Háskólinn á Akureyri
University of Akureyri

Home for kin or career?

Exploring return migration of Icelandic citizens

Hjördís Guðmundsdóttir

Félagsvísindadeild
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90 eininga lokaverkefni
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Ágrip

Alþjóðlegir fólksflutningar hafa betra spágildi fyrir mannfjöldabreytingar í hátekjuríkjum en frjósemi og dánartíðni. Á undanförnum árum hefur aukin athygli beinst að snúbúum – einstaklingum sem snúið hafa heim aftur eftir dvöl erlendis. Þessi ritgerð fjallar um íslenska snúbúa. Rannsóknin byggir á nýlegum gögnum úr könnun á byggðarfestu og búsetuánægju Íslendinga og rýnir í einkenni þeirra sem flust hafa búferlum erlendis og snúið heim aftur samanborið við þá sem ekki hafa búið erlendis á fullorðinsárum. Framkvæmdar voru fimm tvíkosta aðhvarfsgreiningar til að meta líkurnar á flutningshvötunum atvinnumöguleikar á Íslandi, nálægð við vini og fjölskyldu, þátttaka í íslensku samfélagi, að njóta íslenskrar náttúru og ósk um að ala upp börnin á Íslandi. Niðurstöðurnar sýna mun á milli kynja varðandi ástæður endurkomu til Íslands. Helstu ástæður endurkomu kvenna eru uppeldi barna á Íslandi og löngun til að vera nær vinum og fjölskyldu, en karlar voru líklegri til að nefna atvinnumöguleika á Íslandi sem ástæðu heimkomu. Einnig gefa niðurstöður til kynna að snúbúar hafi hærri menntunarstig en þau sem ekki hafa búið erlendis og hlutfallslega fleiri snúbúar eru búsettir á höfuðborgarsvæðinu en utan þess. Þörf er á frekari rannsóknum á hlutfalli karla og kvenna sem snúa heim vegna eigin atvinnumöguleika í samanburði við atvinnumöguleika maka síns. Umræðan um snúbúa á erindi við íslenskt samfélag því að afskekkt land eins og Ísland getur ekki boðið upp á sömu möguleika til menntunar og fjölmennari lönd. Íslenskt samfélag stólar því að miklu leyti á að Íslendingar flytji erlendis til náms og sérhæfingar. Hátt endurkomuhlutfall Íslendinga hefur skapað grundvöll fyrir félagslegar og

efnahagslegar framfarir þar sem alþjóðleg færni, þekking og reynsla hefur reynst þjóðinni til hagsbóta.

Abstract

International migration is a stronger factor for population changes in high-income countries than fertility and mortality. Recent years have seen an increased attention directed towards return migration – the homecoming of international migrants. This thesis explores return migration of Icelandic citizens. Using recent survey data, the thesis analyses the characteristics of returnees compared to those who have not lived abroad in adulthood. Five logistic regression models were constructed for the following migration drivers: employment opportunities, proximity to friends and family, participation in Icelandic society, enjoyment of Icelandic nature, and child rearing in Iceland. The findings suggest a different trend for men and women. The main driving forces of return migration for Icelandic women are child rearing in Iceland and the wish to be closer to friends and family, whereas men more men considered employment opportunities as a reason for their return. The returnees have a higher educational background than not returnees and proportionally more returnees live in the capital region than not returnees. Those living in the western part of Reykjavík are likelier to consider employment opportunities as a return factor and less likely to consider child rearing as a return factor compared to those residing in other towns in Iceland. A gap in knowledge identified in the study is the gender dimension of the employment factor, i.e. the proportion of men and women returnees who returned for their own employment opportunities versus for their spouse's. Return migration is an important topic in the Icelandic context because a remote country with a small population like Iceland cannot offer the same

variety of education and training as more populous countries. Iceland thus depends on Icelandic citizens migrating for specialisation and the high rate of return migration in Iceland has paved the road for social and economic prosperity because skills, knowledge and experience acquired abroad have been brought back to benefit the nation.

Preface

This thesis is a 90 ECTS dissertation for Masters of Arts by Research in Social Sciences offered by University of Akureyri. My professor and supervisor Þóroddur Bjarnason suggested the topic of return migration. I was not particularly familiar with the topic at the time but have since developed a profound interest in migration processes, their driving forces and especially the gender dimensions therein.

I received a grant from the Icelandic Regional Development Institute (Byggðastofnun) for the thesis.

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1 Introduction

International migration is a stronger factor than fertility and mortality for population changes in high-income countries (Azose & Raftery, 2019; McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). It is estimated that the global minimum migration flow is between 34 and 46 million migration events for each time period from 1990-1995 and 2010-2015 and of those, approximately one in four is a return migration event (Azose & Raftery, 2019). As reported by the International Organisation for Migration (2024), there were approximately 281 million international migrants in 2020, which means that approximately 1 in every 30 people worldwide is a migrant (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). In 2023, over 6.5 million foreign nationals migrated permanently into the OECD countries along with 2.1 million new international students (OECD, 2024).

According to the *Annual report on intra-EU labour mobility 2023*, 859.000 EU citizens of working age (20-64 years old) moved to another EU/EFTA member state in 2021, and 656.000 movers in the same age range returned to their EU/EFTA country of origin. This giving an estimated ratio to EU nationals leaving their country of origin in 2020 of 83 per cent. The ratio of return (returnees per 100 movers within the EU/EFTA region) varies across the EU, for example, the ratio of return of those above 20 years old in 2020 was 66 in Germany, 58 in Sweden and 38 in Italy (European Commission: Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al., 2024). Returning of citizens is important for social and economic integrity and development, returnees often bring back new skills, social networks and financial assets benefiting to the home country (Dustmann & Kirchkamp, 2002; Wahba, 2014).

In the context of Iceland, this topic is important because a remote country with a small population cannot offer the same variety of education and training as more populous countries. Consequently, Iceland depends on Icelandic citizens migrating for specialisation and skills acquisition but more importantly, it depends on Icelanders to migrate back to Iceland at a working age.

The rate of return of Icelandic citizens is relatively high. Cumulative rate of return refers to the proportion of those who return after a stay abroad within a given timeframe. Statistics Iceland sets this timeframe to 7 years. The rate of return of Icelandic citizens is 79% for men and 78.2% for women, with an average stay of 2.4 years abroad, for both men and women (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009). A study by Harðarson (2010) included the number of graduates in a multiple regression analysis on out-migration of Icelandic citizens. The findings implied that a large part of Icelandic emigrants originally out-migrated to pursue higher education, and there was a strong relationship between the number of registered students and the number of out-migrating Icelanders three years later. The same study investigated explanatory factors of in-migration of Icelandic citizens. According to their models, the relationship between immigrated and emigrated Icelanders to and from Iceland is largely explained by the number of emigrants in the previous years (Harðarson, 2010). The rate of return of Icelandic citizens is highest for those who migrated to another Nordic country, 84.2% and lowest for those who left for North America, 59.1%. Calculations by the National Statistics Office show that the quantity index of gross domestic product has a positive effect on in-migration and that the ratio of registered unemployment to annual jobs has a negative effect (Harðarson, 2010). This is in line with the literature on economic approaches to migration and return migration, which sees migration largely driven by cost-benefit evaluations of the individual or household units (e.g.,

Dustmann, 1996; Harris & Todaro, 1970; Wahba, 2014). However, academic literature from other disciplines suggests that the decisions to return migrate back to the homeland are of a more complex nature than economic costs and benefits.

Although employment is an important driver of return migration, studies show that proximity to family is also an important factor in the decision-making, including caring for elderly parents or relatives, and wishing to bring up children in the familiar environment of home (e.g. Carling, Mortensen, & Wu, 2011; A. Constant & Massey, 2002; Epstein & Gang, 2006; Gmelch, 1980; King & Kuschminder, 2022b; Ni Laoire, 2008). The aim of the thesis is to explore the reasons behind the high rate of return of Icelandic citizens. Using survey data with over 9500 responders, the study investigates the characteristics of returnees in Iceland and investigates factors associated with economic and social drivers of return migration in the Icelandic context. The guiding research questions of the thesis are:

- How do characteristics such as sex, age and education influence the odds of returning for social or economic reasons?
- Does geographical location influence the probability of the individual migration drivers? Is there an urban-rural divide?
- Do the reasons for return migration to Iceland differ between men and women?

In the thesis, return migrants are defined as Icelandic citizens who grew up entirely in Iceland, lived abroad for one year or longer and migrated back to Iceland. The study will analyse the drivers of return migration in Iceland by sex, level of education, marital status, age at the time of return and current residence in Iceland. The thesis contributes to knowledge by analysing these factors associated with return migration drivers, which has not been investigated on this scale before.

The data analysis is based on a dataset from a 2019-2020 survey from the research project *Residential Stability and Migration* (Búferlaflutningar og byggðafesta) conducted in the capital region and larger settlements in Iceland, specifically targeting migration drivers, motivations and intentions. The thesis received a grant from Byggðastofnun, Icelandic Regional Development Institute.

The thesis is divided into 7 chapters. The following chapter offers a conceptualisation of return migration and a short presentation on the main theoretical approaches. Chapter 3 introduces the survey and the methodology of this thesis. Chapter 4 explores descriptive statistics and chapter 5 presents the multivariate results. Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the findings and chapter 7 concludes.

2 Theoretical foundations

This chapter reviews the main literature on the concept of return migration. This literature review focuses on voluntary migration, i.e. migration that was initiated by the migrant and not political authorities. Forced migration, involuntary migration, repatriation or other cases where the migration event was not initiated by the migrant but by the authorities are excluded from this review. The thesis is on return migration of Icelandic citizens who were brought up in Iceland and assumes that both the initial out-migration and the return migration events were voluntary.

2.1 Conceptualising return migration

Return migration is a relatively recent concept, because up until the 20th century, migration was assumed to be permanent, a one-way move (Gmelch, 1980). For over a century, scholars from diverse disciplines have investigated the driving forces of international migration, the characteristics of those who move, and the implications and effects of economic landscapes, globalisation and social development on migration and migrant experiences. Return migration is a little more complex to investigate because in addition to the questions on motives for migration and self-selection for the first migration event, scholars studying return migration to investigate the motives for the return to the homeland and the characteristics of those who return. Return migration is a complex concept to define because it necessarily includes both *time* and *space* and both are fluid concepts (Battistella, 2018; Cassarino, 2004; King & Kuschminder, 2022b; OECD, 2023; Pauli, 2021; Tsuda, 2018). The

concept of *space* in the context of return migration refers to the spatial movement of migration back to the geographical *starting point*. The question remains how narrowly or widely that *starting point* should be defined; whether it is a country, region or a village, and whose starting point it is, should it include students, seasonal workers or second generation of migrants. The concept of *time* in the context of return migration regards the minimum and/or maximum timeframe between the two migration events. But it can also refer to a return to a time in the past, to the memory of a place called home prior to the migration event. Touching upon the history of the field of return migration to understand how its conceptualisation has evolved since the early days. *The Sociology of Return Migration* by Bovenkerk (1974) is considered one the first systematic review of return migration (King & Kuschminder, 2022b).

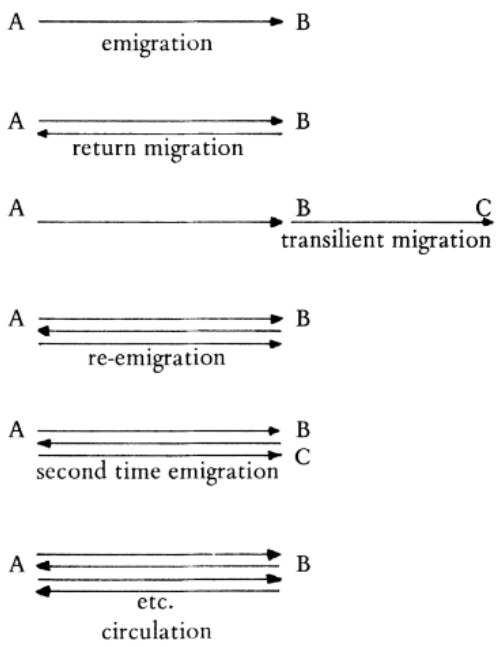

Figure 1 Conceptualising return migration as proposed by Bovenkerk. Source of figure: Bovenkerk (1974), p. 5

Bovenkerk (1974, p. 5) criticised the "terminological labyrinth" in the studies of migration and suggested the following definition of return migration:

> when people return after emigration for the first time to their country (or region) of origin, then and only then we will use the term *return migration* (Bovenkerk, 1974, p. 5).

By "then and only then", Bovenkerk is referring to his proposed series of concepts capturing various types of migration, shown in Figure 1. His definition of return migration thus only applies when migrants permanently return to their country (or region) after the first migration event, as Figure 1 illustrates in the 2nd row. The figure also offers insight into the complexities of defining different types of migration events. Another influential work is *Return Migration* by the anthropologist George Gmelch (1980, p. 136). "Perhaps reflecting the subject´s recent emergence as an area of inquiry, there has been much terminological sloppiness" he writes, before defining return migration as:

> the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle (Gmelch, 1980, p. 136).

Neither Bovenkerk nor Gmelch include a notion of time or timeframe in their definitions on return migration. Regarding the question of *space*, return commonly refers to a movement to a place of origin, to the point where one started. But as discussed, *country of origin* and *homeland* are ambiguous concepts. A. F. Constant (2020a) attempts to include a definition of homeland in her conceptualisation of return migration as:

> the relocation of first or higher generations from a country that is the host country of the first generation or one´s immigrant ancestors to the

> birth and citizenship country of the first generation/ancestors planning to stay for more than one year (A. F. Constant, 2020a, p. 4).

The above definition of return migration captures time and space and answers both questions on *whose* return and returning to *where*. This definition also acknowledges that return migration is not necessarily a permanent move because all voluntary migration decisions and considerations are fluid and open to change (Carling & Erdal, 2014; Pauli, 2021; Tsuda, 2018). Furthermore, return migration can also be considered imaginary, thus intersecting the two concepts of *time* and *space* where migrants´ past, present and future perspectives meet (Erdal, 2017). As A. F. Constant (2020a, p. 4) puts it "Nostalgia and the fantasy about returning to the homeland are an integral part of immigrants' life". Outside of the academic context, *Glossary on Migration* published by the International Migration Law Series from the International Organisation for Migration defines return migration (in the context of international migration) as:

> the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border (International Organization for Migration, 2019, p. 186).

Defining return migration is the foundation for investigating the concept but measuring return migration and its drivers is a challenge due to the administrative hindrances of national registries. While national registries keep an account of in-migration, and some host countries might observe out-migration, host countries rarely keep records of the destination of the out-migrants which would be necessary to separate the return migrants from other or onward migrants (Bovenkerk, 1974; Wahba, 2014). Quantitative research and estimates on return migration are thus limited to indirect

measure such as longitudinal survey data or repeat consensus to estimate the out-migration rates based on the year of arrival, or administrative data linking immigration and tax records. This kind of data is only available in very few countries (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007; Wahba, 2014).

Another challenge with analysing social and economic impact of return migration is the double self-selection bias. Self-selection bias in the migration literature refers to the attributes of those who choose to migrate compared to those who choose to stay. These attributes can be observable, such as level of education, or unobservable, such as productivities. In the words of Borjas and Bratsberg (1994, p. 1) "Much of the empirical evidence about the economic impact of immigration reported in the literature is contaminated by the nonrandom nature of the outmigration decision". They analysed out-migration of immigrants from the United States by combining 1980 U.S. Census data with microdata from the Immigration service. Their findings suggest that positively selected immigration flow is associated with negatively selected return migration, and negatively selected immigration flow is associated with positively selected return migration. Their key finding was that GDP per capita in the home country was the main determinant of out-migration of immigrants, i.e. return migration flow was higher to economically affluent countries (Borjas and Bratsberg, 1994).

Rooth and Saarela (2007) describe the migration selection model as such that migrants are negatively selected on unobservable traits if the home country has greater income inequality (and vice versa), and negatively selected on observable traits if those have higher returns in the home country (and vice versa). This also holds true for return migration, implying that where migrants are negatively selected on observable traits like education, those returning are the "best of the worst", and vice versa. On average, economic migrants appear

to have unobservable traits or qualities that distinguish them from those who choose to stay in the home country and not migrate. For example, more ambitious or entrepreneurial, which favours economic outcomes such as wages and employment rates (Chiswick, 1999; A. F. Constant, 2020b; Eliasson, Nakosteen, Westerlund, & Zimmer, 2014). Return migration thus suffers from double self-selection bias, first those who migrate from country of origin to abroad, and again those who return migrate. This is important to keep in mind when investigating the potential impact of the migration experience on wages, attitudes or social behaviour of returnees upon return, because the selection bias implies that the differences between returnees and not returnees could be caused by the unobservable traits instead of the migration experience.

Return migration has reached the interest of scholars from a wide range of academic backgrounds, such as economists, anthropologists, psychologists and geographers and diverse typologies of return migration have been proposed to explore the types of return migrants, the drivers of different return migration events, return intentions and processes therein (for systematic overviews see for example: Bilecen, 2022; Carling et al., 2011; Cassarino, 2004; A. F. Constant, 2020b; King & Kuschminder, 2022b; Kunuroglu, Van de Vijver, & Yagmur, 2016; Mohamed & Abdul-Talib, 2020; Pauli, 2021; Stark, 2019). A person´s first emigration event, from home country to host country, is most often motivated by economic incentives, such as income or the acquisition of skills expected to increase future income, whereas return (and repeat and circulation) migration appears to be equally driven by non-economic factors (Baas, 2015; A. F. Constant, 2020b). According to neoclassical economic theories, migration decisions are exclusively based on the individual's financial benefits from the migration. The individual is seen as the rational person and the rational person makes a logical decision to migrate

to maximise the expected value of the total salary. As a result, a person only decides to return when wages and other economic conditions are below this expectation, i.e. because the person failed to maximise the financial benefits of the migration (Cassarino, 2004; A. Constant & Massey, 2002; De Haas, Fokkema, & Fihri, 2015; Smoliner, Förschner, Hochgerner, & Nová, 2012).

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) adds family dimensions to the neoclassical economic theories of migration. They recognise that migration decisions are not necessarily taken at the individual level, but often includes the household or even the extended family. They also recognise that the rationale behind the migration decision is not solely based on maximising income, but also risk aversion, skills acquisition and the diversification of income (Cassarino, 2004; King, 2013; Taylor, 1999). In contrast to the neoclassical economic approach to return migration, which by definition is only led by the failure to maximise income, the New economics of labour migration views return migration as a sign of success, where the migrant achieved the goal of accumulating savings, acquiring skills, etc. (Cassarino, 2004; King, 2013).

The structural approach to return migration is also concerned with the classification of success versus failure of the migration, and like the neoclassical economic approach and the new economics of labour, the structural approach also focuses on the economic determinants of return migration. However, instead of viewing migration as a single, individual entity, the structural approach recognises the role of the social and institutional context in the home country (Cassarino, 2004; King & Kuschminder, 2022b; Kunuroglu et al., 2016). The first main attempts to propose a typology of return migration were by Cerase (1974) and Bovenkerk (1974). Cerase studied south Italian migrants returning after a period in the U.S. His typology had four

categories; return of conservatism, i.e. those who emigrated to accumulate savings and always intended to return, often to buy a piece of land; return of innovation, i.e. those who adjusted well to the host society and returned home with new ideas and traits to drive social change; return of retirement, i.e. those who return to retire; and return of failure, i.e. failure to adjust (Cerase, 1974). Bovenkerk (1974) published a bibliographic essay on existing literature on return migration and classifying them by types of return. Gmelch (1980) developed these further into a composite typology. In his work *Return Migration,* he notes that previous studies on return migration mainly focus on migrants´ intended length of stay and motivations for the return migration, and like Bovenkerk, he assumes that the return migration is a permanent move. Both of these scholars make a distinction between temporary and permanent migration ambitions of the first migration event. Gmelch´s composite typology is as follows:

1. Returnees who intended a temporary migration period abroad, usually to achieve a certain goal, such as completing education or saving up a certain sum.
2. Returnees who intended a permanent migration but were forced to return due to external factors, such as family situation in the home country, or the employment situation in the host country.
3. Returnees who intended a permanent migration but chose to return, often because of homesickness or failure to adjust to the new society (Gmelch, 1980, p. 138).

Both the neoclassical economic approach and the new economics of labour align with the typology of Gmelch (1980) described above. These approaches assume that the migration event is motivated by a single goal, although the neoclassical approach limits that goal to economic incentives alone (and a return signifying a failure of achieving that goal). The Structural approach adds the dimension of external factors influencing the decision to return, such as

family at home and employment opportunities. The structural approach has been criticised for viewing migrants as mere units of labour, or in the words of King and Kuschminder: "periphery-to-core migration and core-to-periphery return are elements of the reproduction of global spatial inequality and of the subservient dependency of the peripheral, less-developed countries on the economic hegemony of the global North, including the oil-rich states of the Gulf" (King & Kuschminder, 2022b, p. 6).

