

## What is the Relation between School Failure, Youth Gangs and Capability Deprivation for Children of Migrants? The Case of Young People of Ecuadorian Origin in Spain<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 Introduction

Since the 1990s migration has altered the population landscape in Spain, which has transformed from being a country of origin to a recipient of migrants. Nowadays Spain is “becoming one of the main host countries in the European Union” (Muñoz de Bustillo and Antón, 2010: 14). The foreign born population in Spain represents 14.1% of the total population in 2008, compared to only 4.9% in 2000 (OECD, 2010: 240). Latin American countries represent the main source of migration, and among them, the Ecuadorian immigrants are the most numerous in Spain, with 382,129 Ecuadorians registered in Spain in 2010.<sup>2</sup>

The relevance for this research lies in the increasing presence of students with a migration background in schools. In the 2011/12 academic year immigrants represented 10.12 % of the total student population in Spain, compared to 6.64% in 2004/5 and only 2.06% in 2000/2001. The number of students from Ecuador in 2011/12 was 9.73% of the total of non-national students in all education levels in Spain (MEC, Spanish Ministry of Education statistics). Although the percentage of Ecuadorian students at all education levels in Spain in 2011/2012 was 1% of the total student population, there seems to be a concentration in remedial short vocational courses, 2.92% whereas they are underrepresented at university level, 0.14% (INE, Spanish National Institute of Statistics). More concerning is their gross over representation in juvenile detention centres; in Madrid in 2009, 15% of young offenders had Ecuadorian nationality (ARRMI, 2009: 114). Despite these worrying statistics, there is a scarcity of studies delving into the context of second generation Latin Americans in Spain, particularly qualitative studies that take into account young people’s migration experiences, perspectives on education and well-being.

In the Spanish academic world, legal, economic, sociological and geographical issues regarding migration have been studied (see Tornos and Aparicio, 2002 for a list of researchers in different areas). Although widely researched in other countries such as USA, Germany and France (e.g.: Barth and Noel, 1972; Portes and Borocz, 1989; Gans, 1992, Silberman and Alba, 2005, Crul and Vermeulen, 2003; Faist, 1995), the study of children of migrants presented in this research fills a gap which seems due to the late arrival of migrants to Spain –

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics from the Observatorio permanente de la migración. <http://extranjeros.mtin.es/es/InformacionEstadistica/index.html>

particularly Ecuadorians – and the fact that the number of adolescents born in Spain to a foreign mother or father is still relatively small (Portes, Aparicio, Haller, 2009: 2; IOE, 2007; Vicente Torrado, 2005).

### **Methodology**

To study the factors that expand and constrain the capabilities of young people of migration background, this research adopts an explorative qualitative methodology in order to get a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of ethnicity, class, gender and age allowing for detailed descriptions of everyday practices. Seeking to explore participant's perceptions of well-being, biographical interviews were selected to give voice to those who are often unheard, providing a useful tool to understand the participants' subjective tensions and contradictions regarding their experiences. Delving into the literature on migration, it focuses on aspirations and well-being, and reflects on some of the findings from the author's Ph.D. research.

The main method of data collection is biographical interviews. This research made a flexible use of Wengraf's (2001) Biographic-Narrative-Interpretative Method (BNIM). This method follows the aim to explore situated subjectivities (Wengraf, 2001), by analysing the participants' interpretations and constructions of the social world. These interpretations reflect both the participant's individual concerns, but also cultural and social presuppositions, processes and discourses.

All the interviews consisted of face to face individual interviews in Spanish. Every young participant was asked to tell their experiences related to school, plus subsequent clarification and open questions. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish; the transcript extracts used in this paper correspond to my translations of the verbatim.

The first round of interviews was conducted in 2011. The second round of interviews took place between 6 and 11 months later; the lapse of time was marked by the end of the sentences for those in detention or by the intention of some of the participants to return to Ecuador, as well as the stage of analysis of the transcripts collected during the first interview. This second round consisted of asking open questions about the changes since the last interview and clarifications from issues that emerged during the analysis.

### *Sample*

During this research, biographical interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2012 with 15 selected young boys and girls from 15 to 20 years old, who had been born in Ecuador and had migrated to Spain (average age of migration 8.26 years old). Their age at the time of the interview is written in brackets after their pseudonym when quoted. They were all living in Madrid and belonged to low-income families. A third of the participants were high school students, another third were completing a short vocational remedial course after having dropped out of secondary education and the last third were serving sentences in young offenders' institutions. Semi-structured interviews with adult frontline professionals were used in a scoping exercise to gather information regarding the barriers that hinder young people of Latin American background's high levels of well-being. These experts comprise both Ecuadorian and Spanish teachers, civil association activists, cultural mediators, young offenders' institution' staff and migration researchers.

