**Migration and return: the experience of Spanish managers and**

**entrepreneurs in innovative industries**

**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** This study aims to discover to what extent international experience interferes and influences managers and entrepreneurs in their professional and personal decisions. More specifically, we want to answer the following research questions: Which professional or personal factors influence decisions of women to develop international careers? What is the role of families in making these decisions and how do those decisions change during life-course?

**Methodology:** We interviewed Spanish managers and entrepreneurs who have had a significant international experience in terms of length and assignment. During 2011, we collected qualitative information of 22 professionals (9 men and 13 women) working in research institutions or innovative companies from different sectors. We addressed personal and professional issues of these people.

**Findings:** The analysis shows that learning and professional training abroad motivate the first initiative, but personal reasons are more decisive for returning. Both men and women find themselves in a different phase of their life-course, in which housing and family (including partners and children) become more important. In this stage, decisions are less individual; even the most interesting project depends on the family decision. The negotiation of migration decisions depends on the labour opportunities of the partners.

Men and women express the same reasons to go abroad for the first time. These results confirm that there are no differences regarding their professional motivations. However, with regards to returning, women seem more motivated than men to go back for family reasons, mainly because of children and elderly parents. The care of children is not quoted as a problem for female entrepreneurs and managers when they are abroad; the desire to integrate children into the culture of origin is more important.

**Value of the paper:** According to the results, women managers in this study are not examples of couples in subordinate positions in the mobility decision, dependent on the projects of their male partners. On the contrary, some of these women have developed professional trajectories and mobility strategies that affected the whole family.

Finally, professional careers of managers and entrepreneurs working in innovative sectors confirm the capacity of agency of highly skilled professionals developing international careers. It also suggests a mutual dependence between personal lives and professional goals. Therefore, decisions about personal and professional development depend on the global labour market.

**Key words:** International mobility, migration, gender, life-course approach, managers and entrepreneurs.

**INTRODUCTION**

The recent increase in migration flows of highly skilled professionals (HSPs) is closely tied to the knowledge economy and the globalisation of the labour market (Gaillard and Gaillard 1998, Mahroum 2000, Ackers 2005, Iredale 2001). It is important for HSPs to internationalise their careers in order to be more competitive and to establish contacts with interest groups that are more influential internationally. This has facilitated the interconnection of key agents of the knowledge society from a geographical, technological and economical point of view (Castells 2004, Urry 2007, Favell 2008).

Mobility of HSPs has a positive influence on national economies. The internationalisation of professional careers provides an economic advantage (Castles and Miller 2009, Sassen 2007), as it facilitates knowledge transfer and strengthens an economic model based on science and technology (Held et al. 1999, Favell 2003). For managers and entrepreneurs, internationalisation brings an opportunity to compete in the global market (Gregersen et al. 1998, OECD 2001).  
  
Although the number of European citizens that change their country of residence has increased since the turn of the century, the number of European nationals residing in another EU country actually accounts for less than 2% of the total European population (Martin-Brelot et al. 2010). According to data from the PIONEUR project, 64% of European citizens that adopt an international mobility strategy later return to their countries of origin (Recchi and Favell 2009).

In this paper we will analyse the migratory experiences of Spanish managers and entrepreneurs in innovative sectors. We will examine the reasons and motivations for leaving and returning to the country of origin, taking into account professional and personal factors. The analysis focuses on managers and entrepreneurs with highly internationalised careers, whose profiles theoretically represent a competitive advantage for their employers as well as for the national and global economies.

We also examine the different motivations of men and women. Although market globalisation potentially increases employment opportunities for HSPs, the segmentation of the labour market negatively impacts certain groups, among them highly qualified women (Held et al. 1999, Brown 2001, Sassen 2007). Feminist literature on the subject argues that qualified women are less likely to be offered international mobility options or feel less attracted by international destinations (Adler 1984, Selmer and Leung 2003, Ackers 2004, 2008, Bastida 2006). By contrast, other empirical studies stress that international mobility is important for women because it facilitates professional and personal development (Kofman 1999, 2000, King and Zontini 2000, Ranghuram 2008).

In the first section of this paper we present the main debates on the migratory processes of HSPs with regard to the three following aspects: a) the motivations that drive the international mobility choices of managers and entrepreneurs, b) the effects of international experience on individual careers, and c) gender differences with regard to professional strategy and internationalisation of professional paths. In the second section we describe the methodology used and the profiles of the study participants. In the three following sections we compare the mobility strategies of the male and female participants with the aim of answering the research questions of the study. In the final section we examine the main conclusions and contributions.

