

INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION

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Bolivia: Diaspora and emigration policies

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Bolivia: Diaspora and emigration policies

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INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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Abstract

Is immigration on the Bolivian political agenda? If we only analyze the official census figures and focus on laws, decrees and public policy initiatives, we should probably answer ‘no’. However, as we shall see, we have to consider another reality after integrating various statistical estimates that increase official numbers and after acknowledging the work of some governmental departments as well as non-governmental social research and advocacy organizations and Bolivian migrants associations abroad. To understand the difference in the response to migration questions in Bolivia, we now present the policy and institutional foundations on which the immigration debate is held in Bolivia. Some public policy, civil right defense and research initiatives have been proposed and established, but these initiatives would be best judged after considering how much political and economic support they will receive in future.

Key words: Bolivia, Migration, EU, Institutional Framework

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1. Introduction

Is immigration on the Bolivian political agenda? If we limit our analysis to the official census figures and focus on laws, decrees and public policy initiatives, we should probably answer ‘no’. However, as we shall see, we cannot thus limit any analysis. Official numbers increase when integrated with other estimates and after the work of some governmental departments as well as non-governmental social research and advocacy organizations and Bolivian migrants associations in many countries abroad is acknowledged. To understand the difference in the response to migration questions in Bolivia, we now present the policy and institutional foundations on which the immigration debate is held in Bolivia.

One problem in studying Bolivia’s migratory phenomenon is the difficulty of obtaining quantitative data (Alcócer 2013). The number of Bolivian migrants is unknown due to institutional instability in the register of transnational mobility, “[a situation] that is used from various areas (political, economic, social, etc.) either to magnify, either to dramatize or to make invisible realities that we face today without sufficient backup information” (Alcócer 2013: 18).

Throughout the last century Bolivia focused migration on the three most important destination countries: Argentina, the United States and Brazil. During this century, significant and rapid changes in international migration meant changing flows and patterns. The new destinations were focused at first on Europe (mainly Spain), a labor market in crisis today. Whereas, trajectories of return and/or re-routing were centred on border locations like Argentina, Brazil and especially Chile.

The official figures were as follow for Bolivians abroad: Argentina, with 1,200,000 compatriots; Spain, with 210,000; the U.S. and Brazil, with more than 200,000. In Brazil as well as in Chile, Bolivian migrants increased constantly (Bolivia 2010). In any case, several government and non-governmental sources (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself and the Human Mobility Pastoral–HMP, among others), currently indicate that about 20 percent of the Bolivian population lives outside the country’s borders. This estimate shows Bolivia’s diaspora to be as one of the biggest, in the continent, proportionally speaking.

According to the National Population and Housing Census conducted in 2012, Bolivia had a population of 10,059,856 (Bolivia 2014). This census, the first one that introduced questions on emigration, indicated that 487,997 Bolivians had migrated abroad in the last ten years, 38.2 percent to Argentina, 23.9 percent to Spain, 13.2 percent to Brazil, 6 percent to Chile and 4.2 percent to the United States. Here it is important to emphasize that the central question of the census on the subject refers only a household member leaving the country in the last ten years.

In the case of Bolivian migration to Spain, it reached its most significant moment in the period 2002-2007, with 242,496 Bolivians registered in Spain in 2008 (Solé, Parella, and Petroff *forthcoming*). That figure dropped to 213,169 by 2010 and to 186,018 by 2012 according to the same source, bringing up the issue of return. However, recent approaches have gotten back to the “cyclical tradition according to which Bolivian families have alternated migration to different destinations with home-returning decisions over time” (de la Torre *forthcoming*). Therefore, an apparently massive return from Spain is suggested as a possible platform to new Bolivian migratory cycles to other European destinations (for instance the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy – especially Bergamo – and France, among others) as well as South-South migratory process, mainly to Argentina, Brazil and now Chile (de la Torre *forthcoming*).

The Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia expresses in its Article 298, items 9 and 11, that legislation, regulation, and implementation of policies related to nationality, citizenship, immigration, asylum and refuge are an exclusive competence of the state’s central level: there is no explicit reference to emigration. In Article 21 there are references to freedom of residence, stay and movement in all of Bolivia. This includes the possibility of entering and exiting the country. The new

constitution states, for the first time in the history of Bolivia, the right of Bolivians living abroad to participate in national elections (for the President and Vice President).