## 2 Capability Approach and Migration

### 2.1 Capabilities

This paper uses the CA to analyse the participants' perceptions of well-being, vulnerability and deprivation for migrants' descendents. The CA was first formulated by Amartya Sen in the 1980s as an alternative position to measures of poverty and inequality based on income. Rather than looking at commodities or primary goods *per se*, Sen focuses on "the relevant personal characteristics that govern the conversion of primary goods into the person's ability to promote her ends" (Sen, 1999: 74). Thus, Sen defines functionings as "the various things a person may value doing or being" (1999: 75); whereas capabilities would then refer "to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve" (1999:75), or as Robeyns suggests: "what people are effectively able to do and to be" (2005: 94).

The CA, as a normative framework, considers that there is a plurality of well-being dimensions related to the concept of capabilities and functionings. Because of human heterogeneity, individuals might attach different value to each of these functionings (Sen, 2009: 31). Robeyns holds that there are three types of conversion factors: personal, social and environmental conversion factors (2005: 99) that mediate the transformation of opportunities and resources into valuable doings and beings. Social structures affect men's and women's, migrants' and natives' well-being differently; together with class and racial differences in real freedoms and opportunities.

### 2.2 Capability deprivation

Unfortunately, in every society there are structural inequalities that systematically deprive groups from pursuing their plan of life. Sexism and racism are just two of these forms of oppression that lower the well-being of large numbers of individuals worldwide. This results in dynamic ethnic – although also gender and class – economic, educational and in general, well-being inequalities.

Poverty can be understood as capability deprivation (Sen: 1999); as a lack of multiple freedoms to promote functioning one has reason to value (Alkire, 2007). The CA offers a holistic perspective on poverty that takes into account personal and structural conversion factors, shifting the focus from instrumental to intrinsically important functionings; where the well-being utility of economic resources is relative to the individual's needs and his or her circumstances.

Looking at poverty as capability deprivation can shed light on the situation of people with a migrant background who are often discriminated against; such as having to accept inferior working conditions, even when being legal residents in the host country (Solé Puig and Parella, 2009).

### 2.3 Disadvantage

Wolff and De-Shalit define disadvantage "as a lack of genuine opportunity for secure functioning" (2007:9), adding to the CA the notion of security, stability. The term 'corrosive disadvantages', refers to those disadvantages which yield further disadvantages; corrosive disadvantage can often be dynamic and inter-generational (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007:121). Its contrary, the concept of 'fertile functionings' points at "those functionings the securing of which is likely to secure further functionings" (2007:10). Education can be considered a fertile functioning, because of the capabilities gained or expanded through education. In the

case of children of migrants, education can provide them with tools for empowerment and critical thinking, it can expand other capabilities such as participation in their communities and wider society, a better standing in the labour market (Nussbaum, 2006 and Walker and Unterhalter, 2007).

However, not all educational experiences enhance capabilities; unfortunately schools can also be unsafe and discriminatory places (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007) institutions where social inequalities are produced and reproduced (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Experiences of institutionalised racism and ethnocentric curricula may discourage students of migration background, leading them to dropout education. Early dropout can be considered a corrosive disadvantage because of the long term consequences that would further constrain the capabilities for practical reason, to aspire and capability for work, among others.

## **2.4 Social exclusion**

Social exclusion can then be understood as individual capability deprivation rooted in a dynamic failure of personal conversion factors, social relations and public institutions. “The disadvantages faced by the excluded tend to be interrelated. People belonging to minorities or school drop-outs may have a greater risk of being unemployed or being employed in precarious jobs and hence being low-paid, less educated, recipients of social assistance, posses little political power, and fewer social contacts” (De Haan 2001: 26). Likewise, these disadvantages are often inherited by their descendants becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In the context of children of migrants, social exclusion can also be connected to an ‘oppositional culture’ (Zhou, 1997: 986) and other resistance mechanisms to confront marginalisation, social isolation, alienation and deprivation. These resistance mechanisms have also been referred to as ‘downward assimilation’; where some young immigrants rebel against middle-class values and drop-out school. They are met with the dilemma whose extremes are choosing between their parents’ aspirations for upward mobility conforming to white middle-class values that discriminate against them, thus, being ostracised by their immigrant peers. Or confronting these values, opposing authority and giving in to peer pressure that leads to integration in the ‘underclass’, being marginalised by the larger society but also by their own community (Zhou, 1997: 989-990). This “ghettoization, in turn, produces a political atmosphere and a mentality that preserves class division along racial lines, leading to the greater alienation of minority children” (Zhou, 1997: 988) further diminishing their capabilities, falling into a poverty trap of capability deprivation.

The following sections use the CA to analyse biographical interviews of selected young people of Ecuadorian background in Spain. The participants were selected because of the specific disadvantages related to their ethnicity, social class and lack of education success. This paper should not be used to criminalise a population who are already victims of anti-immigration attitudes. The overrepresentation “failed” pathways to integration intends to describe the risks that a lack of capabilities may result in for children of migrants.