**INTERNATIONALISATION OF PROFESSIONAL CAREERS**

1. **Factors explaining the international mobility strategies of managers and entrepreneurs**

As distinct from other migrant groups, HSPs and entrepreneurs are motivated by factors linked to their professional aspirations (Suutari 2003, Benson and Pattie 2008, Ariss 2010). As organisational studies recognise, the professional strategies of HSPs are becoming less dependent on professional career paths mapped out within an organisation (Schein 1978, Arthur and Rousseau 1996, Stahl et al. 2002, Inkson et al. 2012).

As organisations no longer guarantee jobs for life or the professional careers of their employees, HSPs adopt personal strategies for managing their own careers. They accept challenges and positions in different companies, even if these job offers involve international mobility. Therefore, globalisation generates employment opportunities for those with a high level of professional skills and the willingness to change their country of residence.

These theoretical explanations highlight the agency role (West and Zimmerman 2007) of professionals in self-managing their own careers (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, Stahl et al. 2002), although authors like Hall and Heras (2009) and Inkson et al. (2012) stress that even this agency is constrained by institutional barriers. Self-management of professional development by HSPs is also restricted by factors such as labour law and the globalisation of economic processes. In this sense, although globalisation facilitates the professional progression of international workers, these opportunities are continuously delimited by newly constructed institutional barriers. The dynamics of international markets, legislative frameworks, and shifting institutional support for mobility place constraints on the freedom of movement of some communities, even HSPs (Brown 2001, Sassen 2007).

Local labour market considerations also influence the mobility strategies of HSPs. Staying abroad too long reduces opportunities for returning to the country of origin due to the loss of contacts and social networks. This is particularly notable in the Spanish case, where the rigid, hierarchical labour market (Benson-Rea and Rawlinson 2003, Recchi and Favell 2009) makes it very difficult to find stable employment.

On the other hand, some foreign ethnic groups find it more difficult to access skilled employment than the native population. Some authors have defined “migrant entrepreneurs” as foreign residents who take an entrepreneurial approach to career development in the country of residence as a means of integrating socially and economically (Benson-Rea and Rawlinson 2003, Ariss 2010, Urbano et al. 2011). Such an approach allows these professionals to circumvent the discriminatory structures of the internal labour market by establishing their professional activity in innovative sectors. New venture creation is therefore a way to progress professionally and to overcome the institutional and legal barriers of being a foreign resident.

In light of these arguments, we formulate the following research question: What are the main reasons for adopting an international career path in the case of Spanish professionals?

**2. Obstacles to mobility strategies and reasons for returning to the country of origin in the case of managers and entrepreneurs**

The literature also refers to the difficulties that HSPs encounter in pursuing an international mobility strategy, particularly in the case of expatriate management-level professionals. As Collings et al. (2011) discuss, expatriates face different problems that can be categorised in three broad dimensions: 1) general adjustments related to the practical aspects of adapting to life the country of destination, such as accommodation, childcare and employment options for partners; 2) environmental adjustments related to integration into the country of destination, for example, living according to the local norms, using another language, and adapting to local culture; and 3) adjustments to a different organisational culture, for example, adapting to a new role in the company.

From the before mentioned dimensions, empirical studies have devoted more attention to family issues. These studies are, focusing on the constraints that partners and motherhood can place on international mobility (Shaffer et al. 2001, Takeuchi et al. 2002, Suutari 2003, Tharenou 2008). However, the results of these studies are not conclusive. In our opinion, these theories are limited by the fact that they do not take into account the different influences that family considerations exert in the different stages of the life course or at key moments in the development of a migration strategy: the departure, the consolidation and/or the return. In each of these decisive moments of the life course, family can play a different role.

Therefore, the second research question of this study is as follows: What are the reasons for returning and how does family influence international mobility strategies at the different stages of the life course?

**3. International mobility of women managers and entrepreneurs**

Some theories associate women with a secondary or subordinate role in the labour market on the grounds that they are less interested in pursuing a competitive professional career. The literature describes skilled women as actors who are more dependent on the mobility strategies of their husbands and/or partners and emphasises the influence of women’s life courses on their professional progression. These factors give rise to interrupted careers, slower professional progress or job abandonment because of motherhood and the need to care for children and/or elderly relatives (Acker 2004, 2005; Shauman 2010).