In regard to nationality and citizenship, Article 141 states: “Bolivian nationality is acquired by birth or by naturalization. Bolivians by birth are people born on Bolivian territory, except for the daughters and sons of foreign staff of diplomatic missions; and people born abroad, whose mother or father is Bolivian.” In turn, Article 143 states that “Bolivian nationality (is not) lost because of acquiring Foreign citizenship”. These two items touch key aspects of Bolivian migration: second generation (sons/daughters of Bolivians living abroad) and dual citizenship.

Currently, the main axis of Bolivian state policy in the field of migration focuses on the following priorities: documentation for Bolivians abroad to reduce migratory irregularity; voting from abroad; the struggle to improve care and protection for the migrant population, ensuring compliance with their human rights; and, finally, management measures to regulate the entry and presence of foreign citizens in Bolivia, negotiating around the principles of Human Rights and National Security (de la Torre 2011). We have to mention that migrant documentation is necessary after decades of almost no governmental presence in this field.

In 2007, President Evo Morales addressed explicitly his “brothers and sisters” living abroad in this way: “Even though you are away, we feel you close, because Bolivia is all of us: those who live here and those who, like you, went abroad in search of better living conditions. [...] Do not question our effort. In Bolivia we will continue working and fighting for your rights to be recognized worldwide” (President Evo Morales, Message on the 182th Anniversary of the Independence of Bolivia).

Among American leaders, Evo Morales was the president who spoke out most firmly against the “Return Directive”, passed by the European Parliament in June 2008. Also, at various times in recent years, President Morales has mentioned Bolivian migrants’ dignified return: but the public policies implemented on the basis of that speech, as we shall see, do not seem to meet the demands of the Bolivian migrant family (de la Torre 2011).

We might argue that immigration is now more visible in the Bolivian politics. But, if it is not yet one of its most important topics this might be for lack of precise knowledge of all of its quantitative and qualitative implications; rather than because of the small dimensions of Bolivian human mobility dynamics. Now we will set out (at least initially) the policy and institutional basis for Bolivia’s immigration debate.

2. State policies for emigration or diaspora (national level)

2.1 Emigration Policies: priorities and institutions

Bolivian emigration policy focuses, as noted, on the documentation of Bolivians abroad. Since 2006 Bolivia has concentrated its main migration policy on this matter. Migrant voting in Bolivian elections is another state matter. The creation of the “Gestoría Consular” unit allowed Bolivians living outside of the country documentation services to “integrate” into national registers of crucial importance. In addition, the unit allows the government to strategically withhold part of the economic funds collected with these services for future projects for the sector. In December 2010, the State issued Supreme Decree No. 741, which guaranteed the continuity of the documentation policy assigned to its diplomatic missions and consular offices in Spain, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States with up to Bs. 12,000,000 annually (considerably less than 2 US\$ millions) until 2013.

As for the migrant vote, the new Bolivian State claims to want to include in “political life” those that until very recently have seen this right denied; and, on the other hand, there is an electoral strategy to add further support to the current government. Looking ahead, the migrant vote project’s continuity seems to closely follow the processes of documentation (de la Torre 2011).

The signing of agreements to ensure freedom of movement (or facilities for legal residence), at least in neighboring countries, is presented as a decision that also shapes Bolivian migratory policy, as can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1. Bilateral agreements

Country	Scope of the international instrument	Comments
Argentina	Migratory Agreement between Argentina and Bolivia (April 21, 2004)	Agreement on transitory or temporary and permanent residence
Brazil	Agreement on migratory regulation	Permanent residence
Peru	Agreement between Peru and Bolivia on student visas	Free of charge student visas

Multilateral agreements that Bolivia has signed also enforce freedom of movement (or facilities for legal residence) inside the region. The most important among these agreements are The Andean Nations Community Decision 545 and the Mercosur Agreement. The first one aims at “setting standards that will progressively and gradually free the movement and residence of Andean nationals to be employed as dependents in another country inside the [region]”. The second one is a visa waiver agreement between member States. Today, this agreement is the most important legal framework for Bolivian labor migrants in Argentina and Brazil, where they are a majority.

Regarding the main national emigration policies we have to mention the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the responsible institution in the subject of documenting Bolivians abroad, thanks to the unity of “Gestoría Consular”, which refers personal documents through Bolivian diplomatic and consular offices. After years of strategic work, this Unit will soon stop working and will transfer its responsibilities to other units inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For its part, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is the institution responsible for allowing migrants to vote from outside the country.