## **3 Case study**

The Spanish population landscape has transformed during the last two decades. Migration only appeared at the centre of academic debates after the 1985 Migration Law was passed. This restrictive law responded to the pressures from other European countries that feared Spain would become the main entry point to Europe from Africa and Latin America after the relaxation of national borders enabled by the Schengen agreements in 1985 (Tornos and

Aparicio, 2002). Although at that time migration inflows to Spain were minimal, the imported negative image of migrants as a burden on social services and as the cause of higher unemployment were common on the political and media discourses (Tornos and Aparicio, 2002). This immigration Organic Law 7/1985 linked the working status of migrants in Spain to entry permits as well as residence authorisation and renewal. These restrictions created the construction of illegal immigrants which furthered discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation, i.e., capability deprivation (Tornos and Aparicio, 2002; Calavita, 1998).

Since then, the Spanish immigration laws O.L. 4/2000 and O.L. 2/2009 have emphasised immigrant integration being a transversal issue in all the immigration policies, through education, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship (OBERAXE, 2012:117-119). In theory this integration should be a dynamic multicultural two-way process, where the host society also needs to adapt to include new cultures and identities. In reality, however, the burden of integration falls on the immigrants who are expected to assimilate into the mainstream Spanish culture (Solanes, 2009: 315).

The reasons behind the exceptional increase in Ecuadorian migration from 2000 (Table 1), where the number of Ecuadorians registered increased from around 4,000 (in 1997) to almost 140,000 (in 2000), are associated to the 1998/1999 Ecuadorian economic crisis, with the subsequent fall of GNP, the dollarization, privatisation and decrease of public spending following the Washington Consensus doctrine. These changes resulted in lower levels of quality of life, increased inequality and high levels of unemployment (Herrera, Carrillo and Torres, 2005; Camacho, 2010).

Table 1 Number of people from Ecuadorian origin living in Spain

<b>Year</b>	<b>Census register</b>	<b>Spaniards</b>	<b>Residents</b>	<b>Illegal</b>
<b>1996</b>	--	--	2,913	--
<b>1997</b>	3,972	--	4,112	--
<b>1998</b>	7,155	--	7,046	109
<b>1999</b>	20,481	--	12,933	7,548
<b>2000</b>	139,022	3,446	30,878	108,144
<b>2001</b>	259,522	4,429	84,699	174,823
<b>2002</b>	390,297	5,396	115,301	274,996
<b>2003</b>	475,698	6,353	174,289	301,409
<b>2004</b>	497,799	7,261	221,549	276,250
<b>2005</b>	461,310	10,530	357,065	104,245

Source: IOE (2007) La Inmigración Ecuatoriana en España. Una vision a través de las Fuentes estadísticas. P. 9.

The Ecuadorian migration in Spain is characterised by a strong female presence, particularly in the early years: 65% in 1998-1999; 55% in 2000 and 52.2% in 2005 (IOE, 2007: 11). The number of migrant minors increased, especially in 2002 and 2003. The number of children under 14 who left Ecuador and did not come back in 2002 is estimated to be 37,585; 74% of them went to Spain (Camacho, 2010:73). Both the 2000 Organic law and the 2009

immigration Organic Law 2/2009 stated that legal immigrants who have been living in Spain for longer than one year could bring their children if these are younger than 18 years old.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 there were 125,570 children of Ecuadorian immigrants living in Spain under the age of 16, but 397,216 were still living in Ecuador (INE). Immigrants from Latin America can apply for Spanish nationality after living in Spain legally for two years. Between 2001 and 2009 the number of Ecuadorian immigrants who obtained Spanish nationality was 112,188 (INE). These numbers suggest that many migrants had given up their goal of returning to Ecuador, opting to stay in the host country at least in the medium term (Camacho, 2010: 73).

Nonetheless, the current economic crisis in Spain has particularly affected immigrants. According to the Labour Force Survey, at the end of 2010, the total number of unemployed in Spain was 4.7 million, of which one million were foreigners. The unemployment rate of foreigners climbed to 32% by mid-2011 (OECD, 2012: 272). The spread of unemployment has forced many immigrants to return to their country or to migrate to richer countries. Only a small fraction of the unemployed immigrants satisfied the conditions (e.g. length of time) necessary to qualify for unemployment benefits<sup>4</sup> and their scarce family networks in Spain can hardly sponsor their cost of living whilst being unemployed (González Enríquez, 2012). Returning may be especially traumatic for those minors of migration background who have undergone an important part of the socialisation process in Spain. As well as experiencing another rupture from friends and family who stay in Spain, they need to adapt once again to what might be perceived as another foreign culture.

Spain has the highest rate of early school leaving<sup>5</sup> in Europe, with 24.9% compared to the European average of 12.8% (European Commission, 2013). Early school leaving seems to be much higher for students of migration background (Serra Salamé and Paludàrias Martí, 2010). In their study they found that the percentage of Ecuadorian students who leave school early was 21.7% of the total number of Ecuadorian students; this number was even higher, 32.3% for those Ecuadorians who had not finished the last year of compulsory education (Serra and Paludàrias, 2010: 292).<sup>6</sup>

### 3.1 Perceived cultural differences and curricular gap

The data gathered by the present research suggests that the high proportion of early school leaving amongst students of migration background is, among other factors, related to perceived cultural differences. The Spanish reality hardly ever lives up to their expectations before starting the migration journey. The houses are smaller, the schools are different, the

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<sup>3</sup> According to the National Immigrant Survey 2007 Immigrants residing in Spain had 759,000 children under the age of 16 not living in their dwelling. Of these, 86.6% lived in their country of birth (INE, 2008: 2).