The transnationalist approach to migration developed in the early 90´s, when a group of social scientists observed social networking behaviour of migrants in the city of New York. The groups of migrants, originally from The Philippines, the eastern Caribbean and Haiti, demonstrated complex trans-border social networking and identities through their participation in social affairs of their home country, whilst present in New York. These included financial support to their home town, meetings with politicians from their home country and organised meetings with other migrants from “home” (Cassarino, 2004; Kunuroglu et al., 2016; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). The transnationalist approach describes such migrants as those who "develop and maintain multiple relations -familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political that span borders" and those who "take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Schiller et al., 1992, p. 1). Transnationalism accounts for the social and economic ties migrants have, both to their home and host countries, and thus acknowledges the complex experiences and relationships of migrants, who might be fully integrated into their host society yet constantly longing for home (Erdal, 2017; King & Kuschminder, 2022a; Schiller et al., 1992).

Whereas transnationalism offers a more holistic approach to migration by considering the individual social and economic factors influencing, enabling and constraining migration and return migration, the motives for migration and return migration alike are commonly categorised into individually based "pull-push" factors. In migration, pull factors refer to attracting forces of a place of origin and/or destination, and push factors refer to the repelling forces. Everett S. Lee (1966) introduced the pull-push theory of migration, based on individual choice. Lee's theory is also based on the individual's cost-benefit analysis when deciding on migration, but according to Lee, financial benefit is only one of many factors that influence location choice.

Figure 2 (Lee, 1966, p. 50) explains Lee's theory, where the symbols +, –, and 0 represent the advantages, disadvantages, and neutral aspects of the origin and expected destination. Salary expectations are then only one factor among many that influence the individual's choice and there are different variables behind +, – and 0 at the place of origin and destination, or in the context of return migration, the host-country and homeland, for every individual (Lee, 1966, image source 2: ibid p. 50). Furthermore, what is a push factor for one, can be a pull factor for another. Proximity to family would be a good example in the field of return migration. Wishing to be closer to family

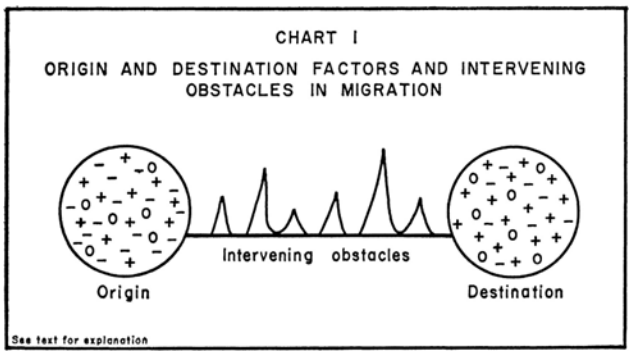

Figure 2: Lee´s push pull model. Source of figure: Lee, 1966, p. 50.

or the community is a frequently mentioned pull factor to home countries (A. F. Constant, 2020a; Gibson & McKenzie, 2011; Gmelch, 1980; Ni Laoire, 2008) whereas family and community can also be a push factor from the home country, for example because of gossip (Carling, 2024; Johannesdottir, Bjarnason, Stockdale, & Haartsen, 2021) or expected traditional gender roles (e.g. Curran and Saguy, 2001; King and Kuschminder, 2022a; Morokvaśic, 1984). Motives for return migration are usually measured by pull factors of the homeland (Gmelch, 1980) but Lee´s theory can also be applied in a wider context, where the contrasts + and − are increasingly obvious and affect all individuals relatively equally, for example war and peace.

2.2 Return migration and gender

Until the 70s, migration studies saw men as the migrants, and women as their accompanying family (Bircan & Yilmaz, 2023; Donato, Gabaccia, Holdaway, Manalansan IV, & Pessar, 2006; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Morokvaśic, 1984; Nawyn, 2010; Pedraza, 1991; Sandell, 1977). Research assumed that both decision-making power and economic activity was by men and little focus has been placed on gender and migration besides sex aggregation of migration statistics. A descriptive example of the vision of women in migration studies is a quote from Everett Lee (1966, p. 51) influential paper on his pull and push theory "Indeed not all persons who migrate reach that decision themselves. Children are carried along by their parents, willy-nilly, and wives accompany their husbands though it tears them away from environments they love". As Nawyn (2010) argues:

> What feminist migration scholars have made clear is that gender is more than an individual-level binary category ascribed at birth. In fact, some feminist scholars would argue that gender is not an individual characteristic at all. It is, rather, a system of power

> relations that permeates every aspect of the migration experience. One cannot understand the opportunities or barriers to migrate, nor the economic upward mobility of some and the downward mobility of others, nor the desire to settle or return, without understanding how migrants are embedded in a gendered system of relations, with one another and with macro-structures such as global labor markets or states (Nawyn, 2010, p. 760).

The number of scholarly articles with a focus on gender in return migration is limited and even the words "women" or "gender" are a rare find in the academic texts. As King and Kuschminder (2022a, p. 53) put it, "if we examine the literature on return migration, we discover that gender is given scant attention". In their chapter *Gendering return migration* they summarise the existing body of research related to gender and return migration and observe a consistent trend that women are less interested in returning than men. They present a heuristic model and suggest that:

> Women are reluctant to return-migrate because they feel emotionally closely linked to their children and the latter´s wellbeing and are unwilling to sacrifice whatever empowerment they have achieved through earning an income and absorbing some of the gender-equality norms and behaviours of the host society (King & Kuschminder, 2022a, p. 56).

This quote represents well how the existing literature on gendered return migration typically assumes a greater degree of gender equality in the host country and a more conservative setting in the home culture, meaning that women are expected to return to fewer (or none) economic opportunities and face a greater degree of gender discrimination and inequality. In their systematic literature on gendered migration patterns, Anastasiadou, Sanlitürk, de Valk, & Zagheni (2024) note that historically, South to North migration has been of greater interest of migration scholars. Their literature review reveals

that within the scope of gender and migration, the most studied countries of origin are Global South countries, while Global North countries are the most studied destination countries (Anastasiadou et al., 2024).

This thesis is on motives for return migration in Iceland. Since 2009, Iceland has ranked 1st in the Global Gender Gap Index and is the only economy to have closed over 90% of its gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2024). While Iceland´s top rank in international measures of gender equality does not signify that there is no reason for gender analysis in the Icelandic context, it does mean that the sacrifice of income and *gender-equality norms* are not likely to apply to Icelandic women when deciding to return migrate to Iceland. Lundström (2014, 2017) has addressed the main-streaming of the migrant as the *racialised figure* in public discourse, the media and the academia, where the migrant is seen as "non-privileged, nonwhite, non-western subject" (Lundström, 2017, p. 79). The lack of literature on "white" migrants is one representation of this *racionalisation* of the migrant.

2.3 Migration of Icelanders

Between 870 and 930, Norse and Kelts migrated to Iceland with their families, livestock and slaves to settle down (e.g., Karlsson, 2020; Thorarinsson, 1961). Between 1262 and 1918 Iceland was a colony, first of Norway and then of Denmark and developed into peasant society. Agriculture and traditional farming was the main industry, 87% of the population was employed in agriculture at the end of the 18th century and a century later, 66% were still employed in agriculture (Magnusson, 1998). Out-migration of the Icelandic-born population was minimal throughout the centuries. In the latter half of the 19th century the large out-migration to North America started. Like elsewhere in Europe, most of those who migrated from Iceland to America were escaping poverty and lack of opportunities. It is estimated that in the period of 1870-

1914, around 23% of the Icelandic population emigrated to North America. Of those, 50.7% were women, which is considered high relative to the emigration rates of the other Nordic countries in this period. The proportion of single women in Iceland at the time was high and it is therefore assumed that the proportion of the emigrated Icelandic women was also high (Matthíasdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2016).

In the following period, emigration of Icelanders remained relatively stagnant until the late 60s, when the herring stock collapsed followed by unemployment and severe economic recession. Consequently, Icelanders started leaving the country again, this time the migration flow was mainly to the Nordic countries and Australia. The returnees began to emigrate back in early 1970s, and since then the rate of returns of Icelanders has remained relatively high (Garðarsdóttir, 2012; Hagstofa Íslands, 2009). Temporary migration to foreign countries for education or employment is now a common practice among Icelandic citizens and the rate of out-migration of Icelanders is considerably higher than citizens of the other Nordic countries; 10-12 out of every 1000 Icelandic citizens moved abroad per year in 1990-2010. The second

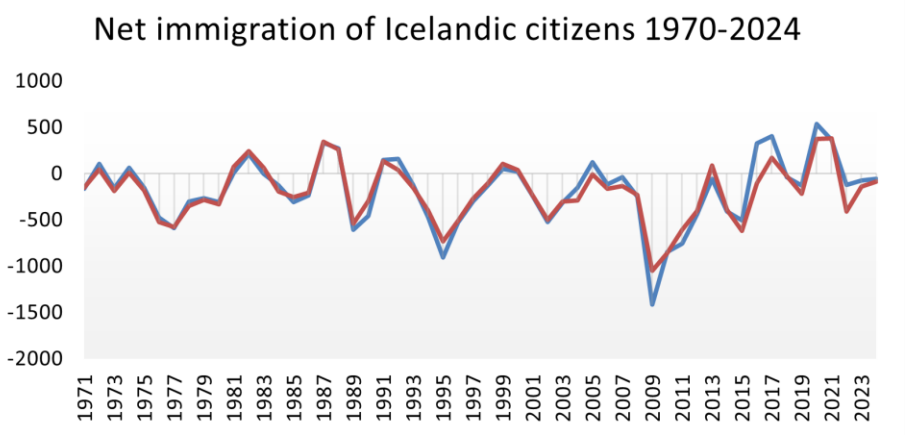

Figure 3 Net migration of Icelandic citizens. Data from Statistics Iceland (2025b).

highest rate of out-migration in the Nordic countries in the same period was Denmark with 5 citizens out-migrating per year (Garðarsdóttir, 2012). According to the National Registry, on 1. December 2024, there were 325.504 Icelandic citizens living in Iceland, and 50.923 Icelandic citizens living abroad. Over 60% of those were living in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Þjóðskrá Íslands, 2025). Figure 3 (Statistics Iceland, 2025b) shows the net migration of Icelandic men and women in the past 50 years. The graph shows that net migration of women and net migration of men is very similar, except in the year following the 2008 economic crisis. Male-dominated work industries such as construction and banking were hit harder at the start, resulting in greater unemployment rates for men. The profile of Icelandic citizens who out-migrated in 2009 was different to the previous years, with a higher proportion of men migrating without their spouse, and a higher average age for both men and women (Harðarson, 2010).

Figure 4 (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009, p. 5) shows the cumulative migration rate for both Icelandic and foreign immigrants to Iceland in the years 1986-2008 (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009, p. 5). In this analysis, conducted by Statistics Iceland in 2009, returnees were defined according to their registration in the country, i.e. immigrants were divided into two groups; new registrations in Iceland and those who were already on records (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009).

According to the study, half of emigrated Icelandic citizens return within four years, as shown in the figure below.

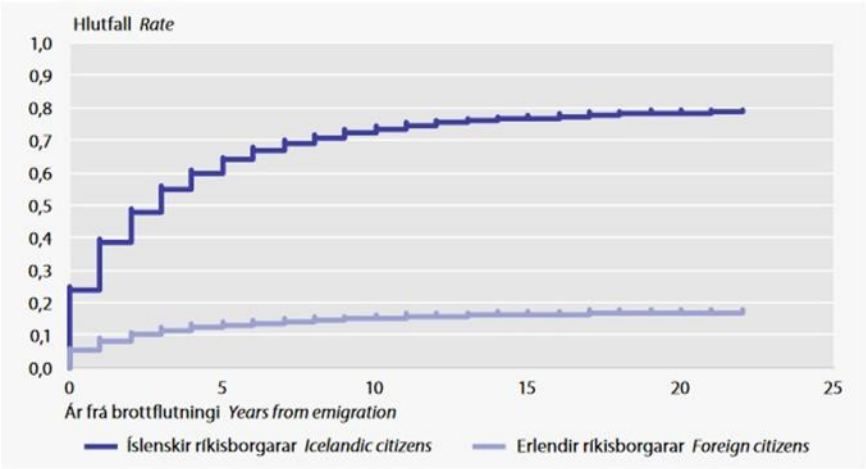

Figure 4 Accumulated rate of return 1986-2008. Source of figure: Hagstofa Íslands (2009, p. 5)

Iceland has seen a great population growth in the past century and the distribution of the population is heavily skewed to the capital region. As employment in agriculture diminished, the fishing industry emerged as the most important new source of employment. Small coastal settlements and villages formed in the 19th century around fishing and fish processing as people moved from farms to the coast for employment. The instability of the fishing stocks and the industrialisation of the vessel fleet and fish processing industry throughout the 20th century led to further influx of people to the capital region (Magnússon, 1998).

The population of the capital region from 1911 to 2025 in figure 5 shows the volume of internal migration towards Reykjavík over the past 110 years. The population gains in the capital region during the 20th century are largely explained by internal migration of Icelanders and high fertility rates of Icelandic women kept the population growth at healthy levels. However,

foreign immigration is the leading factor for the population growth in the 21st century (Bjarnason, Jóhannesdóttir and Garðarsdóttir, 2022).

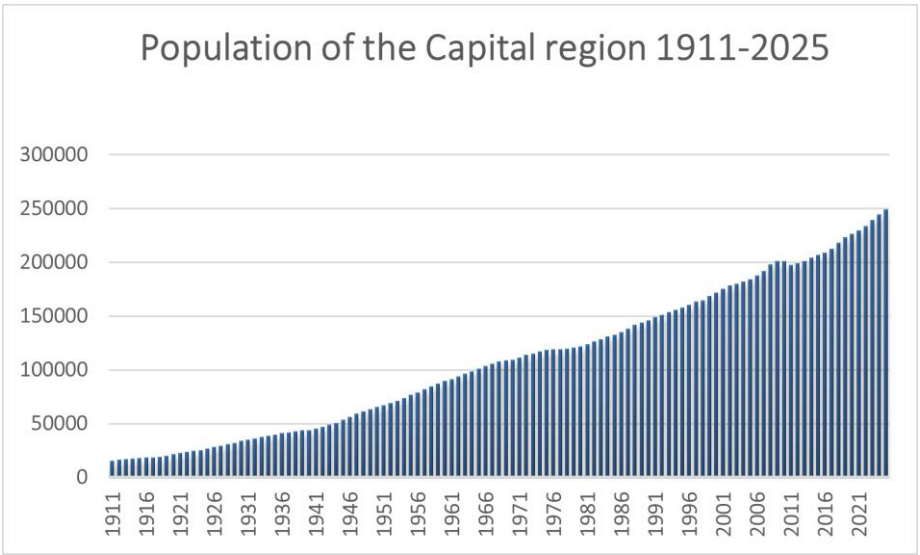

Figure 5: Population of the Capital region 1911-2025. Data from Statistics Iceland (2025a; 2025c; 2025d).

3 Data and Methodology

This chapter introduces the dataset this thesis is based on, the definition of returnee status applied in the thesis and the main variables used to identify returnees. I also discuss the statistical methodology applied to investigate these factors.

3.1 The research project Residential Stability and Migration

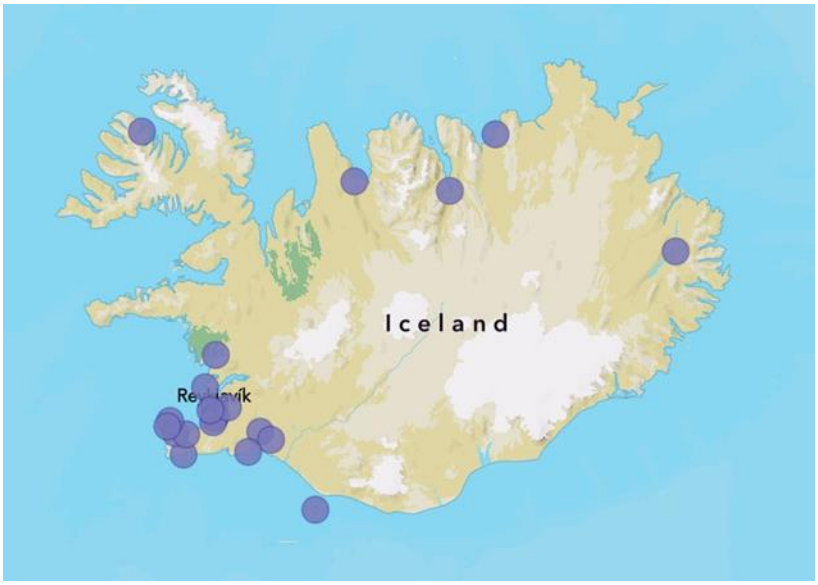

Figure 6: Geographical distribution of the sample

This study is based on data from the research project Residential Stability and Migration (Byggðafesta og búferlaflutningar), led by Thóroddur Bjarnason (2019; 2021) in cooperation with the Icelandic Rural Development Institute (Byggðastofnun) and different universities, both domestic and foreign. The aim

of the research project was to increase knowledge on domestic migration patterns, migration intentions, and drivers of migration in Iceland. The objectives were, among others, to analyse the effects of education, employment, access to services, etc. on migration choices of the population in Iceland. The project collected data through surveys conducted between 2019-2020. The project covered the whole of Iceland, with three different samples and three different questionnaires, divided by types of settlements; the capital region and bigger towns, smaller settlements and villages, and farms. This thesis is based on the data collected from the capital region and bigger towns.

The survey was sent out by e-mail through the commercial survey company Maskina to all residents in the capital region and bigger towns. Additional samples had to be taken in certain postcodes to reach the minimum response rate, including phone calls and text messages with a link to the survey. Figure 5 shows the geographical location of the participating towns. The survey was conducted from 28. October to 15. December 2020. The total number of responses was 9664, which represents 4% of the registered population 18 years and older in the places covered by the survey (Bjarnason, 2022; Bjarnason et al., 2021).

All statistical analysis in this thesis was conducted with the software Stata 17. All data analysis, including the results estimates in the empirical analysis, are reported using raw data, i.e. without the use of weights. The age distribution of the sample is slightly skewed towards the older cohorts, however this is bypassed by focusing on age at the time of the return to Iceland. Regarding geographical distribution, the sample already over-represents localities outside of the capital region. The descriptive statistics for the study variables, including geographical locations, is shown in table 1. The table shows the proportional distribution by returnee status.

3.2 Defining return migration

For this study I adopt the broad definition of Gmelch (1980, p. 136), which defines return migration as *the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle*. This definition is inclusive and can be applied to any migrant resettling to Iceland regardless of motivations, migration history or future migration intentions. Thus in this thesis, *returnee* applies to those who:

- have lived abroad for 1 year or longer in adulthood, and
- grew up entirely in Iceland

To identify return migrants, I constructed 3 new binary variables for each place of geographical location at the time of the survey. The variables are:

1. Having lived abroad: for at least 1 year, or not
2. Place of upbringing: grew up entirely in Iceland, or not
3. Combination of both to determine returnee status: Lived abroad for at least 1 year and grew up entirely in Iceland

To identify those who had lived abroad in adulthood, I used the question *Have you lived abroad?* which had the answer options of *Yes* and *No*. The question was followed by *For how long did you live abroad?*. This categorical variable had six answer options: *Less than a year*, *1-2 years*, *3-5 years*, *6-10 years*, *11-20 years*, and *More than 20 years*.

I constructed a new variable to identify those who had lived abroad in adulthood, where the value 1 was given to those who had lived abroad for 1-2 years or longer and 0 otherwise. The value 0 was given to those who had either:

- answered negatively to the question *Have you lived abroad*?
- lived abroad for less than 1 year
- answered positively to the question Have you lived abroad? but did not answer to how long they had lived abroad for (missing value)

The question *Have you lived abroad?* does not specify if living abroad occurred in adulthood. To detect possible cases of referring to living abroad in childhood, I used the categorical variable *Where did you grow up?* to identify those who grew up entirely in Iceland. The survey was adjusted according to the participating towns and for this question there was a different selection of towns or regions for growing up, depending on the corresponding town. Each of these geographical options for where the responder grew up was measured on a 5 point Likert scale, from (1)*Not at all* to (5)*Entirely*. Besides relevant towns or regions for each corresponding town, the question included the options of *Capital region* and *Abroad* for all the survey editions. To identify those who grew up entirely in Iceland, I constructed a binary variable where only those who grew up entirely in Iceland received the value 1. Those who

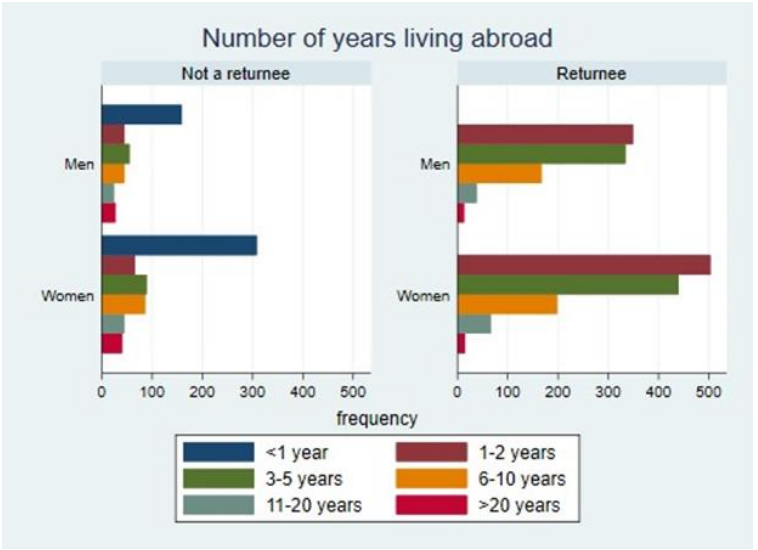

Figure 7: Number of years living abroad

grew up abroad for any part were omitted from further analysis. The respondents with a missing value for growing up abroad but had already

marked that they grew up entirely elsewhere were identified and received the value 0.5.