As for official documents that might offer a wider vision on Bolivia’s institutional and political framework for migration and diaspora, as well as for the sub-regional agreements on that matter, we suggest the following short list: the Bolivian Migration Act, the Bolivian General Act against Human Traffic, MERCOSUR Agreement, CAN Decision 545, the Declaration of Migratory Principles and General Guidelines of the South American Migration Conference and the Multilateral Iberoamerican Social Security Agreement.

2.2 State diaspora policy: first initiatives and actors

Regarding what might be called a *diaspora* policy (not only an *emigration* policy based on documentation and voting from abroad), in Bolivia few initiatives have exceeded the threshold of good intention to get translated into programs or state initiatives. Among these we might note, first, the strengthening of the consular institution in order to extend care and protection capabilities. From 2006, and the beginning of the Morales government and an increase in Bolivian migration dynamics (with Spain as a new destination, along with other traditional ones), the State greatly expanded its number of paid (not honorary) consulates. It also institutionalized the practice of itinerant consulates. The aforementioned Supreme Decree No. 741 (2010) also strengthened Bolivian strategic consulates (new facilities, equipment, personnel, etc.) to deepen fundamental duties of care and protection in major Bolivian migration destinations.

These efforts sought to improve Bolivian state service to its citizens in vulnerable conditions abroad: people search, registration and assistance to detainees, repatriation of mortal remains, consular awareness of gender violence issues, legal advice and mediation to possible access to legal services in the host country, etc. These basic initiatives have recently been supported by specific articles of the Migration Act, which was passed in May 2013.

Thanks to newly strengthened consular offices, progress has been made (only at the level of proposal though) in what we might call the recognition of “transnational life”. We refer here to the wide range of needs and even opportunities displayed by various heterogeneous Bolivian communities living abroad: to support migrant access to health, education, employment counseling and other services in the host country; future coordination on issues of transnational social assistance, such as coordination with other state agencies that work with the migrant family members living in Bolivia; etc.¹ For decrees and programs, some initiatives (backed by articles in the Migration Act, passed in May 2013) do not focus on building links with the diaspora but in encouraging return. Return is considered as a time when the migrant – ceasing to be a migrant – would be more advantageous for the State at home.

We refer mainly to the Supreme Decree 371, dated 2 December 2009. This states that families who wish to return after two or more years abroad will not have to pay customs duties on household goods and production equipment (up to US\$ 50,000). On the other hand, we can also mention the “Productive Return” Pilot Program, based on the distribution of public land for agricultural use. This was initially offered to Bolivian families resident in Argentina and Chile that expressed their desire to return signing up at Bolivian consulates in those countries. To date, none of the relevant families has moved to its new land, as there are a lack of living conditions and basic services.

Another decision that might be said to, *inter alia*, supports return is Bolivian adhesion to the Multilateral Iberoamerican Social Security Agreement. The Agreement, which means regulatory provisions in the new Bolivian Pension Act, will allow Bolivians who have made social security contributions in Spain and other Iberoamerican countries to continue to contribute on the same basis until the time they receive benefits arrives: whether they are in Bolivia, in Spain or in any of the countries that have ratified the treaty.

There are other public initiatives for the Bolivian diaspora including distance senior education programs promoted by the Plurinational Alternative Education Center (Ministry of Education). These programs target the migrant adult population offering them high school or senior technical titles. The 2012 Programs (first version) were: early childhood education, garment making, community gerontology and civil construction, as well as a regular High School program. We should also point out the actions of the state television channel (Channel 7, Bolivia TV). State television carried out a proposal from activists linked with the Bolivian community in Argentina and broadcast, for the first time, live to the whole country the 2012 Urkupiña Folk Parade, held in Buenos Aires. The initiative allowed the strengthening of its ties with Bolivia.

What institutions are responsible for the creation and implementation of diaspora directed initiatives? Primarily, we must mention the General Direction of Consular Affairs (DGCA), at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? The work of protection and care, as well as documentation support stands out as the main tasks for this ministry.

As for competences specifically related to customs charges for returnees, the Bolivian National Customs must be considered as another public actor. For the “Productive Return” Pilot Program, based on the distribution of public land for agricultural use, we have to mention the Ministry of Rural Development and Land. There is also the Plurinational Alternative Education Center (Ministry of Education) and the state television channel (Channel 7, Bolivia TV). Finally, it might be noted that the new Immigration Act, passed in May 2013, proposes the creation of a National Migration Board with representatives from several ministries. Even when this National Board starts operating, legislation provides that all diaspora-related initiatives will correspond to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, except those related to return, in which the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Government will also participate.