However, highly skilled women are more likely than men to pursue international mobility strategies in developing their careers (Docquier et al. 2007, 2009, Dumont et al. 2007), which suggests that skilled women try to avoid the patriarchal relations and rigid labour market structures that characterise their societies of origin (Faggian et al. 2007, Raghuram 2008). The global market provides these women with greater opportunities to develop strategies of personal and economic autonomy. Therefore, their strategies show greater agency on professional decisions and on international mobility (King and Zontini 2000).

Other empirical studies explain the lower rate of international mobility among female managers, due to the uneven gender distribution of top managerial positions and the apparent lack of confidence of managers and director, who consider that female staff are unlikely to be interested in accepting international postings (Adler 1984, Selmer and Leung 2003, Altman and Shortland 2008). Finally, other studies underline that women face the same difficulties as men in adapting to international professional contexts and not subject to more discrimination than their male counterparts in the local markets (Foster 1999, Bastida 2006). Consequently, the lower percentage of women in international postings may be the result of organisational structures that place constraints on their careers, and not the women themselves or their social and marital status.  
  
Despite the above considerations, women require a more clearly mobility strategy than men because of the importance of personal and family factors in their life course. This is particularly true if we consider that traditional gender roles, which tie women to childcare and domestic responsibilities and men to paid employment, are often reproduced even when the women concerned are skilled professionals. In fact, female management-level professionals with international careers are slightly more likely to be single than their male counterparts (Selmer and Leung 2003). Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that professional choices also affect family decisions.

Contrary to what one would expect, expatriate women seem to be more concerned by communication problems with their intermediate bosses than by the issue of childcare (Haines and Saba 1999, Riusala and Suutari 2000). This suggests that women managers have the resources to take care of their families even when they are working abroad.

In the case of female entrepreneurs, there is no solid theoretical corpus about the internationalisation of their professional profiles. There are some studies on migrant entrepreneurs, but they do not explicitly consider the qualifications of the study sample or examine whether they belong to an innovative sector. These studies do, however, allow us to deduce that companies founded by foreign women are the product of a desire to overcome the rigidity of the local labour market (Bear and Villares 2006, Solé et al. 2009, Ariss 2010, Sáiz 2010). Therefore, it seems that women pursue entrepreneurship strategies as a means of gaining access to a labour market that discriminates against or excludes them.

Empirical studies performed in the United States indicate that women pursue entrepreneurship as a means of adapting their professional activity to their particular interests (Allen and Truman 1993, Davidson and Burke 1994). In a multinational environment, this is more difficult for two reasons: first, companies are generally organised from a male perspective that hinders professional development among women, as it is not compatible with their rhythm of work or their specific requirements; second, women traditionally find it much harder to reach managerial positions. Entrepreneurship is therefore a way to surpass the glass ceiling and gives women greater freedom and flexibility to plan their professional activities (Sáiz 2010).

**METHODS**

We chose a qualitative methodology for this study. Qualitative methodologies are the most suitable approach when examining complex factors behind guidelines and emerging patterns of behaviour about which little information is available. They are also more effective when we want to know what people think about the issues in question (Keats 2000).

During 2011, we collected qualitative information about the career paths of 22 professionals. The selection criteria were determined according to the research aims. Therefore, the chosen participants are skilled professionals with management-level positions (including entrepreneurs and businesspeople) in innovative sectors. The Frascati Manual includes in this category all those companies or entities that allocate a significant part of their budgets to the development of new products or services using cutting-edge technology. The 22 informants work in areas involving research or innovation activities.

To be included in the study, participants were required to have a significant amount of international professional experience: at least one extended period of work involving continuous residency in another country, with a minimum duration of one year. Therefore, we excluded those professionals with a high degree of international mobility but who spend only short periods of time abroad, for business trips or other activities such as research or conferences. Periods spent abroad had to be related to the participants’ academic or professional career (international placements for learning languages or for specific tasks not related to their areas of expertise or professional activities were excluded). Finally, the sample had to provide a balanced representation of women and men.