<sup>4</sup> The Spanish government launched an assisted return programme in 2008 which provides unemployed foreigners entitled to unemployment benefits an advance payment on benefits if they return home. However, very few applications - 12000 between November 2008 and December 2010 - had been approved (OECD, 2012: 272).

<sup>5</sup> The rate of early school leavers is defined as the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training. Higher (tertiary) education attainment is calculated as the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary (or equivalent) education (European Commission IP-13-324, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Serra and Paludàrias point out four overlapping problems that lead to this high rate of early school leaving: 1) the inclusion of migration background students; 2) academic failure in both compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education; 3) low progression into further education, especially in vocational training; 4) the need to adapt education to the needs of society and the job market (2010: 287).

culture is bizarre and even the language seems to be strange. Although Spanish is the main official language both in Ecuador and Spain, there are many idiomatic differences. As one young Ecuadorian girl stated:

“but what surprised me was [...] everyone spoke in another ... I mean [...] I spoke with my jargon, I was used to it, but ... and they didn't understand me, and I, I didn't understand what it meant “vale” ((ok / worth)) or, “tío” ((mate / uncle))” (Alicia, 16).

These differences are often overlooked by the educational policies and schools who provide extra support for those migrant students whose first language is not Spanish.

The perceived cultural differences also refer to the student-teacher relationship:

“I didn't get used to the class, [...] there everything's very different. Both because you know the people, teachers, they ((referring to Spanish teachers)) did not know your ..., how to say? They are not of your race, they don't understand you the way they understood you there. [...]. The teachers ((in Ecuador)) were good people, they cared, we respected them more, because in my country old people are very much respected” (Bartolo, 20).

Respect towards teachers seems to be linked to the perceived attitude towards old people in Ecuador fostered by their parents. However, this perception of respect and discipline is contradicted by other studies such as Cuenca whose results point out a lack of discipline and respect and even cases of violence towards teachers in Ecuadorian schools (Cuenca et al., 2009:119).

Other factors that contribute to low school attainment for students of Ecuadorian origin seem to be related to a perceived curricular gap. A Spanish high school teacher described his experience with Ecuadorian students:

“the education gap [...] is striking. [...] But in the case of Ecuador, you know what public education is like there, don't you? It is residual, without means, then they arrive with a huge curricular gap. There are kids who come and don't understand. They ask very basic concepts, and they understand nothing, nothing, nothing”.

Cuenca's study describes the lack of economic and infrastructure resources in the Ecuadorian education system. The students' poor academic results are also related to migration; mainly the effects on child well-being after their parents migrate. Poverty and violence were also pointed out as causes for low-attainment (Cuenca et al, 2010:134). When schools do not compensate these educational differences, student diversity leads to inequality of capabilities. In this way, education understood as a fertile functioning becomes an exclusive privilege of some students who tend to be the mainstream majority; whereas some other students become disengaged, dropout, and become more and more disadvantaged.

In this research one female middle school student was torn between wanting to go back to Ecuador and wanting to stay. One of the reasons cited in favour of remaining was the perceived higher quality of Spanish education: “because since my cousins were also studying, I realized that here education is a little bit better, a little more advanced” (Alicia, 16). A young male in a detention centre described teachings methods in his Ecuadorian primary school: “They taught using games, fairytales, it's a bit childish. And then when I arrived here it was very different. It was like a higher level, more adult” (Roberto, 18).

The possible curricular gap could be connected to the late incorporation of Ecuadorian students to the education system. In this research most of them arrived after having completed primary school and some years of lower secondary school in Ecuador. The late incorporation and perceived cultural differences make completion and progression to post-compulsory education more difficult. In the present study, out of the 15 young participants, 8 had reached the last year of compulsory education and 4 were in upper secondary education. However, these barriers should not overcast Spanish society's perception of migrant learners and particularly teachers' expectations of migrant students. It is important to emphasize that the high percentages of early school leaving amongst students with a migration background should not lead to blaming the country of origin or students' attitude. They should instead move institutions to pay extra attention and try to remove or at least overcome the barriers attached to migration and late incorporation to the Spanish education system.

### 3.2 Family separation and reunification

The findings of this study also point out at the effect of migration changing family relations. Many of the participants stayed in Ecuador until their parents managed to save enough to bring them to Spain. A female participant in secondary school recounted her separation from her parents when she was 10. "I, at first, stayed with my grandmother. And afterwards, almost a year or two before I arrived, I was with my godmother. And, well, since then, I came here" (Alicia, 16). After migrating to Spain with her brother, she seemed happy with her family and has been very successful in high school. Nevertheless, some of the participants related a more traumatic stay in Ecuador:

"it hurt because I saw myself so young to be moving from one place to another. [...]. I lived with my aunt, my uncle, my godmother, my grandmother, my other grandmother, my grandfather... From here to there, as the song goes.[...] ((My cousins)) used to say to me: you don't live here. At home, they always said it. And I, hmm, I used to say: ok, it doesn't matter... It doesn't matter, my dad is the one sending money for you to eat" (Bartolo, 20).

