

175 FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN SPANISH BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2015 AND THE END OF FEBRUARY IN D.C

By Francesco Alfieri

The research focuses on Latin American and Caribbean migrants living in the metropolitan Area of Washington D.C. Most of the men (101) are construction workers and all of the women (54) are domestic workers; of 175 respondents only 20 men work in housework. The majority of interviewees (57%) are Salvadorians.

Data concerning migrants' occupation in their countries of origin are quite interesting. The proportion of professionals, people employed in the service industry, entrepreneurs, and students is unexpectedly high and reaches a 45% of the total. This percentage can be related to the immigrants' high level of education: 34% of respondents completed university, and 22% completed some years of University or College; a quarter of them completed high school. Education is highly regarded among the interviewed, since 42% of them is enrolled in an educational institution in the United States.

The very small percentage of interviewees that were unemployed in their countries of origin (1%) reveals something about migrants' motivation to leave. The main reason for their departure seems to be the improvement of their lives and those of their families, as opposed to merely finding a job. A 39% of the respondents stressed the importance of living in a country that provides better facilities and future opportunities for their children. Two other groups fled their countries due to insecurity and crime (28%), or the political situations in their home countries (19%). Only 1% of the respondents said their motivation was to find a job.

The vast majority of immigrants (75%) declared they came to the United States without any visa by crossing the Mexico-U.S. border. Another 9% arrived with a tourist visa, and the same percentage answered with evasions, showcasing their fear of being deported. Only 7% arrived with a green card. Concerning their present status in the United States, 44% of the respondents declared not having papers, 30% are permanent residents, 14% are American citizens, 10% have Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and 2% refused to answer.

The strong familiar ties among members of the Latin American community seem to play a fundamental role in helping new immigrants settle, as relatives assist them with lodging, food and work: 74% of the respondents received aid from family members who were already in the country.

The interpersonal ties among community members in the countries of origin also contribute to create social networks that support the new immigrants in the destination countries. The efficiency of this migrant network is confirmed by the 76% of respondents who found their present job thanks to it.

Data on immigrants' savings are particularly significant. To the question of whether they saved or not, 83% of the respondents answered positively and 76% of them said they have a bank account in the United States. Another 18% has a savings account, which is the least expensive way for many families to cover unexpected expenses, and 7% has a retirement account. Moreover, these savings serve as a boost to the economy, as 8% of the respondents reported using their savings to buy durable goods, and another 14% to buy consumer items. Nearly the totality of respondents (99%)

reported sending money to their families. In fact, 23% of them have offspring living in their country of origin and 18% said they have children in both countries. To the question of whether they support a hometown association, 36% answered positively.

About the methods that immigrants use to transfer money, the majority of them (76%) prefer to send it through remittance agencies; and only a very small fraction sends cash through a courier. The survey confirms the decline of this method in the last years.

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