Figure 7 shows the answers to the question *For how long did you live abroad?*, by sex and returnee status. The graph shows that there is a number of people who have lived abroad for longer than a year but do not qualify for returnee status. The variable returnee identifies return migrants based on the definition in this study, shown in Figure 8. 21% of men and 23% of women fall under the definition applied for returnee.

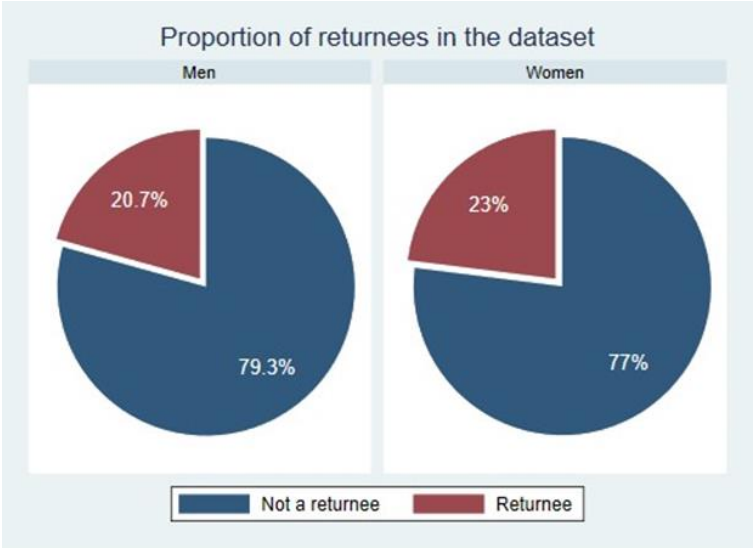

Figure 8: Proportion of returnees

In this study, I will refer to the responders with a returnee status as a *returnee* and the others as *not returnee*. In the academic literature on return migration, not returnees are often referred to as *stayers*. As shown in Figure 6, many of the responders in the not returnees group have indeed lived abroad for longer than 1 year. A total of 522 responders lived abroad for longer than a year and of those, 67 lived abroad for more than 20 years. Thus, the term *stayers* would not be applicable for this sample since these responders are returnees in

practice, although they do not qualify for the definition of a returnee applied in the study.

3.3 Limitations of the data

The strengths of the data lie in the high number of responders and the geographical distribution of the responders, i.e. the representation of regions outside of the capital area. The data is current and contains information on when the responder moved back to Iceland, through the question *How long*

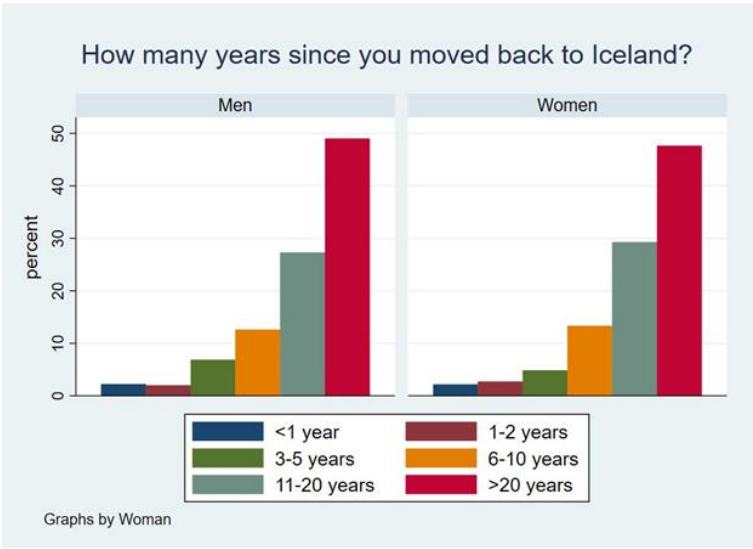

Figure 9: Number of years since returning, by sex

has it been since you moved back to Iceland from abroad?, shown in Figure 8. A total of 48.5% of the returnees in the sample moved back to Iceland over 20 years ago, and 28.3% moved back between 11 and 20 years ago. This means that when answering questions about the motives behind moving back to Iceland, many of the responders are recollecting reasons for a decision they made decades ago.

Another limitation in this study is the unknown timing of the return migration event in relation to other life events of the responders. The survey

included a generous amount of background variables. However, when analysing personal factors associated with the drivers of return migration, it is not possible to know whether these other life events happened before returning to Iceland and therefore could have influenced the decision to move back home, or whether they happened after the return migration to Iceland occurred and thus could not have influenced the decision to return. These life events include being married or in a cohabiting relationship, having children, level of education, et cetera.

There are also a few obstacles in the dataset hindering a better understanding of gender in return migration in this study. The main hindrance is the driver on employment opportunities, where the question includes *or a spouse*. To fully acknowledge and account for the different realities and power relations of men and women, this question would have had to either exclude the *or a spouse* or be two separate questions, one for returning for own employment opportunities, and a separate question on returning for one's spouse´s employment opportunities. Allowing for the investigation of *whose* employment drove the return migration would have allowed for a valuable analysis of gender roles in return migration. Another potentially gendered migration driver in the context of return migration is proximity to friends and family. Women continue to be considered the main caretakers and with that in mind, the driver on friends and family is potentially measuring different factors for men and women, i.e. caring for an ageing parent.

3.4 Logistic regression

The aim of this study is to investigate the association between returnee profiles and the pull factors of return migration to Iceland and whether the background characteristics influence drivers of return. The variables in the dataset that contain information on the pull factors are:

1. Returned for employment opportunities (own or a spouse)
2. Returned to be closer to friends and family
3. Returned to participate in Icelandic society
4. Returned to enjoy Icelandic nature
5. Returned to bring children up in Iceland

These questions are on an ordinal scale, measured on the scale 1 *Did not matter*, 2 *Mattered somewhat*, and 3 *Mattered greatly*.

Logistic regression is a regression model to estimate nonlinear effects on a binary variable through a cumulative logistic distribution function. This method was chosen to investigate the expected effects of the individual characteristics on each of the pull factors. Ordered logistic regression models are typically applied for logistical regression analysis when the dependent variable is an ordered categorical variable, i.e. not dichotomous binary variable. In this study, the ordered logistical models violated the parallel regression/proportional odds assumptions tested by the Brant test. Violating the Brant test suggests that the coefficients describing the relationship between each pair of the three outcome groups are not the same.

To adjust the data for the logistic regression, I recoded the 5 ordered categorical variables on pull factors into binary variables, where the answer option *Did not matter* received the value 0, *Mattered somewhat* received the value 1 and *Mattered greatly* also received the value 1. The formula for logistic regression is as follows:

$$P(Y = 1|X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k) = F(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k)$$
$$= \frac{1}{1 + e^{\{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k)\}}}$$

Where Y is the binary variable, F is the cumulative standard logistic distribution function, and X_1, X_2, etc. are the regressors. Thus $P(Y = 1|X)$ is

the predicted probability of the dependent variable Y being 1 given the values of the independent predictor variables $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k$. The β_1 is the estimated coefficient denoting the the change in the z value arising from a unit change in X_1, holding $X_2, \dots, X_k$ constant. The e is the base of the natural logarithm.

The independent predictor variables for the logistical regression analysis were chosen through cross-tabulations and summary statistics of the variables relevant to the study. These will be introduced and analysed in the following section.

3.5 The study variables

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the study variables. The study variables were identified through existing literature and previous studies on pull factors for return migration, as well as through cross-tabulations and correlation matrices of the data. The study variables are the independent variables in the logistic regression presented later in the chapter, with the exemption of *Kids living at home* and *Length abroad*. The continuous variable *Age* is included in the descriptive statistics as a reference only, since age is captured by the factor variable *Age when returned* in the logistic regression models and the correlation between these two variables is very high; r=0.80, p<0.00.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the study variables

	Returnee		Not returnee	
Variable	n	Mean	n	Mean
Sex				
Man	900	42.4%	3454	45.8%
Woman	1223	57.6%	4087	54.2%
Married/cohabiting				
No	497	23.4%	1855	24.6%
Yes	1626	76.6%	5686	75.4%
Kids living at home				
No	1367	64.4%	4543	65.6%
Yes	756	35.6%	2383	34.4%
Education				
Primary/Secondary school	216	10.6%	1763	26.3%
Trade	424	20.8%	2413	36.0%
University degree from Iceland	683	33.5%	2279	34.0%
University degree from abroad	714	35.0%	248	3.7%
Current residence				
Reykjavík west	459	21.6%	724	9.6%
Reykjavík east	259	12.2%	762	10.1%
Towns within the capital region	382	18.0%	1010	13.4%
Reykjanes	155	7.3%	860	11.4%
West Iceland	170	8.0%	860	11.4%
South Iceland	229	10.8%	1184	15.7%
Sauðárkrókur/Húsavík	121	5.7%	649	8.6%
Akureyri	217	10.2%	860	11.4%
Egilsstaðir	72	3.4%	339	4.5%
Ísafjörður	74	3.5%	309	4.1%
Age				
Age	2123	53.7	7541	51.5
Age when returned				
19-30 years	471	22.2%	.	.
31-40 years	669	31.5%	.	.
41-50 years	588	27.7%	.	.
51-60 years	318	15.0%	.	.
61+ years	76	3.6%	.	.
Length abroad				
<1 year	0	0	.	.
1-2 years	851	40.1%	.	.
3-5 years	764	36.0%	.	.
6-10 years	361	17.0%	.	.
11-20 years	104	4.9%	.	.
20+ years	28	1.3%	.	.

The logistic regression models in this study are sensitive to inflated standard errors because all the regressors are either binary or factor variables. Some of these factors have a very low number of observations, as shown in the table for summary statistics. Inflated standard errors cause wider confidence intervals which affects the accuracy of the estimations and predictions. The two variables, *Kids living at home* and *Length abroad* were omitted from the regression analysis to avoid further inflating the standard errors but kept in the list of descriptive statistics since they hold relevant information. These variables do not hold information vital to the accuracy of the models. We cannot tell whether the *Kids living at home* were born before or after the return migration event and thus the purpose of including the variable would be to capture the current family status, which is already captured by the variable *married* and the correlation between the two is statistically significant, $r=0.22$, $p<0.001$.

Length abroad is positively correlated with *Age when returned*, $r=0.25$, $p<0.001$. The variables *Education* was reconstructed to even out the standard distribution of level of education in the returnee sample where 70 per cent have a university education. The dataset included the variable *Which university or universities did you graduate from?* where one of the options was *University abroad*, which I used to divide those with university education into two groups. Those who had been to both an Icelandic and a foreign university, only received a value for the foreign one. In the table with the descriptive statistics, the variable *Education* is divided into 4 categories: 1. the combined category of Primary and secondary education; 2. Vocational training; 3. University degree from Iceland, and 4. University degree from abroad, but in the regression models, the first and second categories were combined for improved distribution and named *No university*. The variable on geographical

location of the responder at the time of the survey; *Current residence* was also reconstructed to improve the standard distribution within the variable. The capital region was divided into 3 categories; Reykjavík west, Reykjavík east, and towns within the capital region (Capital region other), and the small towns Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík were combined into one category since they are both located in North Iceland. The model diagnosis is discussed in section 4.5.1.

Figures for non-returnees are included in the descriptive statistics table to compare the two groups and to bring attention to the difference in profiles of those who move abroad (and return) and those who do not. The variables *Age upon return* and *Length abroad* only apply to returnees.

4 Descriptive results

Here I introduce a summary of the descriptive statistics relevant to the research. Data on both groups, returnees and non-returnees, are included to explore whether there are notable differences between those who move abroad compared to those who do not, given the self-selection bias previously discussed. All statistics are sex aggregated.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows that the main difference in characteristics between returnees and not returnees is educational background and the proportional overrepresentation of returnees in the capital region (51.8%) relative to the not returnee group in the sample (33.1%). According to official figures, about 64% of the population in Iceland live in the capital region (Statistics Iceland, 2025a).

Women are slightly over-represented in the sample, 57.6 per cent of returnees are women and 54.2 per cent of not returnees. Most of the responders are either married or cohabiting for both groups, 76.6 per cent of returnees and 75.4 per cent of the not returnees. Aggregated by sex, 77.8 per cent of men not returnees are married compared to 83.5 per cent of men

Figure 10: Distribution of age at return, by sex

returnees, and 73.4 per cent of women not returnees are married compared to 71.4 per cent of returnee women. Just over a third of the sample has children under 18 years old living at home for both returnees and not returnees. For women, the proportions are 37.3 per cent of not returnees and 38.2 per cent of the returnees, and for men the proportions are 30.9 per cent for not returnees and 32.2 per cent for the returnees.

The mean age in the dataset is 52, ranging between 18 and 86 years old with the median at 53. Within the returnee group, the mean age of men is 56 and 52 for women, and for the not returnee group the mean age is 53 for men and 50 for women. Since returnees are defined as those who have lived abroad in adulthood for a minimum of 1 year, the minimum age point of returnees is naturally higher than the minimum age of those who have never lived abroad in adulthood and thus the mean age of non-returnees is therefore lower than that of returnees. The variable *age when returned* is constructed

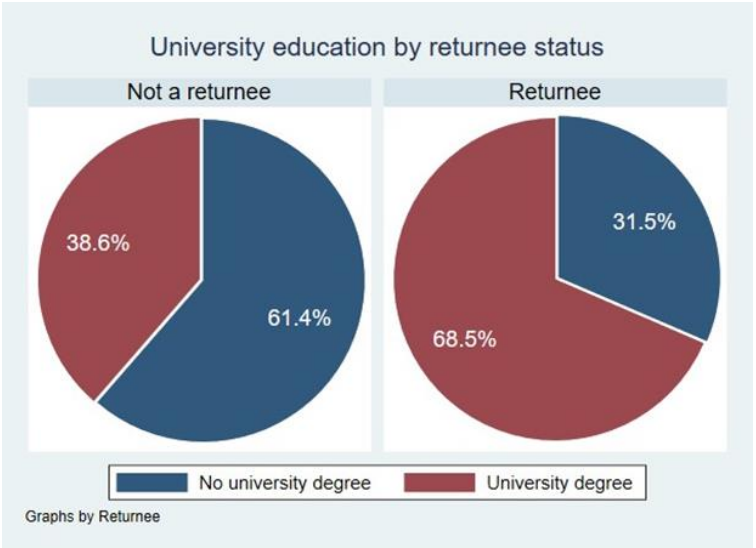

Figure 11: University education by returnee status

by subtracting the values for the categorical variable *How long since you moved back to Iceland from abroad?* (shown in Figure 9) from the continuous variable *age*. I subtracted the lower values of the categorical variable, i.e. 0 year for those who moved back to Iceland less than a year ago, 1 years for those who moved back 1-2 years ago, 3 years for those who moved back 3-5 years ago, etc. The graph in Figure 10 shows the proportional distribution of the variable by men and women, demonstrating how a greater proportion of women return to Iceland at a younger age than men and proportionally more men return later in life.

The variable *education* in Table 1 shows the highest completed level of education for returnees and not returnees, constructed from the survey question *What education have you completed?* which had the following multiple answer options; primary school diploma, secondary school diploma, vocational school diploma, and university diploma. 46 per cent of the total number responders have completed university education, 53 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men. Proportionally more people have completed

Table 2: Level of education, by sex and returnee status

	Women		Men	
Level of education	Returnees	Not returnees	Returnees	Not returnees
Primary School	11.2%	27.7%	9.9%	24.5%
Vocational School	17.2%	26%	25.7%	48%
University Iceland	42.7%	42.3%	21.2%	24.1%
University abroad	28.9%	3.9%	43.3%	3.4%

university education in the returnee group compared to those who have never lived abroad; 69 per cent compared to 39 per cent. A quarter of those who have never lived abroad finished primary or secondary school, compared to just 10 per cent of returnees. Similarly, the proportion of university degree holders is much greater for the returnee group than the non-returnee group, further demonstrated in the graph in Figure 11. The value for a university degree in Figure 11 includes both those who obtained their degree from Icelandic and foreign institutions.

The high proportion of completed university education is partly explained by the relatively high level of education of men returnees compared to not returnees, 66 per cent of all men in the returnee group have completed university education compared to 29 per cent of all the men in the not returnee group. Also noteworthy is the percentage of male returnees who obtained their university degree from a foreign institution compared to female returnees; 45 per cent of all men returnees hold a foreign university degree

compared to 30 per cent of all women returnees. This is better explained in table 2 which shows Figure 12 the sex-aggregated distribution of the variable level of education between returnees and not returnees. The proportion of people with a university degree from Iceland is slightly higher within the not returnee groups for both men and women. The graph in Figure 12 also shows how the proportion of men and women with a skill certificate is lower among returnees compared to not returnees, and how more men than women have a trade certificate. Education of returnees by geographical location will be discussed in the next section.

4.2 Geographical distribution of returnees in Iceland

Table 3: The towns in the survey

Regions:	Participating towns per region:				
Reykjavík west	Reykjavík west	.	.	.	.
Reykjavík east	Reykjavík east	.	.	.	.
Capital reg. other	Garðabær	Hafnarfjörður	Kópavogur	Mosfellsbær	Seltjarnarnes
Reykjanes	Reykjanesbær	Sandgerði	Vogar	Garður	Grindavík
West Iceland	Borgarnes	Akranes	.	.	.
South Iceland	Hveragerði	Selfoss	Þorlákshöfn	Vestmannaeyjar	.
Sauðárkr/Húsavík	Sauðárkrókur	Húsavík	.	.	.
Akureyri	Akureyri	.	.	.	.
Egilsstaðir	Egilsstaðir	.	.	.	.
Ísafjörður	Ísafjörður	.	.	.	.

The variable *Current residence* listed in the descriptive statistics in table 1 refers to where the responders lived at the time of taking the survey. The variable has 10 location points. The survey was conducted in all the main towns

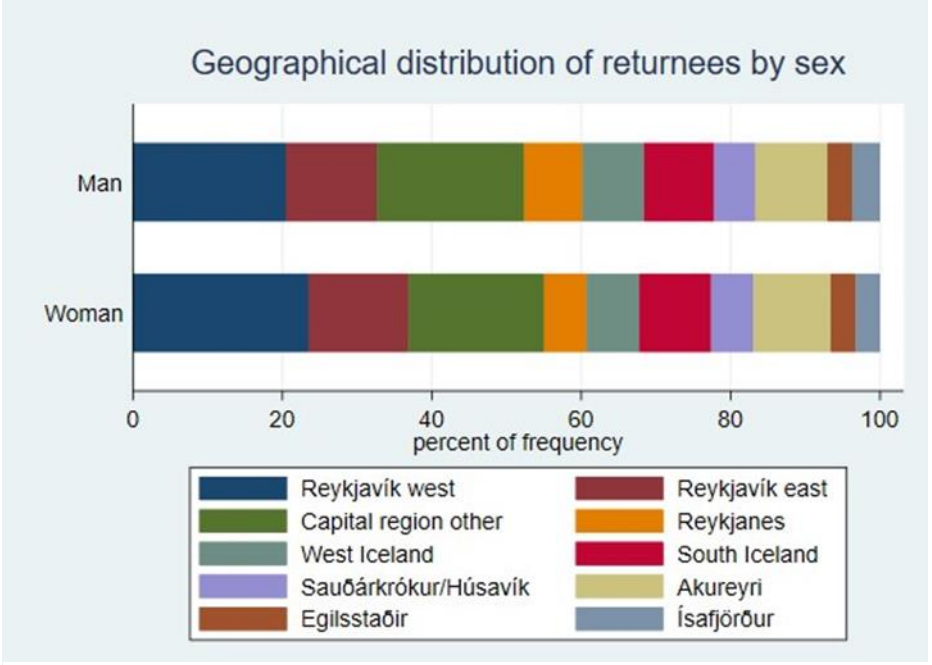

Figure 12: Geographical distribution of returnees, by sex

in Iceland. Table 2 shows the names of the towns categorised by the regions as they appear in the descriptive statistics and the logistic regression models.

The map in Figure 6 shows the geographical distribution of the sample, where the purple dots represent the participating towns. All the participating towns in Reykjanes, West Iceland and South Iceland are within 100 km distance of Reykjavík.