Besides reducing their levels of well-being, this separation tends to produce negative consequences in their school performance in Ecuador (Cuenca et al, 2010:118), as well as when they are reunited in Spain. The developments which occur during that lapse of time change the relationship between parents and children, altering the patterns of authority. The difficult working conditions for migrants in Spain, with a 36.53% unemployment at the end of 2012<sup>7</sup> (INE, 2013:5), forces them to accept low salaries and long working hours. Some participants' responses pointed out the effect of these long working hours. One male participant recalled: "in my house there was neither my mother nor my father, they had to work, you know? [...] we have grown up almost alone" (Roberto, 18). Another male in detention commented:

"My mother wanted me to go to school, you know? Because she didn't want me to stay at home doing nothing. But I didn't want to. And what could my mother do? If my mother left for work in the morning and I stayed home alone" (Javier, 19).

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<sup>7</sup> The unemployment rate for nationals was 24.23% (INE, 2013: 5). In 2011, when many of the interviews took place, this difference was even higher from 39.1% for migrants to 18.4% for nationals (IOE, 2012).



According to the 2007 survey more than one third of young migrants spend more than 6 hours alone per day (INE, 2007; Buelga, 2010).

### 3.3 Labour market, crisis, and xenophobic attitudes

The economic and positional value of education is relative for immigrants, who see their capability for work (Bonvin, 2006) curtailed. Adult Ecuadorian migrants seem to arrive with higher levels of education than the average native Spaniard (IOE, 2007 and Camacho, 2010). Yet, their human capital is not absorbed into the Spanish labour market, where 43% of the Ecuadorian workers are placed in unskilled positions, compared to 36% for Latin American migrants in general (IOE, 2007:43). The main occupation for Ecuadorian male migrants has been construction (34.8%) and for Ecuadorian female migrants has been domestic service (27%) (Camacho, 2010: 170); both of them unstable and unskilled occupations (IOE, 2007: 40). This mismatch between their parents' qualifications and employment often lowers their children's education and career aspirations and expectations, lowering their capability set.

The economic crisis has led to deterioration in the living and working conditions of immigrants. In 2010 more than half of the working immigrants did not earn the equivalent minimum salary in a year and the poverty rate for immigrants has reached 31% with the even more disturbing figure of 10.8% for extreme poverty (IOE, 2012).<sup>8</sup> The crisis has worsened their image and provoked anti-immigration attitudes such as suspicion, fear, and rejection. From 2007 to 2010 the percentage of people who thought that illegal immigrants should be deported varied from 12% to 20%, those who would like to deport immigrants who have committed any type of crime varied from 68% to 73%, and the support for deporting unemployed immigrants increased from 39% to 43% (IOE, 2012). Thus the crisis has led to higher levels of capability deprivation for many individuals of migration origin.

Some migrant participants have reported that anti-immigration attitudes have left them feeling inferior, regarded with suspicion, or treated as though they were second class citizens:

“sometimes Spaniards believe they're better than us. Because you are in their country they think they're better than you, and they aren't. [...] They want to put you down, just because they're here because they can give you a job. [...] That's not cool at all” (Javier, 19).

Several participants complained about being victimised by the police because of their ethnicity. One young student in a remedial vocational centre said:

“I don't like police very much, they stop you a lot, I don't know whether it is ... because we are Latinos and such [...] [they stop you] to search you, take my things... you're walking happily, and they stop you” (Jose, 16).

This ethnic profiling has been denounced by several civil society associations<sup>9</sup>. These types of clashes with the police are particularly pernicious for social integration, since they diminish

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<sup>8</sup> The poverty rate for nationals in 2010 was 19% and extreme poverty was 6.7% (IOE, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> “Migrant's rights organizations have highlighted that the discriminatory use of ethnic profile is reinforced by a 2001 verdict of the Constitutional Court (13/2001) which considered that physical appearance can constitute a reasonable sign of non-national origin, and therefore is a legitimate and lawful indicator for the police to conduct identity checks for migration control” (Amnesty International, 2011).

the trust in public institutions and lower migrants' confidence and social capital (Putnam, 2007).

### 3.4 Social distance and affiliation

The stereotypes and prejudices against foreigners are reinforced by a sensationalistic media (Tornos and Aparicio, 2002) and exploited by politicians (Quillian, 1995). These xenophobic attitudes from the native population pose a barrier to social integration. Reacting to this rejection, many of the participants narrated how they felt more comfortable not only with other Ecuadorians, but also with people of Latin American background and foreigners as a whole. Referring to his group of friends a male participant said:

“Spanish, acquaintances, but friends are Latinos. Because we come from the same land, we enjoy ourselves more with Latinos than with people of Spain or anywhere else in Europe” (Bartolo, 20).