It is difficult to deal directly with managers and entrepreneurs unless there is a personal contact through whom a relationship of trust can be established between the researcher and the key informant. Therefore, we used existing contacts to gain access to a wider group of professionals, using a snowball strategy. The narrow selection criteria meant that two prospective participants had to be excluded following interview. Although they had spent long periods of time abroad, they did not consider the experience to have been significant in their careers or to have had a bearing on their innovation activities or their understanding of business strategy in a globalised economy.

The method chosen to obtain information about their life biographies was the semi-structured interview. We conducted a series of preliminary interviews to test the script of the interview and the extent to which it successfully covered the research aims. We used the results to identify the necessary adjustments, which were implemented in the following interviews. The adjustments consisted mainly in reducing the number of questions and focusing the conversation specifically on international experience and the informant’s opinion of this experience. In addition, following Woodhouse (1998), questions were adapted during the interview so that other important issues brought up by the informants could be explored more fully. The interview was designed to provide an overview of the professional and personal lives of the informants.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The information was analysed once the interview phase had been completed. Each interview was organised into key issues, which were then used to build a double-entry table containing the information from each informant relating to each of the subjects discussed. Using this overview of the informants’ life courses, we first analysed each individual dimension and then considered the circumstances that surrounded each informant. Finally, we collated the results and established the conclusions that are presented in this paper.

The 22 profiles correspond to nine men and 13 women who are either managers or entrepreneurs linked to research and innovation in any area of activity and who have acquired significant international experience during their professional careers (See Annex 1). The sample comprises ten engineers, seven economists or business graduates, two physicists, one computer science graduate, one graduate in history and technology (foreign degree), and one graduate in genetics (foreign degree). All of the participants have master’s degrees in their professional field, and four of them hold a PhD.

Eight of the participants moved to the United States to take an MBA or to enrol in a PhD in their field of specialisation. Three participants went to the United Kingdom, two to Germany and one to Ireland; all of them changed country to take undergraduate, graduate or PhD studies. Once they had completed their studies, they began their professional careers in the destination country or returned to Spain. The other informants acquired their international experience in the context of a professional activity or a business venture.

Regarding the country of residence at the time of the interview, 14 of the informants (nine women and five men) had returned to Spain, while seven (four men and three women) continued to live abroad. Ten of the fourteen informants who had returned to Spain moved back to their home town or city. Of the group who still live abroad, three men live in the United States, one man lives in Angola and one woman lives in Ireland. The two remaining cases are a Uruguayan woman and an American woman, both of whom have been living in Spain for more than five years.

All of the participants have a stable partner, except two of the men, who are single. All participants are aged between 30 and 50, although more than half are between 30 and 40 years old.

With regard to their professional status, eleven of the participants are entrepreneurs and the rest are company managers. Six of the men have created their own companies or alternate this activity with a management position in a multinational. Five of the women (one is not Spanish) have created a company, the rest are managers. Like their male counterparts, some of the women have alternated entrepreneurial activities with managerial roles during their careers.

**MOBILITY STRATEGIES ALONG THE LIFE COURSE**

The age and stage at which the participants began their experience abroad is fundamental to understanding their motivations and aims. Most of them first went abroad to complete their studies. Their main purpose was to obtain a foreign degree and, alongside this, to improve their language skills. However, their overall motivation went beyond academic progress: they were also fully aware of the implications that this decision would have for their future professional strategies.  
  
*“I was very clear that it was good for my professional career to spend a period outside Spain, and I still believe this.”* Irene, Spanish manager.

On the other hand, some of the professionals interviewed for this study adopted international mobility strategies later on their careers, either when their companies assigned them to international projects or in response to personal issues, such as the end of a relationship.  
  
Finally, for a minority of the participants, the adoption of an international mobility strategy was tied to family considerations, in some cases because their parents were exiled and in others because they were delegates of international organisations. For these people, studying or working abroad is a more common experience because they have lived in another country from a very young age.

Despite the different circumstances and motivations described above, all of the participants established an independent professional strategy, in which professional and personal issues were gradually combined and balanced. Studying abroad gave them the opportunity to build networks or find stimulating employment or develop innovative business ideas. This places them in a position of competitive advantage in the global market. The interpersonal relations with professionals of distinct nationalities improved their capacity to establish highly internationalised businesses and to find partners of different nationalities. The confidence acquired through an international career and the experience of having lived comfortably in another country contributed to the decision to choose a foreign partner.