The capital region is the centre of commerce and services in Iceland and is home to more diverse employment and educational opportunities than other regions in Iceland. As shown in the statistical summary in Table 1, 51.8 per cent of all the returnees lived in the capital region compared to 33.1 per cent of the not returnees. Sex aggregated distribution of returnees by location is shown in Figure 12 Over half of both men and women returnees in the dataset lived in the capital region at the time of the survey;

Table 4: Proportion of returnees by location and sex

	Women		Men	
Location	Returnees	Not returnees	Returnees	Not returnees
Reykjavík west	39.5%	60.5%	37.5%	62.6%
Reykjavík east	26.4%	73.6%	25.7%	76%
Capital reg. other	28%	72%	27%	73%
Reykjanes	15.2%	84.8%	15.2%	84.8%
West Iceland	15.8%	84.2%	17.4%	82.6%
South Iceland	16%	84%	14.6%	85.4%
Sauðárkr/Húsavík	17.1%	82.9%	14%	86%
Akureyri	22.2%	77.8%	18%	82%
Egilsstaðir	20.1%	79.9%	15.2%	84.8%
Ísafjörður	22%	78%	16.8%	83.2%

52.4 per cent and 55 per cent respectively. Table 4 shows the proportion of returnee men and women and not returnee men and women for each location. Looking at the proportion of returnees in the capital region, 31.4 per cent of all male responders and 33.2 per cent of all female responders in the capital region are returnees.

The graphs of the geographical distribution show a greater share of female returnees than male returnees in all localities except West Iceland and Reykjanes. The localities with the greatest difference between the proportion of female returnees of all female responders and male returnees of all male responders are Akureyri, where 22.2 per cent of all women responders are

returnees compared to 18 per cent of men, Egilsstaðir, where 20.1 per cent of all women are returnees compared to 15.2 per cent of men, and Ísafjörður, where 22 per cent of all women are returnees and 16.8 per cent of men.

Reykjanes, the home to Keflavík International Airport, is the only area listed where the share of male returnees of the total number of responders is higher than female returnees. 7.8 per cent of all male returnees in the data set were located in Reykjanes at the time of the survey, compared to 5.7 per cent of female returnees. This corresponds to 18 per cent of all male responders and 16 per cent of female responders in Reykjanes were returnees. As shown in Table 2, Reykjanes area consists of the towns Reykjanesbær, Grindavík, Sandgerði, Garður and Vogar, with 79 per cent of the returnees in the region living in Reykjanesbær.

The participating towns in west Iceland are Akranes and Borgarbyggð, both within 100 km driving radius of Reykjavík. 17.7 per cent of the responders in West Iceland have lived abroad in adulthood, of which 9.4 are women. A similar distribution of returnees is in South Iceland and Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík, just below 7 per cent of men and just above 9 per cent of women. Sauðárkrókur, Akureyri and Húsavík are in the North of Iceland. Akureyri is the largest city and the main service hub outside of the capital region, with over 10 per cent of the responders representing Akureyri. Egilsstaðir and Ísafjörður each have a share of 4 per cent. Egilsstaðir is the largest town and main service hub in the east of Iceland, and Ísafjörður in the Westfjords.

Table 5 shows the proportional geographical distribution of returnees by level of education and sex. The graph shows that there are proportionally more men and women with a university degree currently living in Reykjavík and its surrounding municipalities compared to returnees with completed primary/secondary education and vocational training/trade. This is especially

apparent for men. Subsequently, regions outside of the capital region are home to proportionally more people without completed university education. An exemption is Akureyri. University of Akureyri was established in 1987.

Table 5: Level of education by location and sex

	Primary, secondary or trade		Icelandic university		Foreign university	
Location	F	M	F	M	F	M
Reykjavík west	20.4%	21.8%	42.3%	29.6%	37.3%	48.6%
Reykjavík east	32.7%	27.2%	36.5 %	21.4%	30.8%	51.5%
Capital reg. other	31%	28.8%	42.3%	21.2%	26.8%	50%
Reykjanes	46.3%	50%	37.8%	20.8%	15.9%	29.2%
West Iceland	44.2%	51.2%	41.9%	8.3%	14%	40.5%
South Iceland	42.5%	58.4%	37%	15.7%	20.5%	25.8%
Sauðárkr/Húsavík	34.7%	50%	45.8%	18.8%	19.4%	31.3%
Akureyri	28%	39.1%	41.6%	18.5%	30.4%	42.4%
Egilsstaðir	32.5%	53.1%	35%	18.8%	32.5%	28.1%
Ísafjörður	23.8%	43.8%	47.6%	18.8%	28.6%	37.5%

4.3 Drivers of return migration

The drivers of return migration are measured by a statement question in the survey on reasons for moving back to Iceland. The statement question was available to those who had positively answered the previous question on having ever lived abroad. The observations for those who did not qualify for the definition of returnee were omitted (those who had lived abroad for shorter than 1 year or did not grow up fully in Iceland). The answer options to each of the five statements were: (1) *Not a reason*, (2) *Mattered somewhat,*

and (3) *Mattered greatly*. Missing values were recoded to (1) *Not a reason* for those who skipped a statement but had already answered any of the other four as (2) *Mattered somewhat* or (3) *Mattered greatly*. These statements are the dependent variables in the logistic regression models. This section offers a short summary of each migration driver, including proportional sex-aggregation and results from cross-tabulations over the other background variables.

Employment opportunities

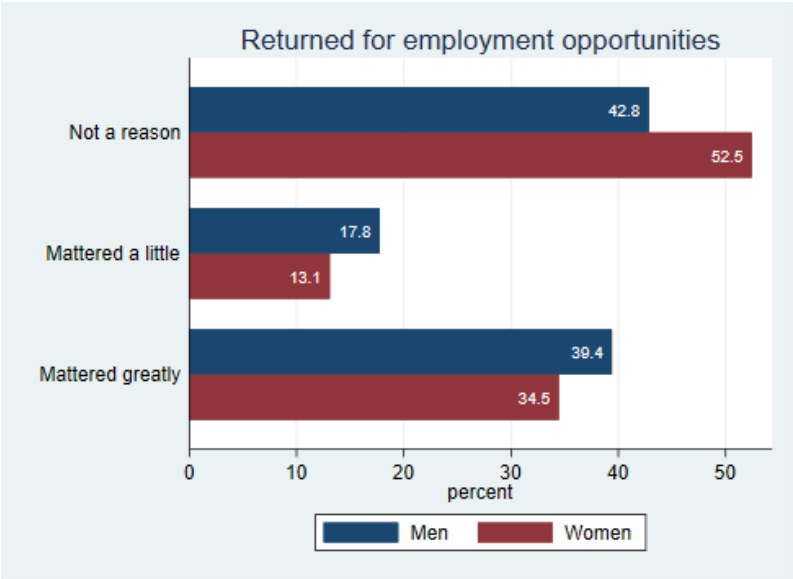

Figure 13: Returned for employment opportunities, by sex

Figure 13 shows the responses to the question *Why did you return from abroad? -Employment opportunities for myself or my spouse*, disaggregated by sex. The chi-square test of independence showed a statistically significant association between the variables on sex and returned for employment, X^2(2, N=2123) = 20.87, p=0.000. More men than women considered job opportunities a reason for returning to Iceland, 39.4 per cent of men said it

mattered greatly compared to 34.5 per cent of women, whereas 52.5 per cent of women said they did not consider job opportunities a reason for their return compared to 42.8 per cent of men. However, since the question included "spouses", we cannot be sure whether men were more likely than women to return because of a job opportunity or if many of those men were following their spouses' lead.

The dataset includes data on marital status, however, many of the returnees in the dataset moved back to Iceland over a decade ago. Of those married or in a cohabitating relationship at the time of the survey, 42.1 per cent of men and 39.2 per cent of women said that employment opportunities mattered greatly, compared to 40.2 per cent of single men and 27.2 per cent of single women. Thus the proportion of currently married or cohabiting women who moved back to Iceland because of job opportunities for themselves or their partner is on par with the proportion of single men but the share is lower for single women.

The importance of employment in return migration decision-making increases with the level of education, for both men and women. Among men with completed primary/secondary school, 26.7 per cent said that employment opportunities for themselves or their spouse mattered greatly, whereas it mattered greatly for 45.2 per cent of men with university degree from Iceland and 49.5 per cent for men with university degree from abroad. For women, employment opportunities mattered greatly to 33.7 per cent of those with an Icelandic degree and 47 per cent to those with a degree from abroad. Among both men and women, more than half of the returnees currently living in South Iceland and Akureyri did not consider employment opportunities to be a reason for moving back to Iceland, with the addition of Sauðárkrókur/Húsavík and Ísafjörður for women. On the contrary, over half

the men in West Reykjavík and Sauðárkrókur/Húsavík considered jobs to matter greatly for their decision to move back to Iceland, whereas the locations with the highest proportion of women migrating back for jobs are West Iceland, 46 per cent, and Egilsstaðir, 44.5 per cent.

Proximity to friends and family

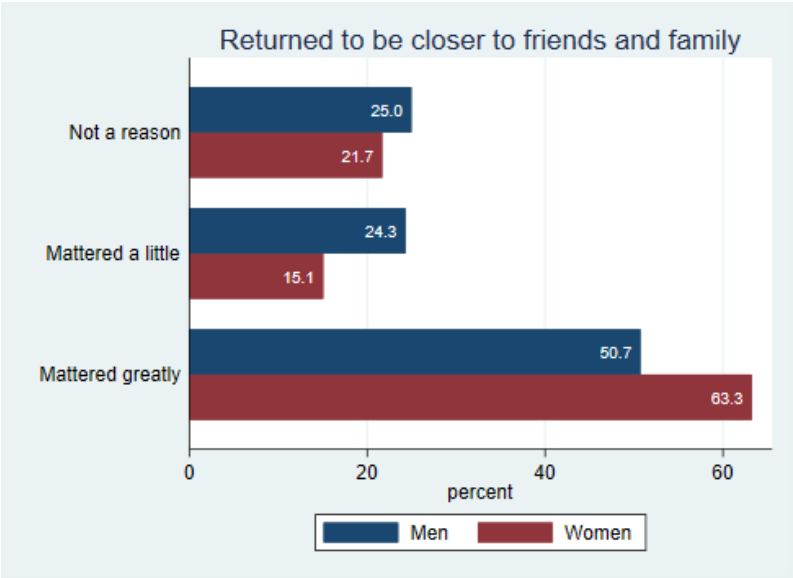

Figure 14: Returned to be closer to friends and family, by sex

Figure 14 shows the responses to the question *Why did you return from abroad? -To be near friends and family*. A fifth of all the responders said that being closer to friends and family was not a reason for their return to Iceland while 60 per cent said it mattered greatly. Figure 14 shows that more women than men considered proximity to friends and family to matter greatly, 63.3 per cent of women compared to 50.7 per cent of men. The chi-square test of independence showed a statistically significant relationship between the variables on sex and returned for friends and family, $X^2(2, N=2123) = 39.86$, p=0.000.

Closeness to friends and family matter greater to women than men in all the geographical locations, except in Ísafjörður, where 51.4 per cent of women said it mattered greatly compared to 56.7 per cent of men. Women in Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík felt the strongest about proximity to friends and family, where 73.6 per cent said it mattered greatly, whereas Reykjavík west had the highest proportion of men who said proximity to friends and family mattered greatly, 56.2 per cent. A higher proportion of individuals holding a university degree from abroad consider family and friends to matter greatly compared to those with no university education or an Icelandic degree for both men and women, 85.5 per cent of each group said it mattered a little or greatly.

Participation in Icelandic society

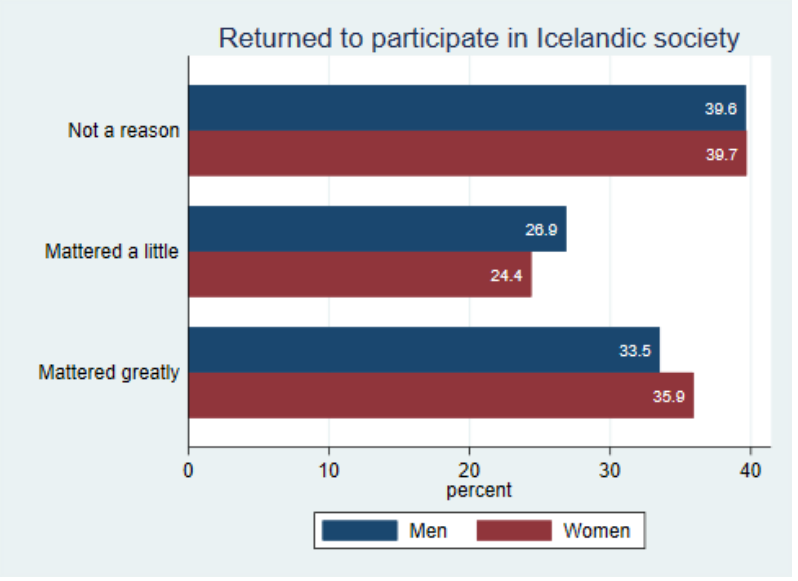

Figure 15: Returned to participate in Icelandic society, by sex

Figure 15 shows the responses to the question *Why did you return from abroad? -To participate in Icelandic society*. Unlike the migration drivers above,

men and women feel similarly about considering participation in Icelandic society as a driving force. 33.5 per cent of men and 35.9 per cent of women considered participation in Icelandic society to matter greatly in their decision to move back to Iceland, and 39.6 per cent of men and 39.7 per cent of women said it was not a reason. The chi-square test of independence did not show a statistically significant relationship between sex and returned for participation, $X^2(2, N=2123) = 2.11$, p=0.349.

Social participation mattered the least for men in Reykjanes and South of Iceland, where 47.2 and 47.4 per cent said it was not a reason. For women, social participation mattered the least in Ísafjörður, 51.4 per cent and Reykjavík east, 42.4 per cent. Those with a university degree from abroad are proportionally more likely to move back to participate in Icelandic society; 43.9 per cent for men and 42.5 per cent for women, compared to 31.9 per cent of men and 39.5 per cent of women with an Icelandic university degree, 26.5 per cent of men and 29.3 per cent of women with trade diploma, and 22.7 per cent of men and 34.2 per cent of women with completed primary/secondary school. For both men and women, social participation mattered the most for those who lived abroad for 6-10 years, 43 per cent and 44.4 per cent, and the least for those who lived abroad for 20 years or more, 18.2 per cent for men and 23.1 per cent for women.

Enjoyment of Icelandic nature

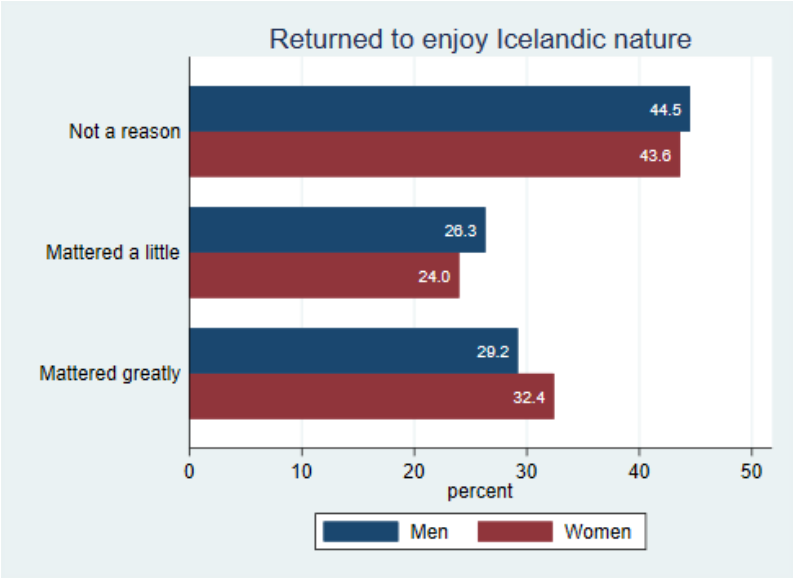

Figure 16: Returned to enjoy Icelandic nature, by sex

Figure 16 shows the responses to the question *Why did you return from abroad? -To enjoy Icelandic nature*. Men and women also hold similar feelings about returning to enjoy Icelandic nature. 30.5 per cent of men and 33.3 per cent of women considered Icelandic nature to matter greatly in their decision to move back, whereas 43.6 per cent of men and 44.5 per cent of women said it was not a reason. The chi-square test of independence did not show a statistically significant relationship between sex and returned for nature, X^2(2, N=2123) = 2.95, p=0.229.

Those with a university degree from abroad are most likely to consider Icelandic nature as a migration driver, 65.9 per cent of men said it mattered a little or greatly and 68.8 per cent of women, and of those with completed primary/secondary school are 46.7 per cent for men and 47 per cent for women, for those with an Icelandic university degree 53.6 per cent for men

and 56 per cent for women. Cross tabulations for other background variables, such as kids living at home, married/cohabiting, and location showed limited variations from the overall proportions shown in the sex aggregated graph above.

Wishing to bring up children in Iceland

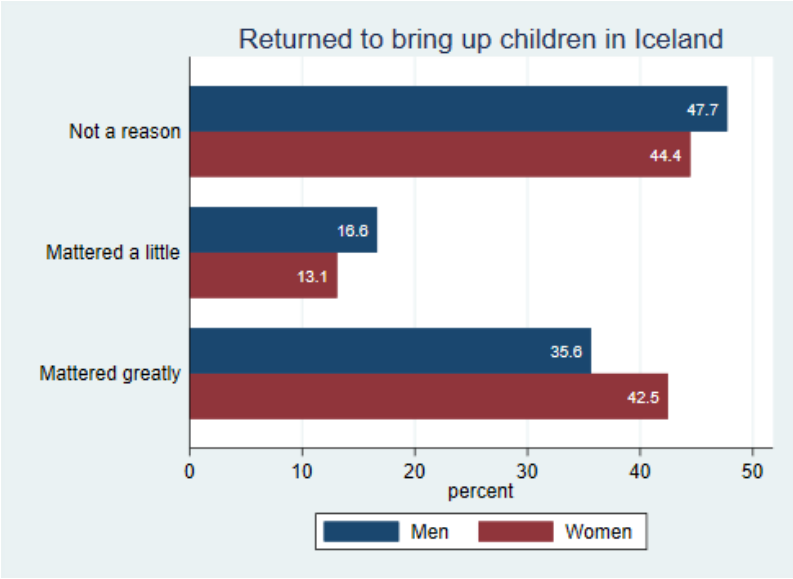

Figure 17: Returned for child rearing in Iceland, by sex

Figure 17 shows the responses to the question *Why did you return from abroad? -To have your children brought up in Iceland*. The graph shows that more women than men considered bringing up children in Iceland to matter greatly in their decision to move back, 42.5 per cent compared to 35.6 per cent, and more men than women considered bringing children up in Iceland mattered a little. The chi-square test of independence showed a statistically significant relationship between the variables on sex and returned for children, $X^2(2, N=2123) = 11.85$, p=0.003.

The highest proportions are found among those who returned in their 30s. 51.8 per cent of women who moved back in their 30s considered the wish to bring up children in Iceland to matter greatly, compared to 35.6 per cent of men in the same cohort. The only age group where more men than women considered children´s upbringing to matter greater is the oldest cohort, 36.6 per cent of men who returned above the age of 61 compared to 22.9 per cent of women. Of those in a marriage or cohabiting relationship, 44.5 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men considered bringing up children in Iceland mattered greatly, compared to 37 per cent of single women and 18.2 per cent of single men. For those with children living at home (at the time of the survey), 45.8 per cent of women and 40.9 per cent of men considered bringing up children in Iceland mattered greatly, compared to 40.6 per cent of women and 33.2 per cent of men without children living at home.

5 Multivariate results

The chapter presents the findings from the empirical analysis on drivers of return migration in accordance with the research questions. The five drivers of return migration are examined to predict the effects of background variables and other potential determinants on the return drivers related to the research questions.

The characteristics associated with the probability of returning for each of the five drivers were estimated through a logistic regression. The results are shown in Table 6. The logistic regression estimates the probability of each of the drivers (Y) being 1 (i.e. mattered a little or greatly), given the value shown in odds ratios of each of the regressor, holding the others constant.

To ease the interpretation of the results, the logit coefficients are shown as odds ratio, which are exponentiated values of the logit coefficients. The formula for converting the odds ratio to percentage is simply $(OR - 1) * 100$. An odds ratio of a coefficient above the value 1 indicates that a unit increase in the regressor X increases the odds of the migration driver $Y = 1$, and a coefficient below 0 indicates that a unit increase in the regressor X reduces the odds of the migration driver $Y = 1$. Thus, an odds ratio of exactly 1 estimates no association, holding the other regressors constant. As the odds ratio compares the odds between two groups, the *ref* in the results in Table 6 stands for Reference group, which is the base group to compare the other odds ratios/coefficients within the same factor variable.