Another participant who arrived in Spain when he was 6 years old recalled his experience in primary school:

“Well, normally I used to go with two friends of color, so black boys and, the others they were, were very nice to say the truth. The majority was Spanish but the two Black boys were, one was a Dominican and the other was African. And I related better to them because, like ..., because they were not Spanish, as they say, because I'm not ... Spanish. We met the three, but the others were, were very nice, very nice [...]. And the two brown-skinned, well, they were like my bodyguards” (Roberto, 18).

This extract reflects the social construction of the outsider, of the ‘other’ who does not belong to the group, which is internalised by the participant after feeling its effects. It also reflects the de-construction of an identity based on the country of origin, Ecuador, reconstructing this identity to narrow the social distance among the participant, a Dominican and an African background students in the light of feeling rejected and finding comfort and protection in the company of other outsiders (Putnam, 2007; Alba and Nee, 2003).

The presence of other Ecuadorians in the classroom, school or neighbourhood facilitates socialization and helps restore the pride of having an Ecuadorian or Latin American background. A male in post-compulsory secondary school said:

“since the first day I made friends because, as they were from my country, Ecuador, that helped me” (Alberto, 17). Another high school student remembers: “Well ... yes, from the beginning I made good friends and ... man, of course I missed the, your friends there and all that, but ... generally well. They were nice to me. And, besides, since there are also, sometimes, some people from right there, from X ((little town in Ecuador)), or from Ecuador, you feel more comfortable too, because you are not the only one among everyone” (Alicia, 16).

However, this pride and the barriers to integration into the mainstream culture, such as the structural racism, are exploited by subversive groups. What has been called “Latin gangs” and in particular “Latin Kings” play a crucial role in the lives of some of the interviewed participants. Although this research pays particular attention to children of migrants in youth gangs, they represent a small minority within the migrant population.

### 3.5 “Latin gangs”

Different youth gangs fight over territory; they use clothes, graffiti, hand gestures and other symbols as signs of identity.

“There was a time that people began to wear wide clothes, and all that, and I got dressed with wide clothes. And people dressed like that looked bad; bad people dressed like this” (Juan, 18).

Violence between and within gangs is not uncommon and it is often used to gain respect:

“Latin Kings [...] so much violence. I saw that they were very wild, because they are the gang’s rulers. The more, the more cruel you are, the higher the position, and respect” (Roberto, 18).

In these gangs, violence is used in initiation rites, as control mechanisms, as punishment both inside the gang and amongst gangs and in order to escalate the hierarchy (Buelga, 2010).

Some of them explained their entry into this gang: “they said this is your family, we welcome you; and it felt like a family, because as I’ve never had this, in my house alone ... I took refuge in the gang” (Roberto, 18). The need to belong, together with a perceived need for protection, is used by these groups to attract young people with a migration background. Some of them joined at the age of 12 and 13 years old, although it is more common to join at a later stage. They present an alternative to going to school and involve gatherings in the street and home parties during the day.

Most of the young participants mentioned the street as the social space where they hang out with their friends in these groups. Being in the street seems to reflect a particular way of life that contrasts with going to school or being at home, e.g., “At least now I want to go back, to, to this day I want to go back to school.... Because in the street I was ((felt)) bad, bad, bad, bad” (Melanie, 16). She recounts the beginning of the decline that led her to a young offender’s institution, missing school and joining a Latin gang:

“I don’t know, I didn’t like studying, then I stopped studying, I didn’t go to school, [...]. Worse was also because there were people who led me, telling me this, that, whatever. And I let myself be influenced and such. [...]. With [...] 13 years I was in the famous Latin Kings gang [...]. I’m not at all proud, I even feel ashamed to tell you, [...] but in those days I saw it as: oh, oh, I’m the meanest! And I’ve realised, over the years and now that I’m 17, I’m going to turn 18, [...] when you’re in the street is not that you have their respect, it is that they are afraid” (Melanie, 17).

This quote signals the ubiquity of low capability sets where individual and social conversion factors fail to transform formal opportunities to study and consequently obtain well-paid meaningful jobs among members of these gangs. In these contexts, strength, dominance, risk-taking behaviours and violence are valued since they represent resistance mechanisms to gain respect and to obtain status and economic resources.

Fun, alcohol, drugs, the opportunity to meet people of the opposite sex and make friends seem to be a common appeal for both native and migrant youth in general, but the addition of restoration of pride and imposed respect through fear and violence appears to be more prevalent in these gangs. A male in a detention centre said referring to Ecuador: “*There I had*

*never taken drugs and here I started taking the first drugs in my life” (Manuel, 18).* Another young male in detention who arrived in Spain when he was 6 years old recalls joining a gang at age 13:

“I joined, mostly because, [...] in my house there was no one. In my house I was uncomfortable, empty. [...] I started to hang out a lot with people FROM MY COUNTRY ((saying it louder)) [...] I liked being Latino again. And I started hanging out, [...] I saw the gang, because I, they started brainwashing me, you know? They told me this is your family. We welcome you, and such. And it felt like a family, because as I've never had this, at home alone, [...] and I started ... Then I went out to nightclubs, stole things, because this is what happens, gangs are not good. And one of the worst things about them, which afterwards I also did, you know? [...] Is that you convince children [...]. The desire to feel important, desire to be with girls, you know? And then you see that, almost all were older. Then they had, they had respect, smoked, drank, felt like, adults, women stuck to them, simply because of being a Latin King” (Roberto, 18).

