

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2013
MIGRANT WELL-BEING AND DEVELOPMENT

MIGRANT VOICES



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Saving for the future: Peruvian doctor lives and works in Luanda, Angola (South-South)

The street is still muddy from yesterday's rain. In front of the district police headquarters in Bairro Vila Alice in Luanda sits the small clinic where Carlos works as a general physician. Carlos, 32 years old, was born in the city of Trujillo, Peru and migrated two-and-a-half years ago to Angola. After completing medical school in Peru, Carlos worked there for two years as a physician. Through relatives and by chance, he met a Peruvian doctor who had been living in Angola for more than 20 years and was looking to expand his private practice. Although Carlos had never thought about working abroad, he welcomed the opportunity and accepted the assignment.



When Carlos first arrived on the African continent, his assignment was only for one year. However, he chose to extend his contract twice and will soon complete his third year in Angola. "It's a good way to advance my career," he says, "and, with the money saved, we can also make plans for the future – maybe something greater." Carlos notes that living in Angola can be challenging, at times: "Of course, there are the first moments, when you arrive, because of the language barrier, for instance; but then the pollution, the hard task of finding an affordable apartment, and the congestion and transportation problems of Luanda are all little annoyances in the everyday routine." Carlos lives in a good and safe neighbourhood, and says that, in Angola, Peruvian doctors are respected, which has facilitated his integration. Over time, he has managed to make a wide range of friends and contacts, including many Angolans. However, security concerns make it hard to be spontaneous and, as Carlos puts it, "[one's] social life needs to be well organized and all prepared in advance."

Carlos is mainly motivated to remain in Luanda because he enjoys a wide range of responsibilities and a much higher salary than what he would earn in Peru for the same work. This allows him to live comfortably and regularly send money to his family. Carlos is married and the father of a 4-year-old boy. "He was too young for me to bring here. For an adult, it's okay here but, for children, it's more difficult because the sanitary environment and the education are not adequate," says Carlos, confessing that living away from his family is the main difficulty he faces. While the remittances sent home help pay for his family's daily life in Peru, Carlos made the decision to migrate primarily to save for the future and to be able to offer greater opportunities to his son and wife. In Carlos's own words: "We have a child and we must think about his future. By being here, I have achieved some very good objectives, in terms of money and savings."

Technology makes life a bit easier, enabling Carlos to talk to his wife and son every day through a video call. They have only seen each other three times since he moved to Angola. When asked where he would like to be in a few years' time, Carlos's eyes roam around his small desk and land on a picture of his son: "This is a big decision about family reunion. I could go back to Peru for a specialization, I could move to a different country, or I could stay in Angola, but I want to be with my family." Carlos concludes that, while he had never imagined living outside of his country and it has not been easy living away from his loved ones, he doesn't regret his decision to migrate.

Providing for the family at home: Two Sri Lankan women working in Kuwait (South–North)

Dilini, security guard

Dilini, a 30-year-old woman from Sri Lanka who has been working in Kuwait for the past 13 years, left her home country desperate for work. “I am like many who lost their houses because of clashes going on,” she says. Her eldest brother, a police officer, was injured in the fighting and couldn’t work. Her father was too old and her sister too young to have regular employment. “The choice left to me was to try to find overseas work as a housemaid somewhere in the Gulf Cooperation Countries, if this family wanted to survive and have another house to live in,” she explains. She was initially reticent about becoming a security guard – a position that is still not customary for women in Kuwait. “Being a security guard was a little embarrassing for me, at the beginning,” she says, “but compared to the job that I had been doing for 10 years as a housemaid, my current position is much better for my privacy, working hours and income.”