Table 6: Logistic regression models, odds ratios

	(1) Employment opportunities	(2) Friends and family	(3) Social participation	(4) Icelandic nature	(5) Bring up children
Man	ref				
Woman	.791**	1.336***	1.084	1.102	1.367***
	(.076)	(.149)	(.105)	(.104)	(.132)
Single	ref				
Married or cohabiting	1.542***	1.279**	1.196	.995	1.823***
	(.172)	(.16)	(.132)	(.108)	(.201)
No university	ref				
University Iceland	1.366***	1.06	1.579***	1.354***	1.336**
	(.158)	(.137)	(.18)	(.153)	(.154)
University abroad	2.611***	2.021***	2.648***	2.168***	1.855***
	(.3)	(.277)	(.306)	(.244)	(.211)
Reykjavík west	ref				
Reykjavík east	.876	1.097	.781	.828	1.441**
	(.143)	(.22)	(.129)	(.133)	(.234)
Reykjavík other	.937	.784	.743**	.794	1.247
	(.138)	(.134)	(.11)	(.114)	(.18)
Reykjanes	.671**	.803	.724	.823	1.696***
	(.133)	(.181)	(.142)	(.16)	(.337)
West Iceland	.993	1.008	.977	.85	1.511**
	(.191)	(.231)	(.19)	(.16)	(.29)
South Iceland	.481***	.673**	.736*	.762	1.04
	(.086)	(.133)	(.13)	(.132)	(.182)
Sauðárkrókur/Húsavík	.871	1.32	1.046	1.334	2.201***
	(.188)	(.36)	(.231)	(.292)	(.491)
Akureyri	.586***	.781	.77	.799	1.063
	(.102)	(.156)	(.134)	(.136)	(.182)
Egilsstaðir	.87	.792	1.039	1.221	1.427
	(.233)	(.241)	(.284)	(.328)	(.384)
Ísafjörður	.444***	.618*	.701	.712	1.079
	(.118)	(.179)	(.183)	(.183)	(.281)
19-30 years old	ref				
31-40 years old	1.825***	1.816***	1.364**	1.59***	2.132***
	(.232)	(.272)	(.172)	(.198)	(.269)
41-50 years old	1.923***	1.285*	1.312**	1.304**	2.275***
	(.254)	(.19)	(.171)	(.167)	(.299)
51-60 years old	1.802***	.925	1.345*	1.296*	1.461**
	(.282)	(.156)	(.209)	(.197)	(.225)
61 years and older	1.003	.7	.856	.881	.853
	(.269)	(.188)	(.22)	(.225)	(.228)
_cons	.458***	1.732***	.777	.755	.221***
	(.086)	(.362)	(.144)	(.138)	(.042)
Observations	2123	2123	2123	2123	2123

Standard errors are in parentheses
**** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

The number of observations for all the models is 2123. The standard errors for the coefficients are shown in brackets. The statistical significance of the coefficients according to the z value is indicated by stars; *=p<0.1, **=p<0.05, ***=p<0.01

Model diagnosis

Table 7: Collinearity diagnosis

Variable	VIF
Woman	1.05
Married	1.04
University	1.03
Location	1.03
Age when returned	1.04

Multicollinearity among the independent variables can cause large odds ratios and inflated standard errors in logistic regressions. Variance inflation factor (VIF) is an indicator measuring the of strength of the independent variables or how much of the inflation of the standard error could be caused by multicollinearity. Variables that are not correlated to each other receive a value close to 1.

The results of the collinearity diagnosis for the logistic regression model on the employment model are shown in Table 7. The VIF indicators are closely the same for all the 5 models. The results suggest that the variables do not suffer from multicollinearity.

Table 8: The Pearson X^2 goodness of fit

Regression model	N	Number of covariate patterns	Pearson X^2	Prop>chi^2
Employment	2123	441	421.93	0.5055
Friends and family	2123	441	421.72	0.5084
Participation in society	2123	441	440.50	0.2688
Enjoy nature	2123	441	430.94	0.3843
Child rearing	2123	441	448.99	0.1844

The Pearson chi-square, X^2 goodness-of-fit test computes the Pearson chi-square X^2 statistic to test the observed against the expected number of responses in the model, using the total number of covariate patterns as a group definition (Archer & Lemeshow, 2006). All the five regression models passed the Pearson X^2 goodness-of-fit test as shown in Table 8 suggesting that the models have adequate fit.

5.1 Results

This section presents analysis of the results from the five logistic regressions. The analysis includes the predictive margins and marginal effects of the independent variables in each model. The predictive margins for every predictor in the five models are sex aggregated. The predictive margins show the average predicted probability of Y=1 given a specific value of a regressor. The logistic regression models in this study only have binary or factor variables and the interpretation of the predictive margins. In the following analysis, the sex aggregation is computed by treating everyone in the dataset if they were

male and then treating everyone in the dataset as if they were female, so that the the only difference in the two groups is the specific value of the variable in question. This way, the two groups are made fully comparable. The exemption to this in the following analysis is the predictive margins of location, where all the other predictors in the models are held at their mean value separately for women and men. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the research questions of the thesis:

- How do characteristics such as sex, age and education influence the odds of returning for social or economic reasons?
- Does geographical location influence the probability of the individual migration drivers? Is there an urban-rural divide?
- Do the reasons for return migration to Iceland differ between men and women?

The logistic regression output for the five models shown in Table 6 shows that the odds ratios for university attainment and age when returned to Iceland have the greatest statistical significance across the models and that the models on returning for employment and returning for child upbringing have the highest number of statistically significant predictors. We reject the null hypothesis that a predictor has no effect on the migration driver when the p-value is <0.1, i.e. the predictor is statistically significant.

Employment

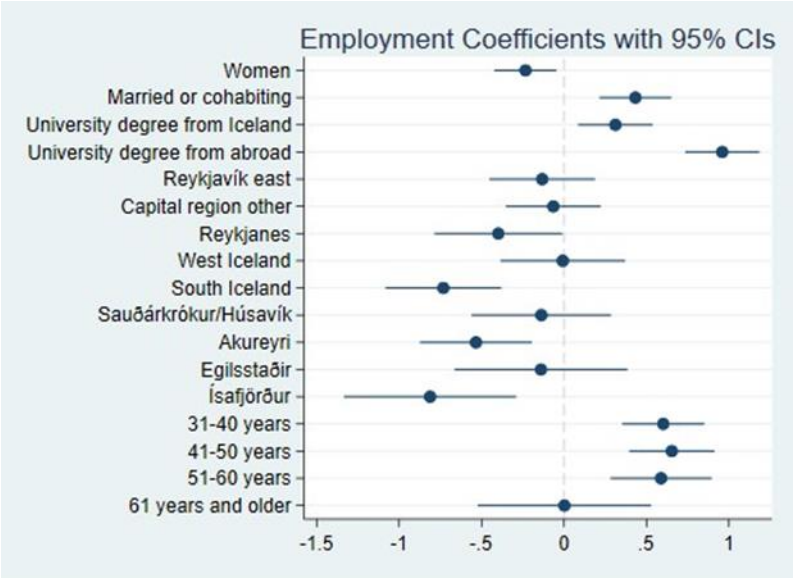

Figure 18: Odds ratios for the employment driver

Figure 18 shows the coefficients with 95% confidence intervals for the odds ratios of considering employment opportunities as a return migration motive. The results suggest that the odds of considering employment a reason for moving back to Iceland are reduced by 20.9 per cent for women compared to men, $p<0.05$ holding all the other variables constant, whereas being married or cohabiting increases the odds of returning for jobs by 54.2 per cent, $p<0.001$, compared to being single. Individuals with a university degree from Iceland are 36.6 per cent more likely to consider job opportunities a reason for their return compared to those without a completed degree, $p<0.001$, and those with a university degree from abroad are more than 2.5 times likelier to move back because of job opportunities than the reference group, $p<0.001$.

Those who move back between the ages of 31 to 60 years are almost twice as likely to consider employment a reason for their return, $p<0.001$ compared to those who move back in their 20s, holding the other variables

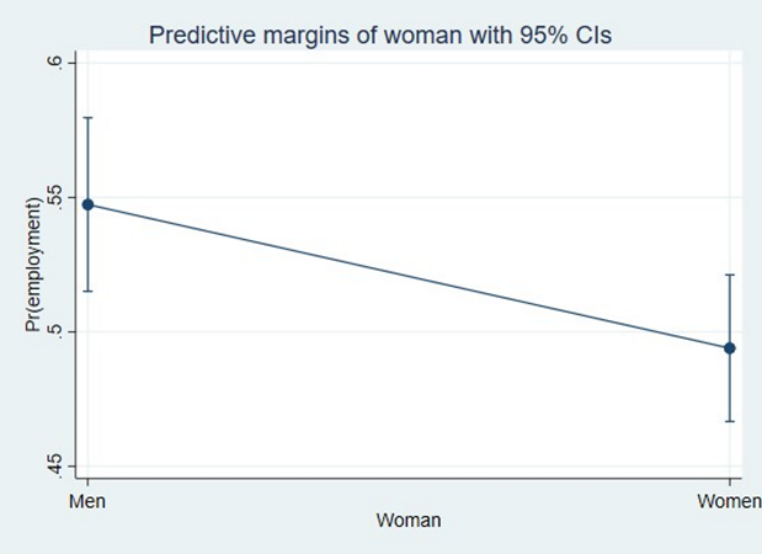

Figure 19: Predictive margins of woman on the employment driver

constant. The odds ratios for Reykjanes, South Iceland, Akureyri and Ísafjörður are statistically significant and suggest that the probability of moving back to Iceland because of jobs are reduced by circa half for individuals living in these locations compared to individuals living in Reykjavík west at the time of the survey, holding the other variables constant.

The overall probability of considering employment as a reason for return is 51.8 per cent, $p<0.001$, holding all the predictors at mean values. Graph 19 shows the predictive margins of sex on returning for employment with the 95% confidence interval. The probability of considering jobs as a reason for moving back to Iceland is 55 per cent for men and 49 per cent for women, holding the other variables constant. The graph in Figure 20 suggests that the expected effect of being married on the probability of considering job opportunities as a reason for return is different for men and women, holding the other variables constant. If everyone in the dataset were a single man, the probability of considering jobs as a reason for return migration would be 49

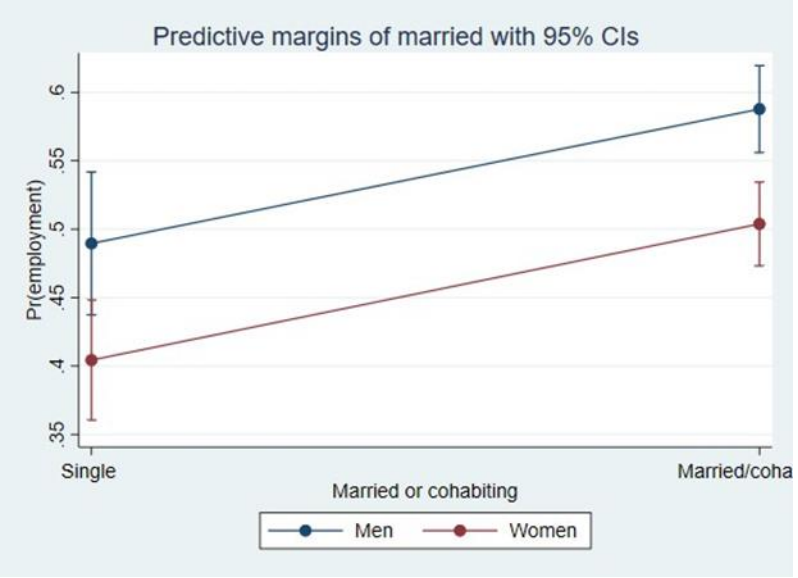

Figure 20: Predictive margins of marital status on the employment driver

per cent, and 40 per cent for single women. The respective probabilities for married or cohabiting men and women are 10 percentage points higher; 59 per cent and 50 per cent. The 95% confidence intervals do not overlap for the values for men and women meaning that the difference between the predictive margins for both single men and married man, and single and married women is statistically significant at the 5% level.

The graph in Figure 21 shows that the predicted probability of considering employment a factor for return is highest for those with a foreign university degree, holding the other regressors constant. The predicted probability of returning for jobs is 69 per cent for men with a foreign university degree, and 60 per cent for women, $p<0.001$. The difference between the predictive margins for men with a foreign degree is statistically significant from the predictive margins for men with an Icelandic degree, and the same holds

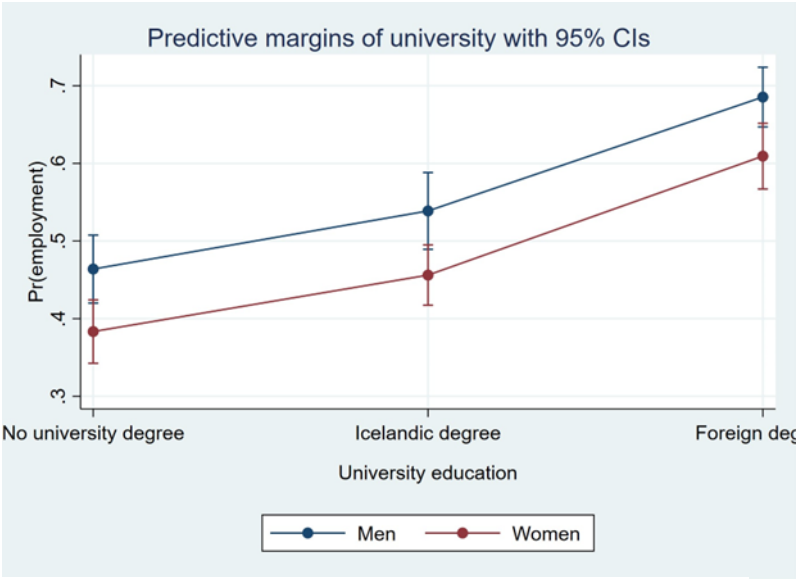

Figure 21: Predictive margins of education on the employment driver

for women. For men and women without a university degree, the predictive margins are 46 and 38 per cent, holding the other variables constant, meaning that if everyone in the dataset were a woman without a tertiary education we would expect only 38 per cent considering jobs as a reason for return to Iceland. We do not know whether those with an Icelandic university degree completed their tertiary education before or after having lived abroad, whereas those with a foreign university degree likely completed their degree abroad, before returning to Iceland.

The predicted effect of age at the time of return on the probability of considering employment as a motive for moving back to Iceland is shown in Figure 22. The graph shows that the predictive margins of age, when holding the other regressors constant is an inverted u-curve for both men and women, where the youngest and the oldest cohorts have less expected probability of

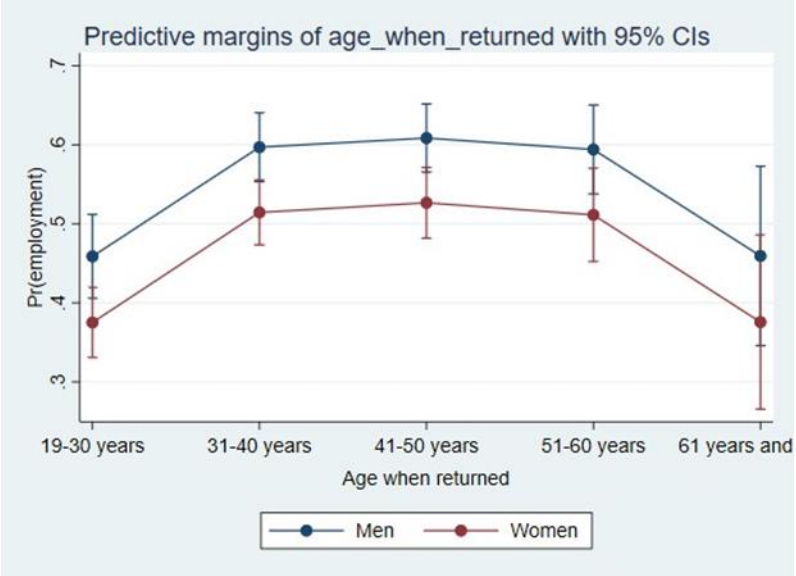

Figure 22: Predictive margins of age when returned on the employment driver

moving back to Iceland for employment opportunities compared to those in the middle of their career. The probability of considering jobs as a reason for moving back is the highest among men who move back in the age group of 41-50 years old, or 62 per cent, and 53 per cent for women in the same age group, whereas the lowest probability, 37 per cent, is among women who return in the ages of 19-30 years old and 61 and older. The difference between the youngest cohort and the three middle-aged cohorts is statistically significant at the 5% level. There are only 76 responders in the oldest age cohort, representing 3.6 per cent of the returnee sample. This results in the inflated confidence intervals for the oldest cohort.

The predicted probabilities for considering jobs a reason is highest for those living in the capital region and lowest for those living in Ísafjörður. The results from the logistical regression model estimated that the probabilities for Suðurnes, South Iceland, Akureyri and Ísafjörður statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level, holding all else constant.

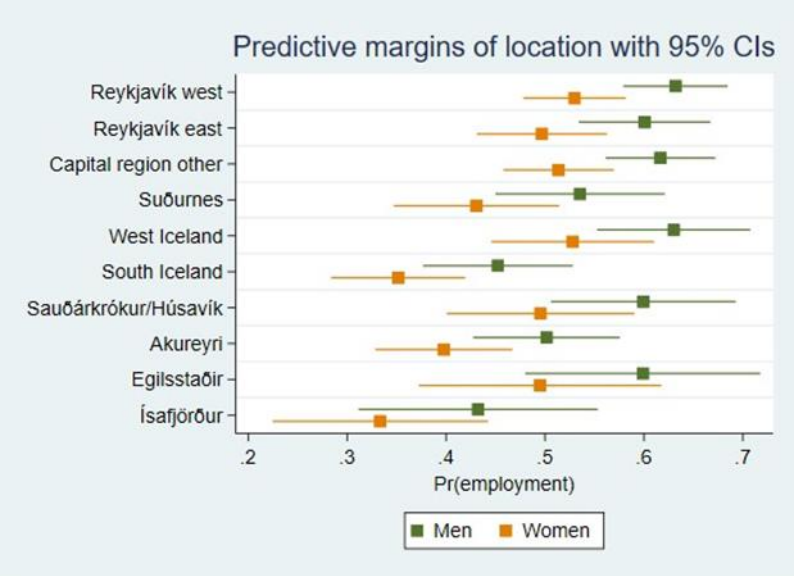

Figure 23: Predictive margins of location on the employer driver

Figure 23 shows the predictive margins of location by sex with the 95 per cent confidence intervals, holding the other variables at their mean value for men and women separately. The standard errors for the values of locations outside of the capital region and Akureyri are inflated due to the narrow sample size of returnees in the smaller locations. Despite the wide confidence intervals, the graph clearly shows that the predicted probability of migrating back to Iceland is higher for men than women in all locations, $p<0.001$. It also shows that the upper bound of the confidence intervals for South Iceland, Akureyri and Ísafjörður fall below the lower bounds of western Reykjavík and the capital region for both men and women.

Friends and family

The results from the logistic regression on considering the proximity to friends and family as a migration driver were shown in Table 6 and the exponentiated coefficients are also plotted in the graph in Figure 24. The regression predicts

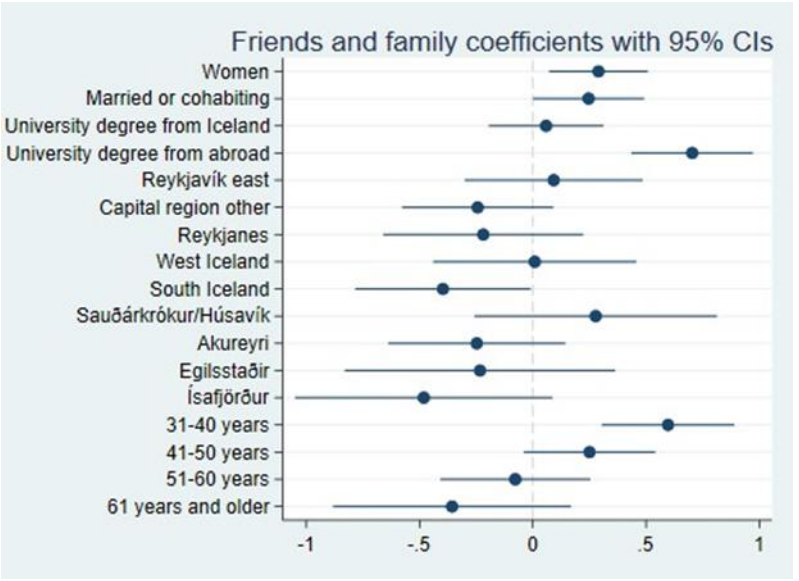

Figure 24: Odds ratios for the friends and family driver

that being a woman increases the odds of moving back for friends and family by 34 per cent, $p<0.001$ holding the other variables constant, and being in a relationship increases the odds by 28 per cent, compared to those who are single, $p<0.05$. Holding a foreign university degree doubles the odds of returning for friends and family, statistically significant at the 1% level. The odds of returning for friends and family increase by 82 per cent for those who returned in their 30s, $p<0.001$, and by 29 per cent for those who returned in their 40s, $p<0.05$. The model estimates no or negative effect of geographical location on the odds of considering proximity to friends and family a reason for return, except Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík, holding the other variables constant. The statistically significant coefficients within the 10% level are living in South of Iceland which decreases the odds by 33 per cent and living in Ísafjörður which reduces the odds by 38 per cent, ceteris paribus.