¹ Hinojosa (2009) highlights the fact that Bolivian migration policy does not include remittances of migrants as part of an economic development strategy: in contrast with policies elsewhere in Latin America.

2.3 Bilateral or multilateral agreement on the readmission (or forced return) of emigrants

There are agreements and initiatives for the readmission of forced return for both, Bolivian citizens deported for having been apprehended in irregular migration status, i.e. without having committed a crime, and for the reinstatement of Bolivian prisoners sentenced for the commission of crimes in several countries.

Regarding the first group, the deportations of Bolivians from the U.S. have recently grown: 2,614 between 2000 and 2011, according to official data, though the situation may have worsened in the last years as reports of the Bolivian General Consulate in Washington DC have expressed.

A similar situation is apparently to be found in Spain and other European countries where the European Return Directive has already entered into force. Only in the case of Spain, Bolivian Ambassador, Carmen Almendras, states that 1,400 deportations had been made in 2008, though the figure fell to 265 in the first eight months of 2013. Bolivian Consulates report disparate situations in which, following or ignoring Article 38 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, an arrest is reported to the Consulate prior to deportation (Bolivia 2012).

Consulates only follow these processes to ensure compliance with deportees' human rights. They cannot do much more. In another instance, that of bi-lateral and multilateral agreements, the Bolivian State seems to do little to prevent deportations, because – apparently disregarding the principle of reciprocity and despite having signed commitments to avoid deportations based on immigration issues – it has continued to allow such practices with foreign citizens living in Bolivia. The picture could change after the humanization which aims to establish the aforementioned Immigration Law, although it still contemplates the legality of “mandatory exits”.

As for the readmission of Bolivians who are serving prison sentences abroad, we have to mention the recent experience of 451 Bolivian prisoners sentenced in Chile who benefited from an amnesty initiative, conditional upon them not returning to Chile. The Chilean Commutative Pardon Law No. 20,588 allowed the transfer of prisoners to the Chilean-Bolivian border, where many would be released and others (who had a criminal record in Bolivia), handed over to Bolivian police.

The institutions involved in advising or protecting the interests of forced returnees are Bolivian consular and diplomatic offices, as well as the Office of Migration [Dirección General de Migración] (Ministry of Government). This office receives the deportees at airports and border checkpoints. As for the readmission of Bolivians serving sentences in prisons abroad, the Ministries of Justice of both countries, in addition to the Ministry of Government of Bolivia are responsible: we note again the recent instance of amnesty in Chile.

3. Relevant policies for emigration or diaspora (local or regional level)

As for local governments, one of the few projects implemented was the “Liaison Center” [Centro de Enlace] Cochabamba (Bolivia)-Bergamo (Italy), following an agreement signed in 2008 between the mayors of both cities. The agreement also included “San Simón” Major University and New Horizon Foundation (Cochabamba). By 2008 several thousand Bolivian migrants lived in the city of Bergamo, mainly from Cochabamba and mainly women (70%) (Hinojosa 2008). The “Liaison Centre” sought to encourage “the flow of information and (to determine claims to establish) services for the resolution of problems of different types (legal, technical, psychological, etc.) experienced by migrants and their families in both contexts” (project agreement document). The pilot concluded and was not institutionalized.

Another experience was the Local Migration and Development Project in Latin America (EMIDEL, by its initials in Spanish), which took place in the city of La Paz with funding from the European Union, through the URB-AL III Project. The project promoted models of good practice in the region that attempted to link the contribution of migration to local development in origin

communities through remittances and entrepreneurial projects (co-development). The project was aimed at persons receiving remittances, as well as migrants that returned to their place of origin, organized or not organized into collective representation platforms.

We should mention that Bolivian municipal governments operate units that defend children's and adolescents' rights and units specialized in psychological, social and legal protection for female victims of domestic violence or gender discrimination. These instances are also often related to migrant families and these participate in various initiatives of activism and advocacy.