Yet the reality in Kuwait did not live up to Dilini’s hopes: “Work agencies describe living abroad as a heaven of money, but this was not what I found when I arrived in Kuwait,” she said. “I had to work for so many hours to earn \$100 every month” – to have enough money to send back home. Tragedy struck in Sri Lanka with the 2005 tsunami, and Dilini was forced to prolong her stay beyond the initial two-year contract: “The house that I built to accommodate my family away from the Tamil clashes was destroyed, but this time by a tsunami,” she says. “I kept saying ‘one more year then I will go back home’, but things didn’t work out that way.” But she also has “big worries” about no longer fitting in back home. The kind of life she has in Kuwait would not be affordable in Sri Lanka: “I even feel my mentality now is not at all like when I was at home.” She fears that she will grow old without ever getting married: “When I am done in Kuwait, will a loving husband be difficult for me to find?”

Shirmila, domestic help

“I didn’t choose to work abroad but, like many in the village, due to little income and the clashes going on between the Tamils and the government, I had to try the agencies that were sending people abroad for a better income,” says Shirmila, a Sri Lankan woman now working as a domestic helper in Kuwait. The travel process was smooth and the biggest challenges were the language barriers and missing her husband back home. “I was very lucky and worked for a lovely family,” she said. “They helped me a lot to make things easier.”

Shirmila had a terrible shock when visiting home for the first time after seven years away. As she recounts: “I knocked on the door of my dream house – the house that I was building by sending my husband every dollar I could save in Kuwait – and a strange woman opened the door and said she was my husband’s wife! My first thought was: ‘I wish I hadn’t travelled or had the working abroad contract; I’ve lost everything’.” However, now she is thankful for her decision to return to Kuwait: “Thank God I decided to come back to Kuwait and not to give up just because of the house and the husband that I lost.”

After 24 years, she is still in Kuwait and has managed to bring her children over to join her and to find them good jobs. “They are around me all the time,” she says, “and we enjoy being together on weekends with many other community members.” Moreover, she has managed to build a house back in Sri Lanka and to ensure that her grandchildren have a good standard of living.

German graduate student in New York (North–North)

Interested in continuing her education, Vera recently began a Master's degree in film studies at a well-known university in New York. Attracted by the university's strong reputation and the vibrancy of its host city, Vera was also eager to experience living in another culture, particularly in the English-speaking world, hoping it would improve her attractiveness to employers further down the road. Studying in the United States also gave Vera more flexibility in her choice of programmes than she would have had in Germany. Several months into the programme, Vera is happy with her decision to move to the United States. While she admits that, at times, it is tough to be so far from home, she enjoys the academic rigour and intellectual environment and feels she is in the "right place".



The process of getting to the United States, and of gaining admission to such a highly competitive school, required considerable time, effort and money. "It felt like a long, long journey," Vera says. However, she was amazed by the level of support and personalized attention she received from the university and from her professors, even before she arrived.

Vera lives in what is jokingly known as "academic island" – an area of the city densely populated by students. She shares an apartment with students from the United States and says she always feels safe in her neighbourhood. The proximity to her classes and the peacefulness of the neighbourhood, which is dotted with parks, make the area pleasant to live in. Perhaps the nightlife is a little tame, but there is always a subway ride into the city for that. Vera has made several close friends and appreciates how diverse her social group is, with classmates coming from all over the United States and the world. Vera communicates with her family and friends in Germany via Skype, Facebook and letters.

While she enjoys her living situation and the high quality of her education, Vera knows that the opportunity does not come cheap. Even with two scholarships covering her EUR 18,000 annual tuition and more, Vera was obliged to take out a loan and to borrow from her mother to cover her expenses. She also works as a research and teaching assistant at her university, and as a writer for culture magazines in Germany. "I found it a little shocking that, even with scholarships, one could not afford this opportunity," she remarks. Luckily, thus far, Vera has been healthy and has not had to seek medical care; her friends' stories of large bills make her cautious about seeking medical care in the future.