The length of the stay abroad was planned in advance, based on the achievement of specific aims. In some cases the stay was curtailed due to the expiry of a visa or work permit. Those participants that chose to remain permanently in the country of destination offer both objective and subjective explanations., including the need to escape a precarious economic situation in the country of origin, emotional and affective reasons, and motivations related to the adoption of a different lifestyle.

A minority of the informants did not follow their initial plans and decided to stay in the destination country or move to another. They took this decision on the grounds that the labour market conditions in the country of origin were precarious and their niche role was not sufficiently well developed.

*“I didn’t know if I was going to stay in this country [United States] or not. The thing is, you start to work in a company and then, in Spain, the same kind of opportunity isn’t available.”* Fernando, Spanish businessman in the United States.

These professionals eventually decided whether they wanted to stay permanently in their new country, move to another country, or return to Spain. The people that decided to remain definitively in the country of destination built and consolidated their personal lives gradually. The decision is very complex and is taken over time. This is reflected in the following statement, made by a Spanish businessman resident in the United States.

*“Personal issues are generally a difficult thing for young people who come here [to the United States]. When you have to take a decision... Because if you marry here, you stay here, and many people, including me, I suppose, delay this decision until they know exactly what they want.”* Fernando, Spanish businessman in the United States.

Although the desire to learn and acquire professional experience abroad often provides the motivation to move abroad, personal reasons are more decisive than professional considerations in determining whether a person returns to the country of origin. This is explained by the fact that the professionals in this position have reached another stage in their lives, in which personal projects – partners and families – are more decisive. As we will see later, decisions taken at this stage also are less individually motivated because they depend on the commitment and the professional situation of the partner.

**THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY STRATEGIES**

The male and female participants in this study pursued an autonomous mobility strategy based mainly on professional motivations. They embarked on the strategy alone because they were young and single, but some remained mobile even though they now have a partner and children; some have even moved to recently assigned international destinations with their whole family. By contrast, when asked to explain the motives that led them to return to Spain, almost all of the women and more than half of the men cited personal reasons as the more important factor. This suggests that personal and family motivations affect female managers and entrepreneurs more than their male counterparts.

*When I finished [my Ph D.], I went back to Spain for personal reasons. My father had cancer and, well, I decided to go back, I put my professional career on hold and went back to [name omitted], my hometown.* Irene, Spanish manager.

The main factors that led female managers to return to Spain were their children’s education and the health of elderly relatives. In this sense, is interesting to note that while workers are necessarily accompanied by their children, their parents remain in the country of origin and are a key factor in the decision to return. In the following statement, a female manager emphasises this reason, underlining the role of her husband.

*We went back especially because my husband had family [in Spain]. My parents were no longer alive. I usually saw my sisters every summer, and they came with their children, so this wasn’t so much of a factor. But my husband’s parents were getting old. And for my husband, it was very important that our children, who were very accustomed to American culture and spoke English as their mother tongue, got used to Spanish culture [as well] and learned Spanish, to enjoy time with their grandparents. [It was also important for him] that we could help to ensure that his parents, in the last years of their lives, were surrounded by a large part of the family.* Rocío, Spanish manager.

From a gender perspective, is important to note that men and women share the same vision. As stated above, the time abroad covers a period of their professional and personal lives, but in the case of couples with children this period precedes an eventual return to Spain. These professionals could be in a top managerial position or running a successful start-up, but when they realise that this period is coming to an end, they begin to prepare for the return.

*“On one hand, I had come to the end of a professional cycle, and on the other, my wife wanted to return to Spain… So, well, I thought that it would be good to have a fresh start, and that’s always a good thing, isn’t it? Now and again you need a change.”* David, manager living in Spain, formerly an entrepreneur in the United States.

Childcare is not a sufficient reason to return. Female entrepreneurs and managers living abroad explained that their work schedules and the kindergartens were better than in Spain and that they could establish a better balance between their professional and family lives. The most common family-related motivation for returning to Spain was the desire for children to grow up within the Spanish culture and to be close to their relatives. This idea already has been expressed in the statement by Rocío, above, and is referred to below by another participant, Catalina:

“*My three-year-old son was about to start school. So it was necessary to take a decision. There were other circumstances too. [My husband] had been living in Brussels longer than me … and there were certain advantages if he left before he had been there for 10 years.*

*[…] so, as this coincided with the point at which we wanted to return to Spain, I had an interview here in [name of the company omitted], with the president of the Group, and they offered me a job here in Spain, and I came back.”* Catalina, Spanish manager.