Finally, we mention that in some Bolivian municipalities the link between local governments and migration is not limited to formal institutions. Rather, it extends to a range of practices involving migrant families living abroad inside the economic, social and even political reality of their hometowns. Migrant hometown associations have co-funded a series of works together with the local government of Arbieta (Valle Alto of Cochabamba), one of the so-called "migrant municipalities". For decades there have been traditional donations for the construction of squares, churches, sports fields and other works, promoted by INCOPEA, a Bolivian soccer leagues which games take place in the Washington DC metropolitan area. More recently, migrant solidarity aimed to fund the stone paving of the streets of Arbieta and the building of a stadium. President Evo Morales added more funding to this last work and recognized Diogenes Escobar, Arbieta's mayor, as "the first Bolivian Transnational Mayor".

For the few local initiatives undertaken for the Bolivian *diaspora*, we have mentioned the municipal governments of Cochabamba (Bolivia) and Bergamo (Italy), which "Liaison Centre" also worked with the support of "San Simón" Major University and New Horizon Foundation (Cochabamba). As to the project EMIDEL, the Municipal Government of La Paz was responsible, with funding from the European Union, through the URB-AL III Project.

Less directly, we mentioned the frequent involvement in migrant matters of the social units of Bolivian municipalities. Finally, we mentioned the case of migrants of Cochabamba's High Valley (with Arbieta as a reference), municipalities in which migrants (or residents) are visible through the co-financing of a number of works and through other forms of social, economic and politic participation.

4. Engagement of non-state actors

In order to detail the particular participation of the most important non-state actors engaged with Bolivian international migration, we mention them here separately.

Program for Strategic Investigation in Bolivia (abbreviated to PIEB in Spanish)

Much significant research about internal and international Bolivian migration were sponsored by this institution. PIEB has the reputation for being most involved in this issue in recent decades.

"San Simón" Major University (Cochabamba)

Both research centers, the Center for Advanced Studies (CESU-UMSS) and Planning and Management Center (CEPLAG-UMSS) developed research programs dedicated to transnational migration in Cochabamba (2007-2012).

The Postgraduate Diploma in Development Studies at San Andrés Major University (CIDES-UMSA) (La Paz)

In 2009, CIDES-UMSA, together with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), carried out the research project *Global Care Chains. Care rights and female migration in Bolivia* (Salazar, Jiménez, and Wanderley 2010). Currently, two research projects on migration are being carried out by this center. The first one is "Migration, Gender

and Politics in South America and the Andes: State of art”. The second deals with feminization of transnational labor markets: “Bolivian women in the textile manufacturing industries of Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo”.

Bolivian Universities

Especially in the central axis (La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz), sociology, psychology and economics scholars have been researching international migration. However, it should be noted that these studies have been developed in isolation. They are local efforts. But in the last ten years academic interest on the subject has revived considerably.

Human Mobility “Pastoral”

The main objective of this Catholic organization is to serve, accompany and defend migrants: reducing levels of human-rights violations, xenophobia, stigmatization and strengthening migrant families within social structures. It has several offices nationwide, which provides humanitarian assistance to migrants and their families.

The Bolivia-Spain Cooperation Association (ACOB)

An institution that has performed various actions with Bolivian families in Spain (especially in Madrid). ACOBE works “with people at risk of social exclusion and vulnerability, providing legal assistance, social care, vocational training, leisure and cultural activities, academic support and counseling for employment (search)” (ACOB 2013). Since 2005, ACOBE Center manages the Bolivian-Hispanic Center (CEPI) entity directly under the Government of Madrid Autonomous Community. ACOBE (through AMIBE and CODEM) encourages initiatives to facilitate migrant’s returns from Spain.

The Centre for Promotion of Economic Initiatives (FIE NGO)

FIE NGO is a private non-profit institution created to support the development of economic initiatives where there is poverty, through credit and training programs (Roncken and de la Torre 2009). It was selected from several institutions to co-run the “Voluntary Return Migration Model based on Entrepreneurship Development”, together with CREA-EMPRESA, a Spanish entity that accessed an IDB-MIF fund. (The project was also carried out in Colombia, Uruguay and Ecuador.) In Bolivia, between 2009 and 2010, it addressed return migrants or migrant families (on the Bolivia-Spain circuit), so as to provide small group training programs for the implementation of new business. Thanks to FIE NGO, the program spent a reduced fund as seed-capital for the most important business initiatives. Similar but smaller programs were carried out by Caritas and “Fundación Capital”.