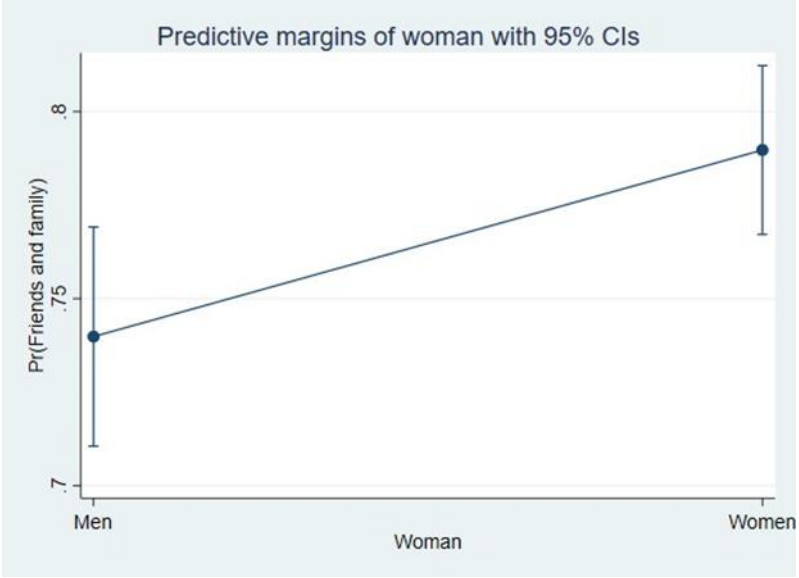

Figure 25: Predictive margins of woman on friends and family driver

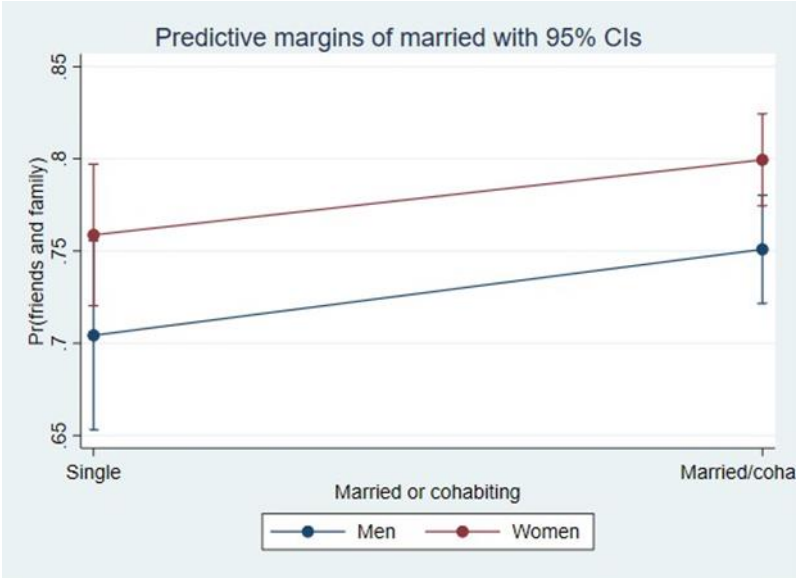

Figure 26: Predictive margins of marital status on the friends and family driver

When all the predictors in the model are set to their mean values, the overall probability of considering proximity to friends and family a reason for moving

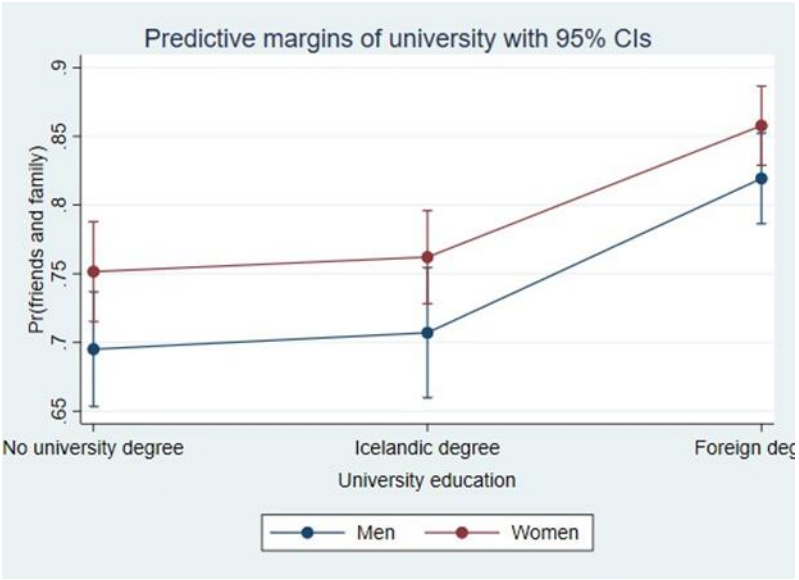

Figure 27: Predictive margins of education on the friends and family driver

back to Iceland is 78 per cent, $p<0.001$. Adjusting for sex only, the average probability for women to consider friends and family as a motive is 79 per cent, and 74 per cent for men, as shown in Figure 25. This difference between men and women is statistically significant at the 5% level. The graph in Figure 26 shows the effect of marital status on the probability of moving back to be closer to relatives. The predicted probability of a single man to consider family and friends a reason to return is 70 per cent compared to 76 per cent for a single woman, whereas the predicted probability of a woman in a relationship is 80 per cent, and 75 per cent for men. The 95% confidence intervals between single and married men and single and married women overlap and the difference is not statistically significant at the 5% level.

Figure 27 shows the predictive margins for education on the friends and family driver. If everyone in the dataset were a woman with a university degree from outside of Iceland, the average predicted probability of returning

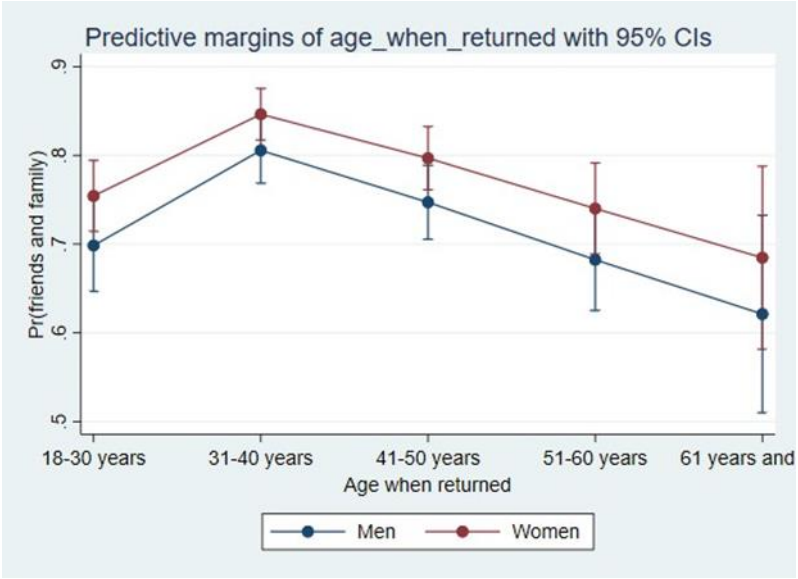

Figure 28: Predictive margins of age when returned on friends and family driver

to be closer to friends and family would be 86 per cent, and 82 per cent was the group all men with a foreign degree. The difference in marginal effects between the values of no university education and Icelandic university degree is 1.1 percentage point, not statistically significant at the 10% level, whereas the change in probability from no university degree to a foreign university degree is 11 percentage points, $p<0.001$. The graph also illustrates the statistical significance between the groups, since neither the confidence intervals for women with a foreign and Icelandic degree nor men in the same groups overlap.

The graph in Figure 28 shows that the average probability of considering proximity to friends and family a migration driver is highest among men and women who returned in their 30s. If everyone in the data set were a woman returning in her 30s, the average probability of considering friends and family a driver for the return would be 85 per cent, and 81 per cent if everyone

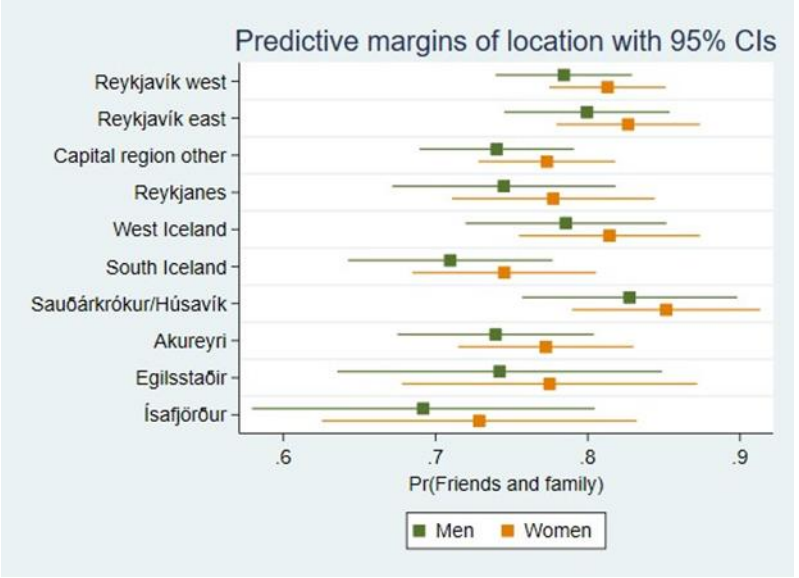

Figure 29: Predictive margins of location on the friends and family driver

were male, compared to the smallest average probability, 62 per cent for men and 68 per cent for women, found in the oldest cohort. The difference between those returning in the youngest cohort and those returning in their 30s is 11 percentage points for men, $p<0.001$ and 9 percentage point for women, $p<0.001$, and the difference between the youngest cohort and those returning in their 40s is 5 percentage points for men, $p<0.1$ and 4 percentage points for women, $p<0.01$. The graph also illustrates that the smallest difference between the average probabilities for men and women is found within the age cohort of 31-40-year-olds.

Figure 29 shows the predicted average probabilities by geographical location, with all the other regressors held at their mean value for men and women separately. The model suggests that the highest average probability of considering friends and family a reason for the return is in Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík, for both men and women, and the smallest probability is in Ísafjörður. Both groups are relatively small, resulting in inflated confidence intervals.

Participation in Icelandic society

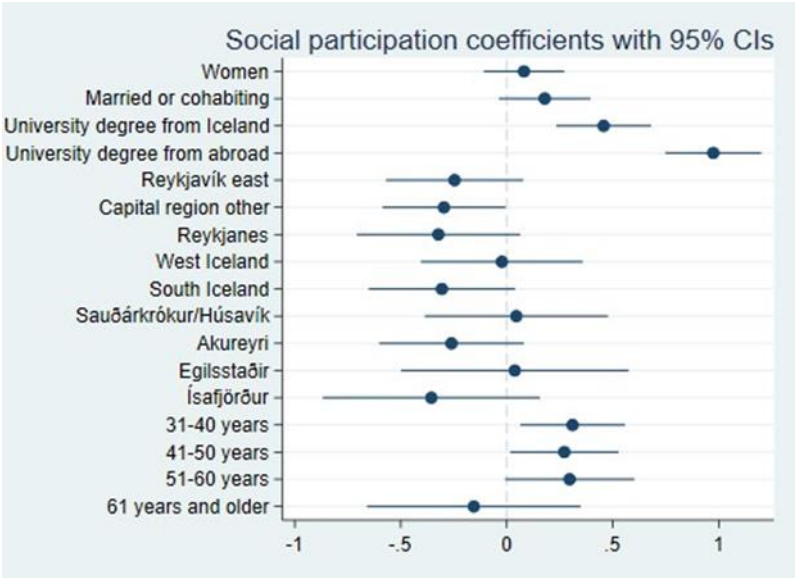

Figure 30: Odds ratios for participation in society

Figure 30 shows the odds ratios of considering participation in Icelandic society a reason for returning to Iceland. The results estimate that the odds of considering participation in Icelandic society a reason for return increase by 8 per cent for women compared to men, holding all the other variables constant, whereas being married or cohabiting increases the odds of returning for participation in society by 20 per cent, compared to being single. These predictions are not statistically significant within the 10 per cent benchmark.Holding an Icelandic university diploma increases the odds by 56 per cent, $p<0.01$ and those with a foreign diploma are more than 2.5 times likelier than those with no completed university education to consider participation in society a reason for their return, $p<0.01$. The model estimates that the geographical location of the responder does not have a statistically significant effect on the odds of returning for social participation compared to

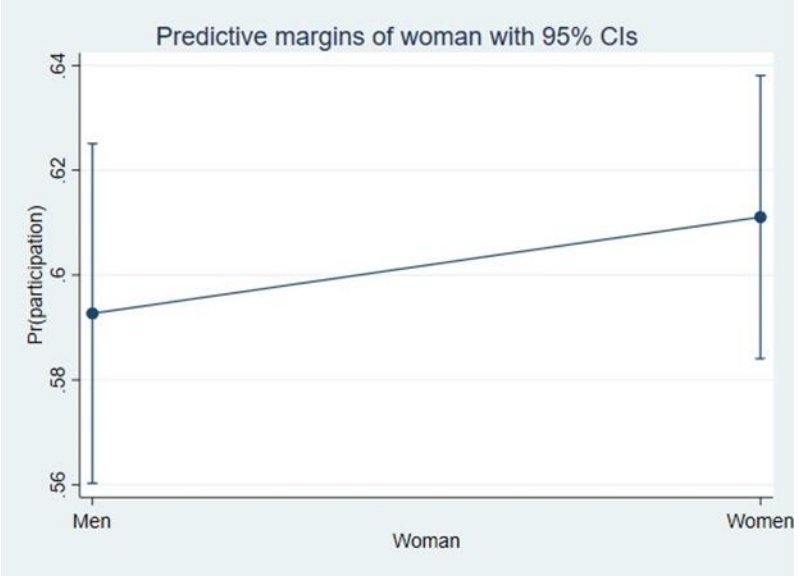

Figure 31: Predictive margins of woman on the participation driver

the base level set in Reykjavík west. The exemptions are Reykjavík other, where the odds are reduced by 26 per cent, $p<0.05$, and South Iceland, where the odds are also reduced by 26 per cent, $p<0.1$, holding the other variables constant.

The overall probability of considering participation in Icelandic society a reason for return is 61 per cent, $p<0.001$, holding all the predictors at mean values. The graph in Figure 31 shows the predictive margins of returning to participate in society for men and women. If all the responders were men, the model would expect a 59 per cent probability of them to consider social participation a driver for their return, compared to a 61 per cent probability if they all were women, a difference of only 2 percentage points and not statistically significant. The predictive margins of marital status is 56 per cent for single men compared to 58 per cent for single women, and 60 per cent for married men compared to 62 per cent for married women. As shown in the graph in Figure 32, the overall difference in probability between those single

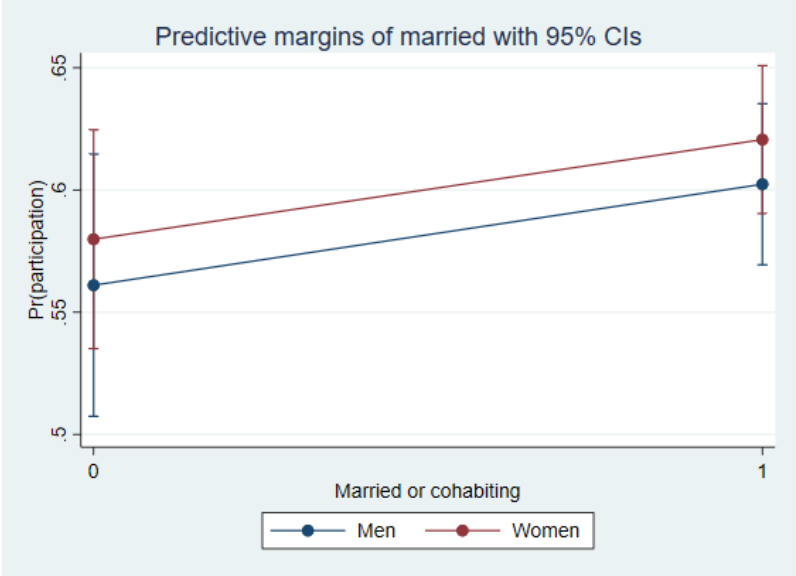

Figure 32: Predictive margins of marital status on the participation driver

and married is a 4 percentage point increase in odds for those married, not statistically significant.

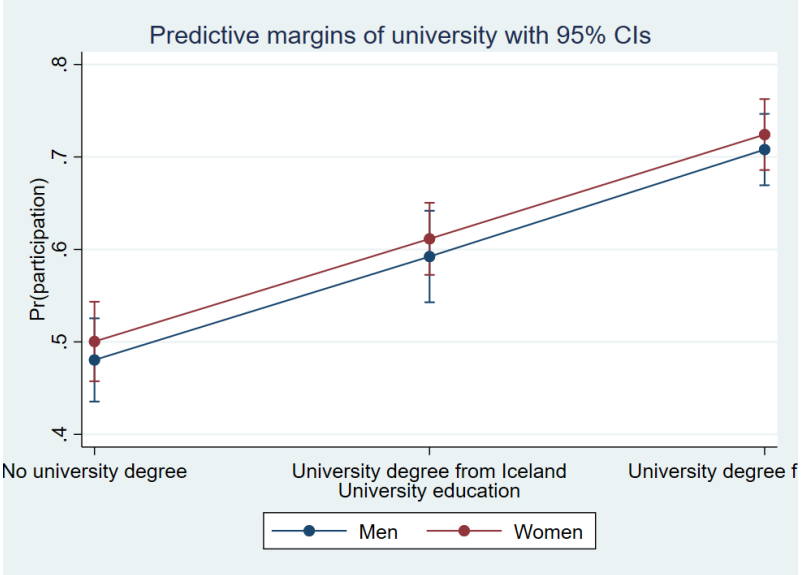

Figure 33: Predictive margins of education on the participation driver

The model estimates that university education has a positive effect on the probability on considering participation in society a reason to move back to Iceland, as shown in the graph in Figure 33.

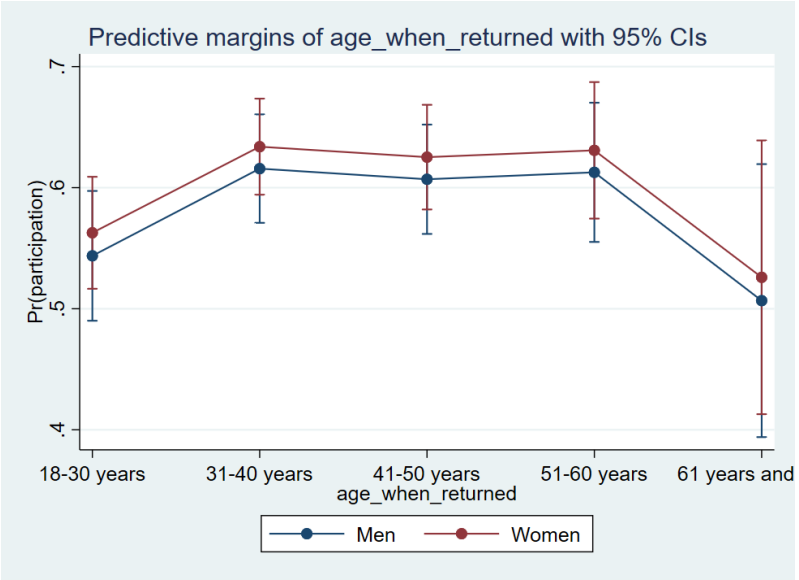

Figure 34: Predictive margins of age when returned on the participation driver

The average probability of moving back to participate in society is 48 per cent for men without a university education, and 50 per cent for women, $p<0.001$, the average probability is 59 per cent for men with an Icelandic university degree and 61 per cent for women, and the average probability for those with a foreign university diploma is 71 per cent for men and 72 for women, $p<0.001$. The difference between the groups by sex is statistically significant at the 5% level.

The average probability of considering participation in Icelandic society is smaller for those who moved back in the youngest and oldest age groups, or 54 and 56 per cent for the youngest men and women, and 51 and 53 per cent for the oldest men and women. The average probability is highest for men and women who returned in their 30s, 62 and 63 per cent, $p<0.001$.

The 95% confidence interval overlaps for all the groups meaning that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups.