The experts interviewed in young offenders’ institutions and probation officers described the predominance of dysfunctional families amongst the youth who join these gangs. Broken families, alcoholism and domestic abuse are unfortunately too common for these young offenders, who fulfil the prophecy of victims who become victimisers. An Ecuadorian male in a juvenile detention centre serving a sentence for having abused his girlfriend recalls his parents’ mistreatment: “because when my mother or my father used to beat me... I also felt the fear she felt. I resign myself then, after so much violence, as she has often resigned herself” (Roberto, 18). But instead of pathologising dysfunctional migrant families, it is crucial to reflect on the structural inequalities, such as the precarious jobs they are forced to accept, the lack of substantial opportunities to gain status and economic resources to command respect.

Regarding young people of migration background, school failure seems to lead to a decline not only in social integration but in general well-being, which might lead to criminality, thus becoming a corrosive disadvantage (Wolff and De Shalit, 2007). The process of downward assimilation can be observed in Bartolo’s narration:

“And when I came here, to Spain, in second year of ESO<sup>10</sup>, [...] I did the tests and got good grades, but my mother made me repeat the first year. And here, I passed the first year without difficulty. During the second year I got more sidetracked. And I didn’t ... didn’t ... study anymore. I was kicked out of class because of being rude to a teacher. And then ... I didn’t study anymore. I was on the street doing nothing, without studying” (Bartolo, 20).

Bartolo arrived in Spain aged 11; he admitted having some behavioural problems in Ecuadorian schools. When he arrived in Spain, he was placed in a lower academic year than other children of his age. He passed the first year, but he was expelled during the second year for an incident with a teacher. He stopped studying and spent time in the streets. He joined the Latin Kings gang and started a criminal career (resulting in two murders) that led him to a young offenders’ institution.

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<sup>10</sup> ESO comprises of four years of compulsory lower secondary education.

#### 4 Analysis

This research's young participants have experienced a triple journey (Feixa, 2005). Firstly, a geographical voyage: migrating to Spain was a journey that many of them only embarked upon after being separated from their parents who had to work hard to afford their plane tickets. Secondly, a cultural journey: the shock of encountering a reality that differed from their expectations, where not only the climate, houses, language, school and culture were different from their reality back at home, but where even their parents had changed (Buelga, 2010). Thirdly, the natural journey: from childhood to adulthood, with the typical changes, transgressions and search for identity associated with adolescence.

The participants' life trajectories reflect the impact of personal and structural conversion factors on integration. If we take serving a sentence as the negative extreme of integration and going to university as the positive extreme, the results of this research would confirm the existence of structural disadvantages and capability inequalities that put the participants at risk of capability deprivation and social exclusion. Early school leaving is considered a sign of unsuccessful integration, a corrosive disadvantage, since it closes future opportunities lowering the capability set. Out of the fifteen young participants in the sample, ten had dropped out before finishing compulsory education. However, five of these ten decided to start a vocational training course in a remedial education centre. And the other five were completing compulsory education through compensatory programmes taught at the offenders' institution or in coordination with it. One of the young offenders had completed compulsory education and had started high school. Out of the five young participants interviewed at a secondary school, two of them were finishing the last year of compulsory education during the first round of interviews and both had passed to high school during the second round. Out of the other three who were in the first year of high school during the first round, one of them had to retake the year as a result of family problems. The other two continued to the second and final year, although only one of them, a girl, managed to go to university at the first attempt.

The findings of this study would therefore suggest that ethnicity, language, nationality and age of arrival on their own do not account for determining children of migrants' upward or downward integration. Socioeconomic factors, including family structure, parents' occupations, working hours, ethnocentric curricula and police ethnic profiling seem to be necessary explanatory factors to expand or reduce children of migrants' capability set. All the participants belonged to working class families, although some of them had more economic difficulties. Lack of economic resources, mother-headed families, compounded with long working hours, school dropout and being a male, seem to be more common characteristics for those who join youth gangs, resulting in clusters of disadvantage (Wolff and De Shalit, 2007).

The school is considered the main institution to facilitate successful integration of young people with migration background. Education can be a 'fertile functioning' (Wolff and De Shalit, 2007). However, in this study, migrant background students often feel like outsiders, struggle to make friends with natives, and feel discriminated because of their migrant background, which lower their capability of affiliation (Nussbaum, 2000) and capability to participate in education (Vaughan, 2007). Consequently, many of them dropped out resulting in a lower set of capabilities gained through education (Vaughan, 2007) that have lifelong consequences. The major concentration of drop-outs seems to take place in lower secondary school, particularly third and fourth years. Compensatory programs such as adult education and short vocational and training courses seem to be successful in rescuing those students

who had previously abandoned mainstream education. Nonetheless, the number of students with a migration background in institutions offering these remedial courses is disproportionately high, which may result in ghettos.