The literature from the English-speaking world indicates that the increased professional orientation of women has established a new scenario for skilled professional couples. Decisions now reached by mutual agreement and take into account the professional interests of each partner. The potential interest of the project offered to one partner, and the opportunities available to the other in the event of a move, are fundamental to understand the decisions they take.

**PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY OF WOMEN MANAGERS AND ENTREPRENEURS**

Mobility strategies help female managers and entrepreneurs to develop capacities and skills related to the establishment of businesses in a globalised economy. The female participants in this study explain that living abroad enables them to deal more easily with diverse cultures, speak several languages, and develop the necessary social networks to enhance their professional activity and/or area of businesses. As one manager comments, setting up a global company means moving outside the local market and acquiring other skills.

*“It is not the same to have a haberdashery here in Barcelona and sell to people from the neighbourhood, and to be used to dealing with people who already know what they want, as it is to open a market where you have to deal with an elderly Dutch man, an Italian businessman’s son… You have to learn to move more and to know everything.”* Carolina, Spanish manager.

All of the women interviewed stated that international mobility was important to professional progress but that the experience had also changed their way of thinking, their lifestyle and their relationships. In other words, the impact of mobility goes beyond knowledge and professional experience and changes their view of the world. They have acquired basic skills that allow them to manage in highly competitive, male-dominated economic and innovation environments. Perhaps, therefore, although they recognise that being a woman in a predominantly male environment is difficult, they do not consider that they have been discriminated against as a result. A Spanish manager explained the following situation:

*“In Japan, men get drunk when they’re doing business[after they finish the business meeting]. I don’t get drunk. A man in my position would have had to get drunk. But I said no and it was ok.”* Adela, Spanish manager.

The high level of competition and the fact that all professionals in an international environment adopt a code of courtesy and neutrality mean that, to some extent, the sexism that may be more apparent in local values can be overcome. The same manager explains how she is treated in business meetings in her male-dominated profession.

*“I don’t know if you know that tennis players, when they play against a left-handed opponent, get confused because they’re not used to it. I think that in the world of businesses, in general, when you are dealing with a woman the same thing happens to an extent... There are people who are not used to it… But I don’t think this means … [she thinks]… that this has either a positive or negative impact.”* Adela, Spanish manager.

**CONCLUSIONS**The career paths of managers and employers in the innovative sectors covered by this study confirm the agency role of skilled professionals as they make decisions with autonomy and responsability. These strategies are closely related to international mobility, and the strengthening of their professional profiles and activities in globalised world. This group of people, can be classified as self-initiated expatriates, a subgroup of migrants following Andresen et al (2012) categorization because they are not sponsored by an organization. But in opposition to Baruch et al (2010), they gain objective career benefits from their expatriation process.

While HSPs have some advantages, their opportunities are also limited by the market in the form of restrictive legal frameworks and rigid local markets, and additional constraints can be brought by their own families at certain points in their lives.

Partners and families are not an obstacle when deciding whether to undertake an international assignment because HSPs have a very strong professional motivation and, because of their age, few personal commitments. Personal factors have an influence later, when they decide to have a family and children. At this point, the personal and the professional interrelationships and decisions become more complex: they are taken jointly, and require consideration of the partner’s employment opportunities. This confirms the co-dependency of personal and professional aspirations in the construction of contemporary identities, as the literature has highlighted. Therefore, personal decisions depend on career paths and employment opportunities in the globalised labour market.

Men and women refer to the same reasons when explaining their motivations for going abroad. This confirms the hypothesis that there are no differences between men and women in terms of motivations but that institutional barriers prevent more women from accessing competitive international positions. The female informants in this study are not examples of secondary mobility strategies; in fact, some of them have pursued professional paths and mobility strategies that have affected all of their family members.

However, women seem to be more strongly motivated than men to return from abroad due to family reasons, fundamentally related to their children and the care requirements of their parents. Nevertheless, childcare itself is not stated to be a problem by female entrepreneurs or managers; instead, they are concerned about integrating their children into the culture of their family in the country of origin.

For women, international mobility is an extraordinary opportunity for personal development and independent professional progress. This is essential in establishing a work-life balance strategy. The female managers consulted for this study affirm that their business idea arose from their creative skills and was motivated by the fact that creating their own business would allow them to balance their professional and personal interests. They all stated – in agreement with the literature – that they created their own business as a means of surpassing the glass ceiling that some companies and organisations impose.