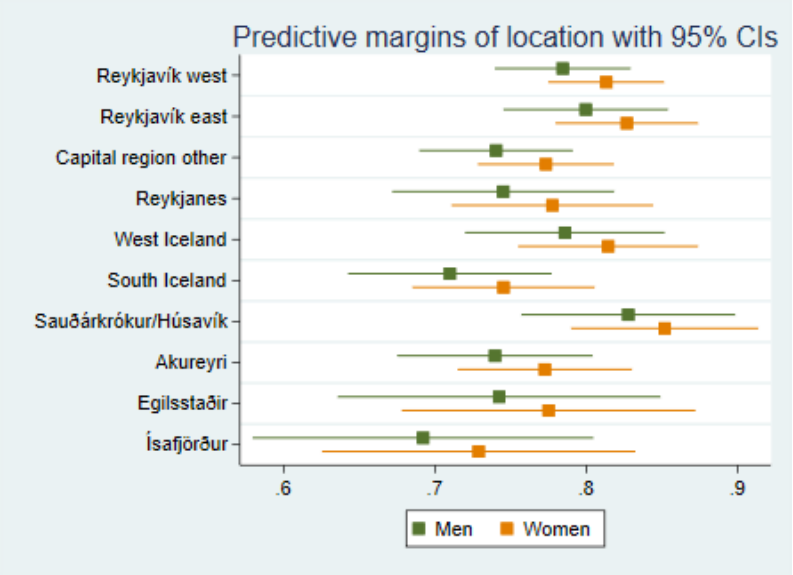

Figure 35: Predictive margins of location on the participation driver

The graph in Figure 35 shows the predictive margins of location by sex, with all other predictors set to their mean values for men and women separately. The graph shows that the responders living in Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík at the time of the survey had the greatest probability to consider participation in society as a reason for their return, 85 per cent for women, and 82 per cent for men. It also shows that the second highest probability is among those living in Reykjavík east and west, for both men and women, as well as in the west of Iceland. For all locations, the probability is higher for women than for men.

Enjoying Icelandic nature

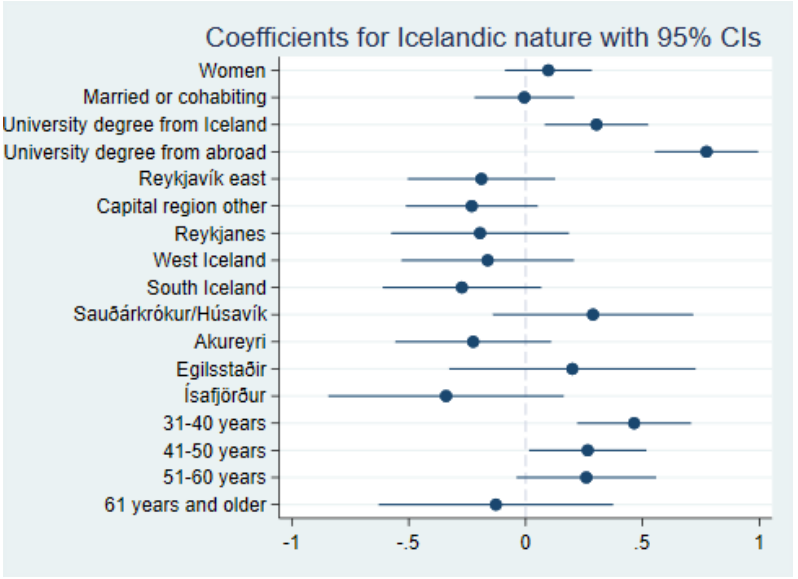

Figure 36: Odds ratios for enjoying Icelandic nature

The graph in Figure 36 shows the exponentiated coefficients from the logistic regression on the odds of considering enjoyment of Icelandic nature as a reason for moving back to Iceland, and their 95 per cent confidence intervals. The results are also shown in Table 6. Holding the other predictors constant, being a woman increases the odds of moving back to be closer to Icelandic nature by 8 per cent and being in a cohabiting relationship has no effect. Neither of these values is statistically significant within the 10 per cent limit.

The coefficients for university education are statistically significant within the 1 per cent limit. The model estimates that an Icelandic degree increases the odds by 35 per cent and a foreign degree increases the odds by 86 per cent, ceteris paribus. The only geographical locations associated with an

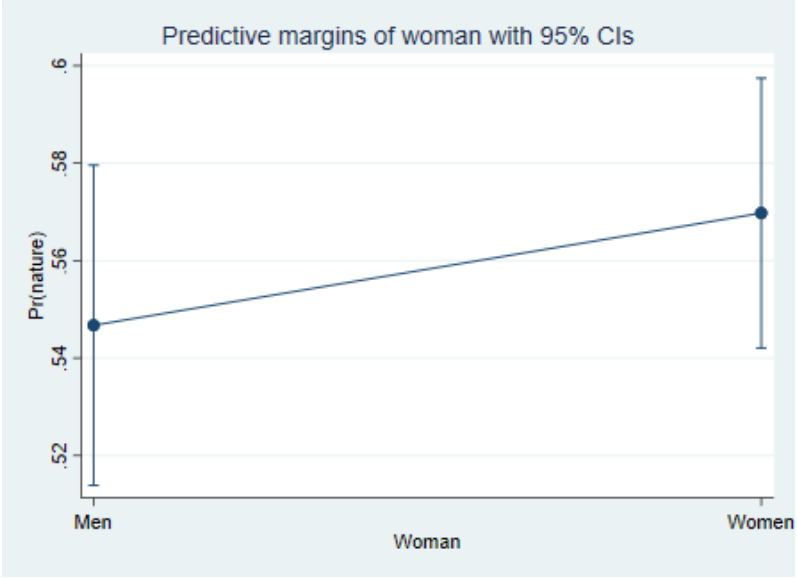

Figure 37: Predictive margins of woman on the nature driver

increase in odds are Sauðárkrókur/Húsavík and Egilsstaðir, but none of the coefficients for geographical location are statistically significant. The graph also shows that the odds of considering Icelandic nature a migration driver are higher among those who returned at a younger age. Holding the other coefficient constant, the model predicts that returning in the ages of 31-40 increases the odds by 59 per cent, $p<0.01$, returning in the ages of 41-50 increases the odds by 30 per cent, $p<0.05$ and returning in the ages of 51-60 also increases the odds by 30 per cent, $p<0.1$.

Holding all the predictors at their mean values, the probability of considering Icelandic nature a reason to move back is 56 per cent. The predictive margins for men is 55 per cent and 57 per cent for women, as shown in Figure 37. The 95% confidence interval shown in the graph illustrates that the two groups are not statistically different.

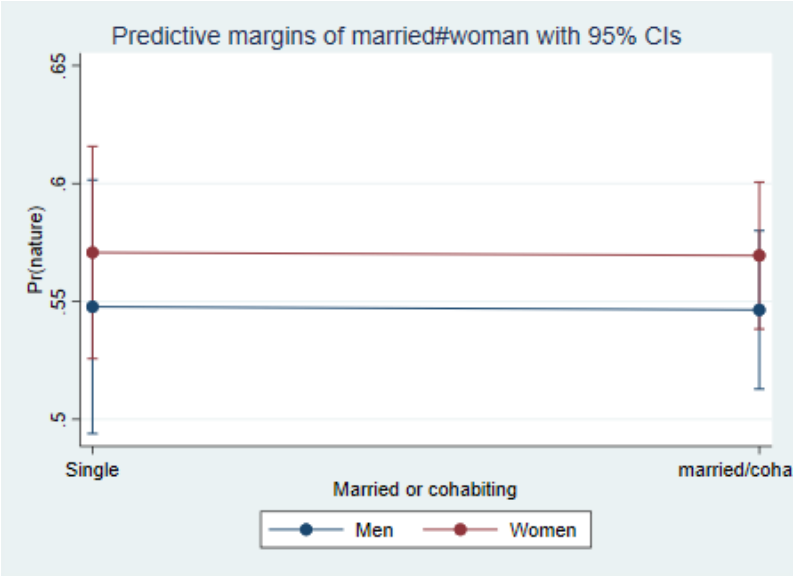

Figure 38: Predictive margins of marital status on the nature driver

The insignificant difference between men and women is further shown in Figure 38 which draws the average predictive margins of being in a marriage or a cohabiting relationship compared to being single. The graph shows a flat line and the predicted probabilities are the same if everyone in the dataset were a single man, the model expects 55 per cent probability of returning for Icelandic nature and 57 per cent probability if everyone were a single woman. The predicted probability for those in a cohabiting relationship or a marriage, are also 55 per cent for men and 57 per cent for women.

The predictive margins of university education are shown in Figure 39. If everyone in the dataset were men without a completed university education, the average predicted probability of returning for Icelandic nature would be 46 per cent, and 48 per cent for women. If everyone had an Icelandic degree, the model predicts the average probability of considering nature a reason to return to be 53 per cent for men and 55 per cent for women. The predictive

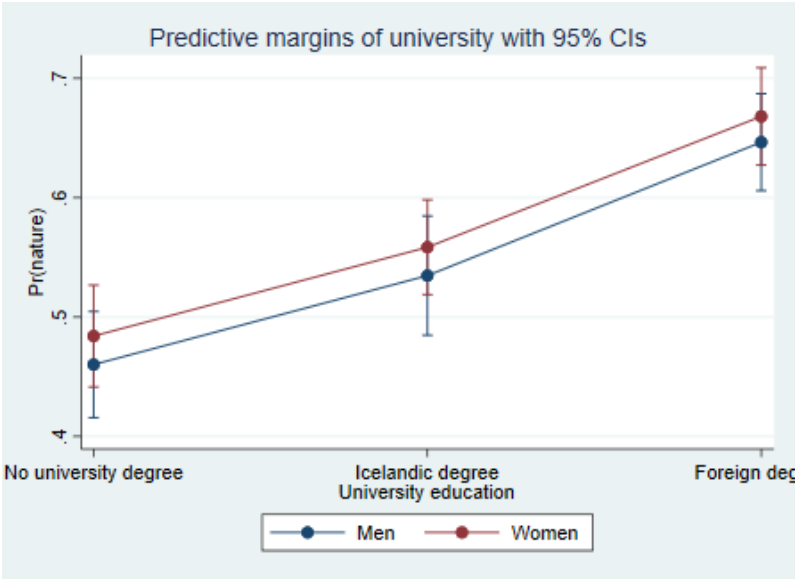

Figure 39: Predictive margins of education on the nature driver

margins for those with a university degree from abroad are 65 per cent for men and 67 for women. There is a statistically significant difference between

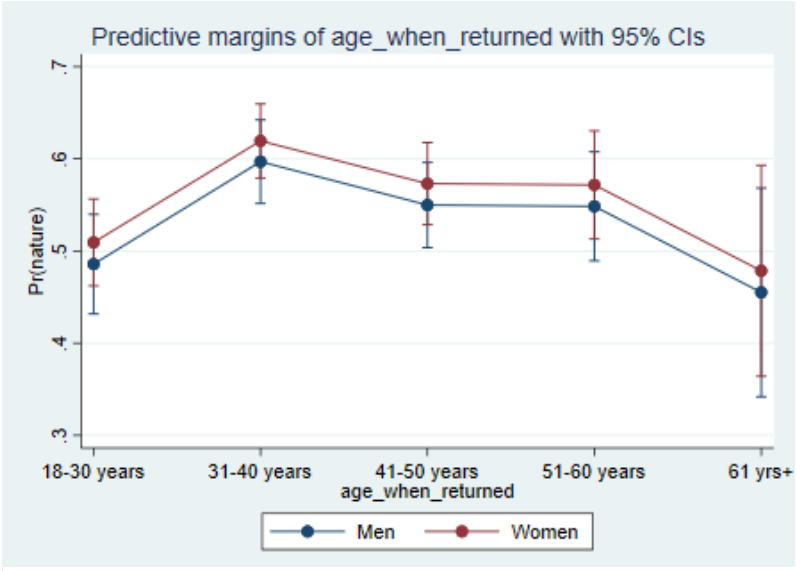

Figure 40: Predictive margins of age when returned on the nature driver

those who completed university education abroad and those who obtained their university degree from an Icelandic university.

The predictive margins of age at the time of moving back to Iceland are shown in the graph in Figure 40. If everyone in the dataset returned in the age group of 19-30 years old, the chance of considering nature a reason to return would be 51 per cent for women and 49 for men. The predicted probability is greatest for those who returned in their 30s, 60 per cent for men and 62 per cent for women, and the difference between those who returned in their 20s and 30s is statistically significant, $p<0.05$.

The graph in Figure 41 shows the predictive margins for the geographical location at the time of the survey, holding the other predictors in the model at their mean values, separately for men and women. The average marginal effects for the different geographical locations are not statistically significant and the graph shows well the small difference between men and women.

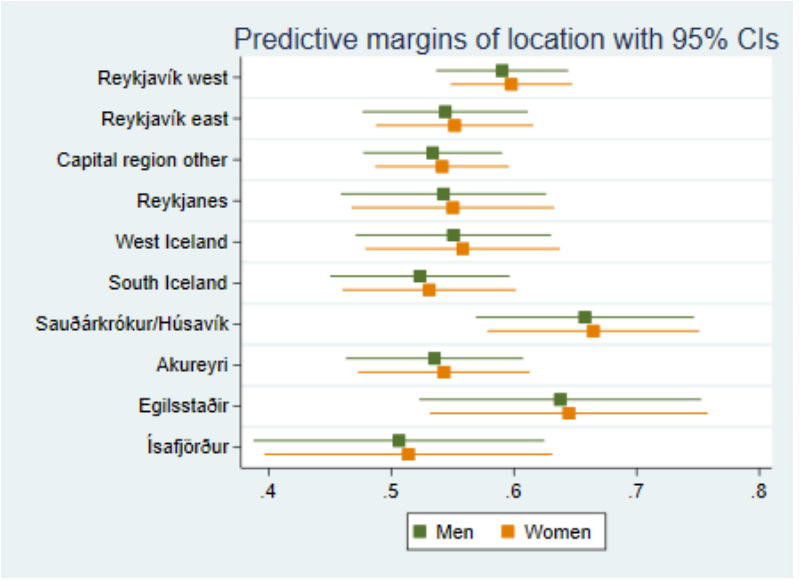

Figure 41: Predictive margins of location on the nature driver

Bringing children up in Iceland

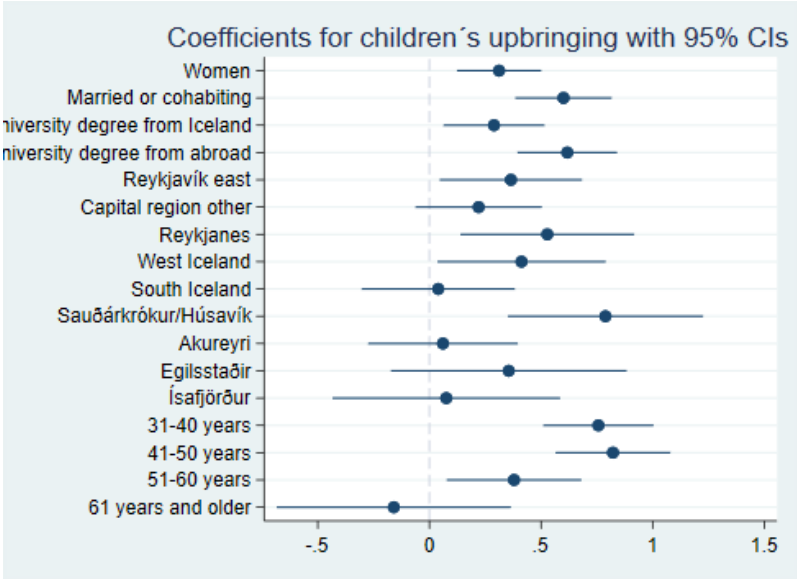

Figure 42: Odds ratios for the child rearing driver

The graph in Figure 42 shows the odds ratios for the coefficients resulting from the logistical regression. According to the model, being a woman increases the chances of considering the wish to bring up children in Iceland a reason for return by 37 per cent, $p<0.01$ and being married or in a cohabiting relationship increases the chances by 82 per cent, $p<0.01$, holding the other predictors constant. Compared to having no university education, having a university degree from Iceland increases the probability by 34 per cent, $p<0.05$ and having a university degree from abroad increases the probability by 86 per cent, $p<0.01$.

Half of the coefficients for geographical location at the time of the survey are statistically significant within the 10 per cent bound. Using Reykjavík west as a baseline and holding the other predictors constant, residing in Reykjavík east is associated with an increase in chances of returning to bring up children in Iceland by 44 per cent, $p<0.05$, living in Reykjanes is associated

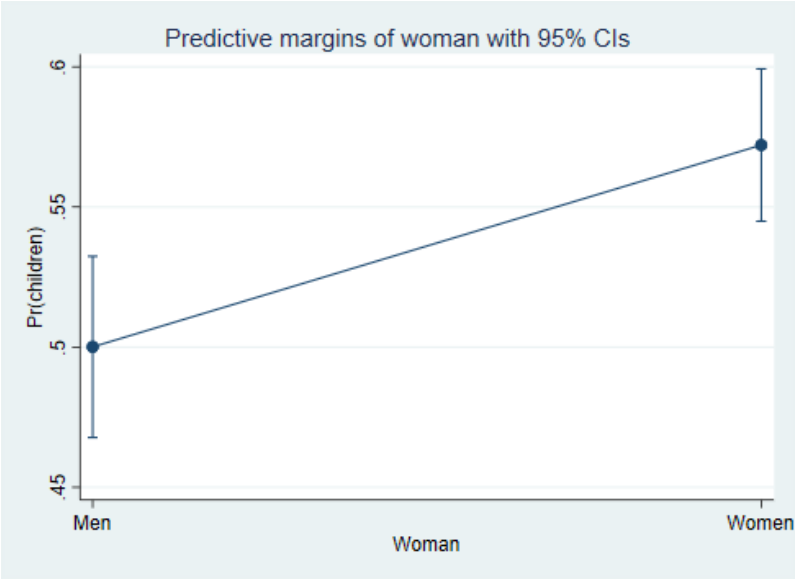

Figure 43: Predictive margins of woman on the child rearing driver

with an increase of 70 per cent, p<0.01, living in West Iceland is associated with an increase of 51 per cent, p<0.05, and living in Sauðárkrókur or Húsavík increases the chances by 120 per cent, p<0.01. Age at the time of return is also statistically significant within the 10 per cent bound, with the exemption of the oldest cohort. Compared to the youngest cohort and holding the other regressors constant, returning to Iceland in ones 30s increases the chances by 113 per cent, p<0.001, returning in ones 40s increases the chances by 128 per cent, p<0.01 and returning in ones 50s increases the chances by 46 per cent, p<0.05.

The graph in Figure 43 shows the predictive margins for men and women. The predictive margins for men to consider child upbringing a reason to move back is 50 per cent, which means that if all the responders in the dataset were men, the model expects them to have an equal chance of considering child upbringing a reason for returning and to not consider child upbringing a reason, holding all the other predictors constant. If everyone in

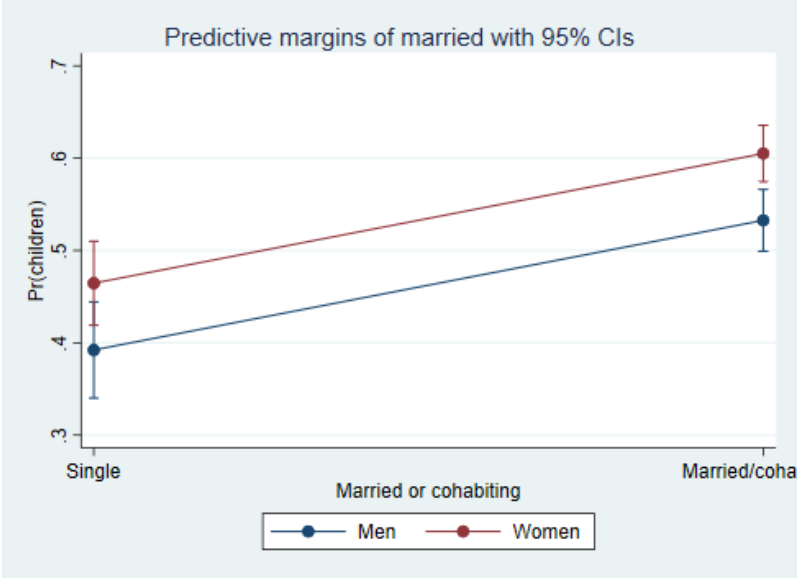

Figure 44: Predictive margins of marital status on the child rearing driver

the dataset were women, the probability would be 57 per cent, ceteris paribus. The difference between the predictive margins of men and women is statistically significant at the 0.001 per cent level.

Being married or in a cohabiting relationship is associated with 53 per cent probability of considering wishing to bring up children in Iceland if all were men, and 61 per cent if all were women, compared to 39 per cent for single men and 46 per cent for single women. The predictive margins are shown in the graph in Figure 44. The difference between being single and in a marriage or cohabiting relationship is statistically significant for both men and women.