While Vera is thankful for the opportunity and inspired by the high standard of the education she receives, she cannot be sure that the financial risk she has taken will pay off in the end. There is no guarantee of a job when she graduates, particularly as her field of study does not directly lead into a traditional career path. "It's a high risk to take," she admits, but one she is willing to go for. Despite excellent grades, Vera is unsure about her future. Following the completion of her degree, in another year and a half, she is considering pursuing a PhD – in the United States, the United Kingdom, or back in Germany. Asked if she ever plans to settle down in one place, Vera responds that the idea of settling seems "a bit out of date", somehow. "I don't live like that," she says, mentioning that she has also studied in Italy and Berlin. Although settling might not be the answer, for her, Vera understands the appeal. "The idea that I will never have a place that will be home is also very strange to me," she says.

Building a career: Spanish migrant working in Buenos Aires, Argentina (North–South)

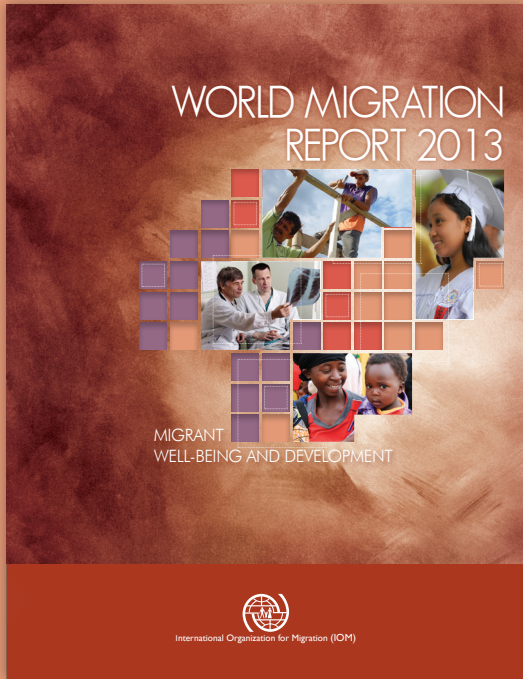
Pablo originally moved to Buenos Aires to pursue a Master's degree in Creative Advertising nearly two years ago, drawn by the city's strong reputation for excellence in his chosen field – in terms of both academic quality and the level of professionals working in marketing and publicity. Additionally, an education in Argentina was much less expensive than a comparable degree in Spain.

After finishing his degree, Pablo decided to remain in Buenos Aires to pursue professional opportunities. At first, he found it very difficult to find a job without his residency permit and he was obliged to intern in several companies in order to boost his qualifications. Eventually, after quite a struggle, Pablo was hired by a multinational company that provided him with the necessary documents to gain temporary residence for one year, with the possibility of extension.

Pablo loves his job as a creative editor, saying he is 100 per cent satisfied. While there are few differences between working in Spain and Argentina, Pablo observes that, in Argentina, people work longer hours because of their strong drive to earn bonuses and move ahead in their careers. When asked if it is his ideal work, Pablo half-jokingly responds that the perfect job would be in the open air – for instance, as an instructor of surfing or some high-risk sport – but that what he has is second best. Pablo lives within his means, saying he cannot afford to waste too much, but he has enough for food, housing and leisure time. In Spain, Pablo remarks, it is impossible to have economic independence and, in this sense, his situation has improved since the move.

Pablo lives in the small Chinatown area in the north of Buenos Aires and feels comfortable and safe in his community. Many of his neighbours are also young immigrants from Spain, which helps to create a supportive network. While Pablo feels welcome in Argentina, he is aware that it is not the same for all nationalities. While Pablo's girlfriend is from Argentina, his closest friends are mainly Chilean and Spanish, and he feels an especially close bond with other Spanish people. He likes the sociable, out-going nature of Argentineans most of all but says this can be too much, sometimes, as well!

Pablo is satisfied with the health care available to him in Buenos Aires and reports being healthy. He appreciates the professional opportunities available to him and the high quality of his working environment. He enjoys getting to know people from all over Latin America and the world, and appreciates the proximity of places such as Brazil and Peru, which would be very hard to visit from Spain. The most challenging thing about living abroad is being far from his family and friends in Spain: "You become a little more guarded, a little cold," he says. However, Pablo is happy with his life and with his decision to move, although he says the move is only temporary. In the future, he sees himself returning to Spain and living in Barcelona.



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