The family is the first place of socialisation. Many of this research's participants resented the scarcity of time they spend with their parents. This situation is characteristic of economic migrants who have to work in low skilled jobs where workers' rights are often violated. Some researchers estimate that migrant mothers work long hours such as 10 to 16 hours per day in order to support their families (Arellano, 2004; UGT, 2001). In their search for company and attention, i.e. capability of affiliation (Nussbaum, 2000), some of these young people turn to gangs. These gangs offer themselves as a second family, but as we have seen, they often lead to violence and criminality (Delpino Goicochea, 2007; Feixa et al, 2006).

Spanish society's xenophobic attitudes, such as the experiences described by some of the participants, make upward integration more difficult, pushing youth from migrant backgrounds to lower their career expectations and dropout school, worsening their capability set. Many of the participants found support in Latin-American background groups against the subtle and explicit psychological and, in some cases, physical aggressions that they face in their daily lives.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, like every group of friends, they improve the well-being and social cohesion of their constituents (Nolan, 2009); in particular, groups of Latin-American background youths convert the migration stigma into pride. Nevertheless, some of these groups carry out criminal activities becoming criminal gangs. Most of the participants who were serving sentences in juvenile detention institutions had been part of them and they described the brainwashing and violence characteristic of these criminal groups' *modus vivendi*.

## 5 Conclusion

There are structural capability inequalities between migrant descendents and Spanish nationals. Migrants and their descendents are at higher risk of poverty, typically enjoy lower pay and insecure jobs and suffer from discrimination (IOE, 2007). They face a segmented labour market unequally structured on the basis of gender, ethnicity, nationality and social class. The intersections of these axes of oppression result in capability deprivation, becoming key explanatory elements for the trajectories of individual mobility. These trajectories impact their children's development and opportunities, often condemning them to lower levels of well-being and capability sets. The scarce care and attention that parents' long working hours result in, may translate into the children developing low self-esteem, dropping out of school and into criminal activities and often social exclusion; eventually leading to intergenerational transmission of capability deprivation.

The traditional economic perspective on migration needs to take into account the social consequences, paying particular attention to the increasing cases of integration failure. Children of migrants' integration and well-being cannot be separated from their parents'. Despite completing an important part of their socialisation process in Spain, young people of

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Spanish Ombudsman report on school violence, 20% of the migrant background students have been victims of social exclusion among their peers, such as being ignored by their classmates. This percentage is double that of nationals. Likewise, 1.9% have been threatened with weapons, in comparison to 0.4% of nationals. They are also more likely to be victims of verbal aggressions such as being insulted, having derogative nicknames and speaking evil behind their backs. In terms of gender, boys are more likely to suffer more physical aggressions (Defensor del Pueblo, 2007: 153, 156).

migrant background are often discriminated against and excluded from mainstream culture. The capability approach offers the right lens to analyse the life trajectories that led the participants to progress in education, dropout, enrol a remedial program or join an ethnic based violent gang. This research shows how when the integration strategies fail, the resilience or resistance mechanisms developed to create a sense of belonging may lead to downward assimilation and capability deprivation.

Instead of looking at migration as hand labour; social policies need to focus on endowing individuals with adequate resources and real opportunities, i.e., capabilities, both inside and outside the labour market and education system. This would include the creation and maintenance of a suitable environment that promotes multicultural and intercultural understanding, bonding (i.e. in-group trust) and bridging (i.e. cross-cutting contacts, generalised trust), and the full participation of minorities in Spanish society.

Although the current immigration laws and policies emphasise integration as being a dynamic bidirectional process, in reality, the burden of integration falls on immigrants who are expected to assimilate. Media and political discourses portraying immigrants as a burden to social services and, sometimes, as criminals, foster xenophobic images that leave young people of migration background little room for successful integration. Likewise, the spread of practices-such as police ethnic profiling lower young people's trust in public institutions and hinder the sense of belonging to a diverse Spanish society. These barriers to integration often lead to resistance mechanism, such as in-group solidarity, but also to segregation, and downward assimilation into Latin gangs with criminal links.

Therefore Spanish social policies need to take into account migrant families' vulnerable position, paying particular attention to compounded disadvantages inducing lower sets of capabilities, which might turn into social exclusion and capability deprivation. In order to enlarge real opportunities, social policies need to minimise the effect of structural inequalities and intersectional discrimination. Thus, the education system should be a safe and encouraging place where gender, ethnic and social class differences do not translate into unequal substantial opportunities. Education institutions should ensure that both natives and migrant background students socialise, learn about the wealth of diversity, adapt to one another and are able to develop the knowledge and skills that would enable them to fulfil their aspirations.

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