However, although they are aware of the difficulties of performing a traditionally male professional activity, they have not been affected by of sexual discrimination. The codes of courtesy and neutrality of the world of international business seem to minimise these cultural biases that may otherwise prevail at other levels of patriarchal societies.

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**ANNEX I**

**Table 1. Profile of people interviewed**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Sex** | **Academic background** | **Age** | **Personal situation** | **Country of birth** | **Country and period of being migrant** | **Return** | **Reasons return/ no return** | **Current professional situation** | **Innovative**  **industry** |
| 1 | IRENE | F | Genetics | 40-45 | Married with child | Spain | UK, 5-10 years | Yes | Personal | Manager | Health |
| 2 | ADELA | F | Physical Sciences | 40-45 | Married | Spain | USA, 1-3 y. | Yes | Professional | Manager | Computer & internet security |
| 3 | NOEMI | F | Telecommunications | 40-45 | Married with children | Spain | USA, 3- 5 y. | Yes | Professional | Manager | Communications |
| 4 | DANIEL | M | Telecommunications | 45-50 | Married with children | Spain | USA, 5-10 y. | Yes | Both | Manager | Communications |
| 5 | PABLO | M | Design | 40-45 | Single | Spain | USA, 1-3 y. | Yes | Both | Entrepreneur | Food |
| 6 | IGNACIO | M | Telecommunications | 40-45 | Single | Spain | Ireland (5 years), Germany and Angola, More than 10 y. | No | Professional | Entrepreneur | Computer & internet security |
| 7 | EDUARDO | M | Computer Science | 40-45 | Married with child | Spain | Israel, 1-3 y. | Yes | Professional | Manager | Service |
| 8 | CARLA | F | History and technology | 40-45 | Married with children | USA | Spain, 5-10 y. | No | Personal | Manager | Service |
| 9 | BLAS | F | Economics | 40-45 | Single | Spain | USA, 10 y. in USA with some interruptions | No | Professional | Manager | Communications |
| 10 | MARÍA | F | Business Administration | 40-45 | Married | Spain | Germany, Singapur, UK and France. 5- 10 y. | Yes | Personal | Manager | Textile |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 11 | CECILIA | F | Economics | 40-45 | Married with child | Uruguay | Spain | No | Professional | Entrepreneur | Service |
| 12 | JORGE | M | Telecommunications | 40-45 | Married | Spain | Germany, Japan and USA. More than 10 years | No | Professional | Manager | Communications |
| 13 | FERNANDO | M | Telecommunications | 50-55 | Married with children | Spain | US, .Since 1968 | No | Professional | Entrepreneur | Computer & internet security |
| 14 | LORENA | F | Industrial Engineering | 40-45 | With partner | Spain | Ireland, Since 2008 | No | Both | Manager | Electronics |
| 15 | ANA | F | Phisical Sciences | 50-55 | Married with children | Venezuela | Childhood and youth in different countries, Spain | No | Personal | Entrepreneur | Service |
| 16 | ROCIO | F | Telecommunications | 50-55 | Married with children | Spain | Germany (1 y.), USA (6 y.) | Yes | Personal | Manager | Communications |
| 17 | CAROLINA | F | Ing. Industrial | 45-50 | Married with children | Spain | USA. 1-3 y. | Yes | Professional | Entrepreneur | Communications |
| 18 | CATALINA | F | Economics | 40-45 | Married with children | Spain | France (less than 1 y.) and Belgium (5-10 y.) | Yes | Personal | Manager | Health |
| 19 | ASTRID | F | Economics | 40-45 | Married with children | Spain | UK, The Netherland and Belgium, 3-5 y. | Yes | Professional | Entrepreneur | Health |
| 20 | LUIS | M | Electronic engineering | 40-45 | Single | Spain | UK, 1-3 y. | Yes | Personal | Entrepreneur | Communications |
| 21 | JAVIER | M | Economics | 40-45 | With partner | Spain | USA, 3 y. | No | Professional | Entrepreneur | Textile |
| 22 | FILOMENA | F | Industrial engineering | 40-45 | With partner | France | Spain, mnore than 10 y. | No | Both | Manager | Service |

*Source: Own data*