International Cooperation

An ally (sponsor) of state action to the *diaspora* has been the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mission Bolivia. IOM has received mainly European resources to cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in “Strengthening Governmental Migration Management, Return and Reintegration in Bolivia”, Aeneas Project 2009-2011. Besides participating in the debate on migration, legislation and public policy, IOM has managed financings for “humanitarian assistance” to needy migrants, be they refugees or displaced persons (or returned from Spain, Switzerland and other countries). IOM has also developed materials for dealing with human trafficking. With more limited support (aimed at funding research and consulting in the framework of regional programs), other international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF also participated in the Bolivian migration debate.

Some others nongovernmental stakeholders and actors in emigration and diaspora policy are mentioned briefly in Table 2.

Table 2. Complementary non-governmental stakeholders and actors in emigration and diaspora

Institution(s)	Type	Area of work / Role
Ombudsman [Defensoría del Pueblo]	Public Institution	Migration and Human Rights Migrations Amnesties Labor Migration and Cross-border development
Mesa Técnica para las Migraciones	Joint NGOs and other institutions	Migration and Human Rights Amnesties and Advocacy
Coordinadora de la Mujer (La Paz), Tahipamu (Santa Cruz), Oficina Jurídica para la Mujer (Cochabamba)	Gender organization	Migration and Human Rights Migration and Gender
Jesuit Migrant Service	Religious organization	Migration and Human Rights
Desdelsur	Private newspaper dedicated to migration issues	Migration and Human Rights Bolivian Diaspora Migration Advocacy

5. Conclusion: Is the policy framework complete and has it been implemented?

There have been two points of progress in migration matters. First, there has been better documentation management (with reduced irregular migration) and, second, voting rights abroad. These programs include those that until very recently had seen their rights denied. Progress has also been made in consular competences, which translates into improved care and protection for Bolivian migrants.

But if there is not full recognition of the “transnational life” (including a lucid treatment of the subject of return), then there will be disappointment. The State will stand accused of milking migrants as economic resource generators and as future voters to support the “process of change” (carried out by current Bolivian government). In that case, we could once more be speaking about a state acting selfishly and not on behalf of migrants and their families. Increased budget and strategic planning are needed for public policy, particularly in the recently approved legislative framework, another important step (Migration Act).

After our brief review of Bolivia’s policy and institutional framework for immigration and diaspora, there is still institutional instability in the register of transnational mobility. Meanwhile, estimates increase official numbers. The appearance of new migratory destinations is also evident. After Spanish economic crisis, for example, trajectories of return and/or re-routing to other European destinations and to border nations like Argentina, Brazil and especially Chile have been established. In this last case, we have to acknowledge important advances in free circulation conquered not only by the Bolivian Government but by many governments well integrated inside the sub-region. The Mercosur Agreement and the CAN decisions may be mentioned as significant examples of these dynamics. As said before, Bolivian adhesion to the Multilateral Iberoamerican Social Security Agreement can be understood as another decision that will support return and transnational life.

Other public initiatives for the Bolivian diaspora (distance senior education programs, TV broadcasting of diaspora cultural celebrations, etc.) are only just beginning. The new Immigration Act, passed in May 2013, may offer some hope with its proposal for a National Migration Board with representatives from several ministries. This legislation provides that all diaspora-related initiatives will be dealt with by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the local or regional level, there have been few experiences, mainly in the spirit of Migration and Development. Pilot programs have been concluded but were not institutionalized. Migrant associations have sometimes bucked this disappointing trend.

Non-state actors such as social research institutions and universities have attempted to understand internal and international Bolivian migration. NGOs, church and civil right institutions help migrants, fighting against human rights violations, xenophobia, and stigmatization, and strengthening migrant families within social structures. There are also international organizations like the IOM, which has received European resources. But it has done so mainly to cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in “Strengthening Governmental Migration Management, Return and Reintegration in Bolivia” (Aeneas Project, 2009-2011), as well as materials for addressing the issue of human trafficking.

In the introduction we asked how important human mobility is on the political agenda in Bolivia. We might conclude by saying much ‘more than before’, but still much less than is needed to really get to grips with the issue. Here and there, Bolivian migrant families face new challenges (restrictive policies, possibilities thanks to their transnational lives, etc.). Meanwhile, the government (at national and local level), as well as academia and non-state organizations are still a long way behind, in the best case scenario catching-up with migrant families and trying to understand what support they might need. Some public policy, civil-right defense and research initiatives have been proposed and established, but these initiatives can only be judged after considering how much political and economic support they will receive in future.

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