of the generic network addressing the needs involved in the risks or lack of protection of children. However, the reality of minors born in Spain and separated from their families is one and that of young people who migrate alone is very different. In this research, certain divergences or biases appear that professionals show with respect to the process undertaken by adolescents; in this sense, an update is necessary for terms of the skills and training of the professionals that make up the system intended to serve them competently.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

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