The probability of considering bringing up children in Iceland a reason for the return is greatest among those with university education from abroad, and smallest for those who have not completed education at university level, for both men and women, as shown in the graph in Figure 45. The average predicted probability for considering child upbringing as a motive is 43 per cent for men without university degree, and 50 per cent for women. For those with

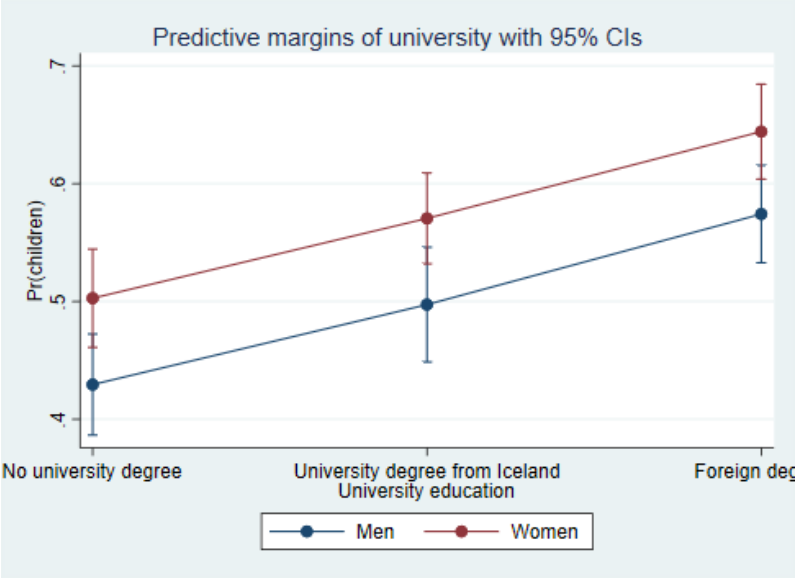

Figure 45: Predictive margins of education on the child rearing driver

an Icelandic diploma, the average predicted probability is 50 per cent for men, and 57 per cent for women. For those with a university degree from an institution outside of Iceland, the average predicted probability is 57 per cent for men, and 64 per cent for women. The 95% confidence intervals of the predictive margins do overlap for all groups. When the interaction of sex is removed, the difference in the average marginal effects of education is statistically significant at the 1 per cent level for university abroad.

The predicted effect of age at the time of return on the probability of considering bringing up children in Iceland as a reason for return is shown in the graph in Figure 46. The average predicted probability is strongest for those who returned to Iceland in their 40s, 57 per cent if everyone was treated as men and 64 per cent if everyone was treated as women, holding the other predictors constant. The smallest average predicted probability is in the oldest cohort, 34 per cent for men and 41 for women. The difference between the

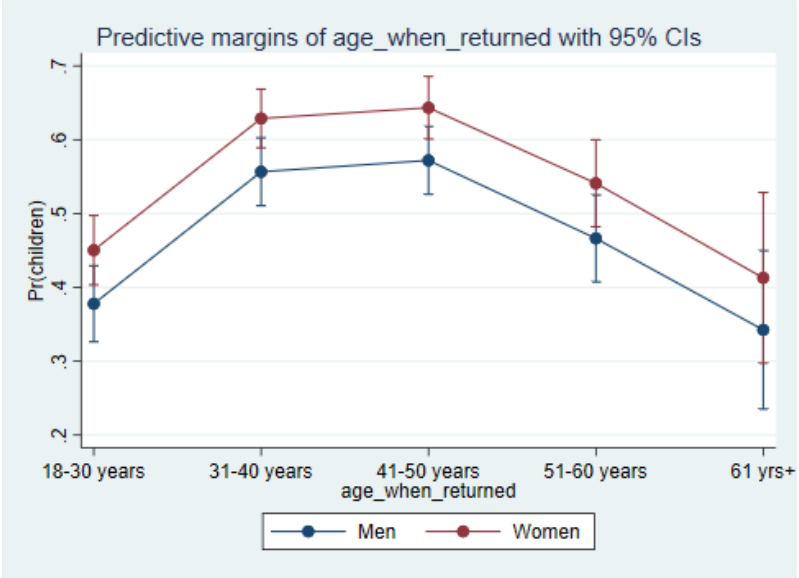

Figure 46: Predictive margins of age when returned on the child rearing driver

youngest cohort and those who returned in their 30s and 40s is statistically significant, $p<0.05$.

The predictive margins of geographical location at the time of the survey are shown in the graph in Figure 47. Holding the other predictors at their mean values separately for men and women, the model estimates the highest probability of considering bringing up children a migration motive in Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík, 66 per cent for men and 69 per cent for women. The second highest probability is expected in Reykjanes, 60 per cent for men and 63 per cent for women. The smallest probability is expected in Reykjavík west, 47 per cent for men and 50 per cent for women, holding the other predictors at their mean value.

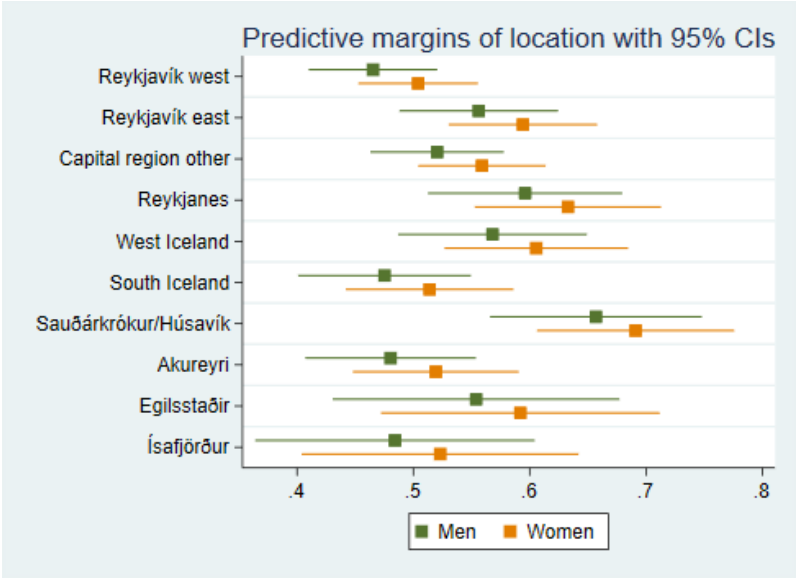

Figure 47: Predictive margins of location on the child rearing driver

6 Discussion

This chapter explores how the individual characteristics influence the odds of considering the different social and economic motives for return migration to Iceland and how the results connect to existing literature on return migration. The research questions guiding the thesis are:

- How do characteristics such as sex, age and education influence the odds of returning for social or economic reasons?
- Does geographical location influence the probability of the individual migration drivers? Is there an urban-rural divide?
- Do the reasons for return migration to Iceland differ between men and women?

6.1 The influence of individual characteristics

The individual characteristics included in the models were sex, marital status, university education and age when returned. Although the independent variables in the 5 models were all the same, the logistical regressions were run separately. The reported odds ratios are based on the dependent variables and they differ between the 5 models. The other predictors are held constant only within each model and not across them.

The fundamental issue with model estimations in return migration lies in the lack of comparative data on individuals who migrate but do not return. This thesis presented descriptive statistics on the individual characteristics for both returnees and those who have not lived abroad in adulthood. This allowed for the observation on potential differences between returnees and not returnees, with the goal of painting a clearer picture of the returnee profile. The figures for educational attainment, disaggregated by sex and returnee status showed how self-selection based on observable traits presents itself in the Icelandic context. The figures suggested that individuals with

greater academic ambitions are likelier to migrate in adulthood and subsequently return, matching the findings of Harðarson (2010) on the relationship between number of graduates in Iceland and out-migration of Icelanders 3 years later. Similarly, individuals with lower formal education are less likely to migrate and return. Due to data limitations, the educational attainment of individuals who migrate and do not return are unknown.

As discussed in the theoretical background, Gmelch (1980) observed three types of returnees in his seminal work on typology of return migrants. The first one was returnees who out-migrated intending for a temporary migration period abroad, often to achieve a defined goal. The findings of Harðarson (2010) and as well as the returnee profile observed in this study, suggest that this category of return migrants might fit a significant number of the Icelandic returnees.

The proportion of those with only primary and secondary education is more than double for not returnees, both men and women. The proportion of individuals with vocational education was also higher in the not returnee groups for both men and women. In total, just over a third of those who have not lived abroad in adulthood have completed university education, compared to over two thirds of the returnees.

In the European Union, the proportion of EU migrants with university education is also relatively high compared to nationals, although not as pronounced as the figures in this study. According to data from EU-SILC 2021 and 2022, 42% of both returnees and EU movers had high education levels compared to 27% of nationals, and 20% of returnees and 21% of EU movers had low education levels compared to 27% of stayers (European Commission, 2025). According to EU data, the level of education of EU migrants varies greatly across the Member States. For example, the rate of EU migrants with

university education is over 70% in Sweden and Luxemburg, whereas only 14% of the EU migrants in Italy have completed university education (European Commission, 2024).

This is consistent with the migration selection model discussed in section 2.1. which implies that migrants from countries with less earnings dispersion and thus relatively lower returns on education are positively selected on observable traits (Borjas and Bratsberg, 1994, Rooth and Saarela, 2007). Iceland has a relatively high income equality (Statistics Iceland, 2023) which, according to the migration selection model, would expect a positive selection of observable skills. A similar pattern has been found in the selection profile of returnees from other European countries. Among those are Ireland, where returnees are found to have a higher level of education than the population that has not lived abroad. Furthermore, among the Irish migrants in general, those who do return seem to have the higher levels of education (A. Constant & Massey, 2003; Corcoran, 2008). Similar evidence of high level of education of out-migrants has been found in Denmark (Jensen & Pedersen, 2007) and in the UK (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007).

The logistical regression models predicted statistically significant effect for women relative to men; reduced odds for considering employment opportunities as a driving force for return migration, and increased odds for considering proximity to friends and family and the wish to bring children up in Iceland. The models also indicated a statistically significant effect of relationship status for both men and women. Compared to single men, men in a cohabiting relationship or a marriage are likelier to consider returning for employment opportunities and bringing up children in Iceland. Similarly, compared to single women, women in cohabiting relationship or marriage are

also likelier to consider returning for employment and bringing up children in Iceland.

From the economic perspective on migration decisions, research has found that migration events are negatively associated with earnings for married women, but positively associated with earning of married men (Eliasson et al., 2014; McKinnish, 2008; Sandell, 1977). However, it is not clear whether high-earning wives are less likely to migrate because of the potential loss of income compared to low-earning wives. Eliasson et al (2014) investigated couple migration and self-selection using Swedish registry data. They found that high earning wives were less likely to move than those on the lower end of the income distribution (Eliasson et al., 2014).

Having lived abroad is associated with higher wages upon return (Barrett & Goggin, 2010; Koikkalainen, Linnakangas, & Suikkanen, 2016; Wahba, 2015). Using Finnish longitudinal data, Koikkalainen et al. (2016) compare two cohorts of Finnish return migrants, returning in 1999 and 2004. They found that the latter cohort had a higher share of return migrants with university degree, 35% compared to 25% and that the newer generation of migrants was motivated by career choices as opposed to unemployment or other forms of financial necessities. This new generation of Finnish migrants already holds a greater socio-economic status prior to migrating, they are younger and better educated than the earlier migration cohorts. This is resulting in better labour market outcomes upon returning to Finland, the return migrants earn higher wages and have lower unemployment rates compared to those of same age who did not migrate (Koikkalainen et al., 2016).

Almost half of the returnee men in the dataset hold a university degree from abroad compared to less than third of women returnees, whereas the proportion of women returnees holding an Icelandic degree is double the

proportion of men. The coefficients for university education from an Icelandic university are statistically significant for all the models except returning for friends and family, and for all the five models the coefficients for a foreign university education are statistically significant.

We can assume that the university education from a foreign university was obtained before migrating back to Iceland, whereas those with an Icelandic degree could have obtained their degree either before or after the migration event. It is therefore not clear whether the Icelandic university education had an effect on the return migration decision since it could have been obtained afterwards.

Compared to having no university education, having a foreign university degree more than doubles the chances of returning for all the models but bringing up children in Iceland, where it increases the chances by 86%, holding the other regressors constant. The difference in predictive margins between men and women with an Icelandic degree, compared to men and women with a foreign degree was statistically significant for all the models. Having a degree from Iceland compared to not having a degree increases the chances by over a third for all the models apart from returning for friends and family, which predicts no difference between those without university education and with an Icelandic degree.

The data shows a difference between men and women regarding age at time of return. About two thirds of men returned in their 30s and 40s whereas a similar proportion of women returned in their 20s and 30s. This corresponds with the EU data on returnees who returned within the last 5 years, where the average age of returnees is 40 (European Commission, 2025). This figure is not sex disaggregated.

In the model on employment opportunities, returning in one´s 30s, 40s, and 50s almost doubles the likelihood of considering job opportunities a reason to return, and the difference is statistically significant from the youngest cohort, which is the least likely to consider jobs as a reason for return. Returning above the age of 60 does not increase the chances for considering any of the 5 migration motives studied, and none of the coefficients for 60 and older is statistically significant.

Proximity to friends and family matters most to those who returned in their 30s, followed by those who returned in their 40s. These are also the cohorts most likely to consider bringing up children in Iceland a motive for returning to Iceland. Compared to the youngest cohort, the predicted increase in likelihood is more than twofold for those returning in their 30s and 40s. However, returning in one´s 50s increases the chances of wanting to bring up children in Iceland by almost 50% suggesting that the motivation extends from early years to adolescence.

Dustmann (2003) analysed the effect of parental concerns for their offspring on the probability of return migration. Using data from Germany on immigrants from Italy, Spain, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece, they constructed a model that included relative income prospects, return plans and future economic and welfare prospects of the child, with the gender of the child specified. They found that children in the household reduce the probability of returning, more so for boys than girls. Dustmann speculates that this is due to the parents' concerns for the education and employment opportunities of their offspring being greater in the host-country (Germany) than in their home countries, and that career concerns are considered less important for daughters (Dustmann, 2003).

Perhaps the reverse is a consideration of Icelandic parents; that children in the household increase the probability of return. Thorsteinsson (2006) interviewed Icelanders working in academia abroad about their return migration considerations. Many of his interviewees spoke of child upbringing and family policies such as access to daycare, parental leave and the welfare system as pull factors for Iceland. All the interviewees spoke of missing the proximity to friends and family and those with children wished for their children to identify with Iceland and the Icelandic language (Thorsteinsson, 2006). Official figures on net migration of Icelandic citizens by age groups also show a trend of outmigration of young people and in-migration of people mid-career and their offspring (Bjarnason, Jóhannesdóttir & Garðarsdóttir 2022).

Ní Laoire (2007, 2008) has explored return migration in Ireland through life course perspective. Her findings suggest that return migration in Ireland is largely driven by the wish to bring up children in Ireland and to be closer to aging parents and family networks, equally reflecting a strong sense of obligation and the nostalgic idea of home return.

For considering the enjoyment of Icelandic nature as a migration force, age is the only statistically significant predictor except university attainment, which is statistically significant in all the models. Returning in one´s 30s increases the chances of considering Icelandic nature a motive by 59%.

6.2 The influence of geographical location

The capital region is home to half of the returnees compared to a third of the not returnees, with western Reykjavík having the greatest proportion of returnees – almost 40% of the responders in Reykjavík west are returnees. The distribution of individuals with higher education is also skewed towards the capital region; over 60% of the total graduates from foreign universities are

currently living in Reykjavík and its surrounding municipalities. One reason for the attraction of the capital region for returnees is the high level of education of returnees relative to not returnees. 73% of women returnees hold a university degree and 66% of men, which is significantly higher than the proportion of not returnees with a university education, 49% of women and 30% of men. University education is one of the main explanatory factors of out-migration of young people from rural areas and the lack of employment opportunities for university graduates in rural areas is the main hindrance for their return. University attainment in Iceland has been climbing in recent years and the proportion of university graduates in regions outside of the capital region has increased too. However, the highest proportion of university graduates is still found in the capital region (Bjarnason, Jóhannesdóttir, Garðarsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2022).

Compared to Reykjavík west, considering employment opportunities as a reason to return is associated with a decrease in probability for all the locations surveyed, with four locations statistically significant; Reykjanes, South Iceland, Akureyri and Ísafjörður. For all the locations, the probability is higher for men. Compared to Reykjavík west, half of the locations (Reykjavík other, Reykjanes, South Iceland, Akureyri and Ísafjörður) are associated with a decrease in probability for all the models except the wish to bring up children in Iceland, which, comparing to Reykjavík west, shows an increase in probability for all the geographical locations. This implies that those living in Reykjavík west are likelier to consider employment opportunities as a reason for their return to Iceland than residents of other towns, and less likely to consider children as a reason for return.

Using data from Iceland, Bjarnason and Haartsen (2024) investigated the effect of proximity to family on residential satisfaction and the likelihood of

staying. They found that the probability to stay was higher for individuals living in the same community as most or all of their closest family, regardless of size of community or residential satisfaction. The regression models do not contain information on whether the responders are currently living in proximity to friends and family. However, Bjarnason, Þórðardóttir and Skaptadóttir (2022) explored the effects of social relations on internal migration, using the same survey data as this thesis was based on. Those currently residing in the capital region are likelier to live close to their friends and family than people in other regions. Over two thirds of the responders in the capital region said that most or all of their closest relatives also lived in the capital region. The figures were even higher for closest friends. In comparison, 43% of residents of bigger towns said that most or all of their closest friends and family lived in the same town as they did. Furthermore, three-quarters of the individuals who grew up in the capital region, moved away and since returned, said that proximity to friends and family had mattered greatly or somewhat.

6.3 Gender and migration

This study has incorporated sex aggregation in presenting the results from the descriptive statistical analysis and the empirical findings, using a dichotomous variable on sex. Studying the difference between men and women regarding return migration does not mean the research itself is gendered, at most it presents the results of the different social processes and realities of men and women behind migration decisions and motivations.

As discussed in the previous subsection, the main difference between the sexes is the increased likelihood for friends and family, and children upbringing for women, and employment opportunities for men. The difference between men and women for the drivers on participation in Icelandic society and enjoyment of Icelandic nature are not pronounced nor statistically

significant. Previous studies on migrant families have shown that women are more likely to take on the role of care-givers of ageing parents and in-laws by increasing the number of visits, the length of visits or even return permanently (Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla, & Wilding, 2014; Miyawaki & Hooyman, 2023; Nawyn, 2010, Ní Laoire, 2008).

As previously discussed, historically migration scholars have largely neglected women in migration and assumed their role as a passive trailing wife. Although most women migrants are economically active (f.ex. Anastasiadou et al. 2024), the literature on family migration suggests that women are more likely to be the trailing spouse than men (Eliasson et al., 2014; McKinnish, 2008). For example, Guðjónsdóttir and Skaptadóttir (2017) analysed gendered norms among Icelandic men, women and families who had migrated to Norway. Their study suggests the prevalence of the traditional roles of men as breadwinners and women as home carers as these roles were reported exaggerated after migrating. Many of the Icelandic families migrated for improved employment opportunities for the man, regardless of the employment prospects of the woman (Guðjónsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2017). The traditional role of the male breadwinner dominated the discourse on employment-driven migration to Norway in the Icelandic media during the economic crisis, despite women exceeding 40% of out-migrants to Norway at the time (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir and Karlsdóttir, 2013). This further highlights the conceptualisation of women´s role in migration and their perceived dependency on men.

Marriage has a negative effect on women´s income after migration (Eliasson et al., 2014; McKinnish, 2008; Sandell, 1977). McKinnish (2008) investigated the effect of having an occupation that is associated with frequent migration on the migration decisions of a household and on the earnings of

the spouse. She found that mobility of husband has a large negative effect on the wife´s earnings whereas wife´s mobility has no effect on the husband´s earnings, regardless of her educational background. Her findings strongly suggest that "the career prospects of husbands and wives do not receive equal weight in household decisions" (McKinnish, 2008, p. 848) both because of the large effect of husband´s occupational mobility on migration compared to wife´s occupational mobility, and the negative effect of migration on wives´ earnings is determined by the husbands' education but not their own (McKinnish, 2008). However, the negative effects of migration on married women´s careers are less pronounced for return migration (Bailey and Cooke, 1998, as cited in McKinnish, 2008).

Similarly, Lundström (2014, 2017) and Lundström and Twine (2011) explored gender norms and migration of Swedish women in heterosexual relationships living in Singapore, the United States and Spain. Many of the women in her research had put their own professional careers on hold or abandoned them altogether to follow their husbands' careers and found themselves in the traditional role of a housewife. Besides gender, Lundström also adds the racial dimension of whiteness to her analysis, addressing the racial power structure, privilege and social and spatial hierarchies, how they intersect with the gender vulnerabilities of white women and how that conflicts their identity as a migrant. The migrant is generally portrayed as non-white and social and economically vulnerable, whereas Lundström found that the social and economic capital of the Swedish women migrants was largely dependent on their husbands' career and their own appearance as a white Scandinavian. The literature review in section 2.4 discussed the limited number of studies on the gender dimension of white women migrants from the Northern periphery. The lack of relevant and related literature on previous

studies on return migration in similar context to the Icelandic one is a limitation to this study. While the main driving force of return migration of the Icelandic men aligns with previous studies and theories on migration, which have largely focused on the economically active male migrant, there is little to rely on regarding the return migration forces of Icelandic women.

Lee´s (1966) theory of individual choice and cost-benefit analysis of the attracting and repelling forces behind migration decisions was designed for the economically active male migrant (and his trailing wife). The novelty of Lee´s theory of migration at the time was that it was based on the individual choice, instead of factors at the macro level. This allows for gender considerations in modelling migration decisions based on the pull and push effects. Since migration is a gendered process so are the push and pull factors impacting migration decision (Anastasiadou et al. 2024).

The results of the logistic regressions and the predictive margins of woman suggest that the pull and push factors for return migration of Icelandic citizens are gender specific. I.e. the findings reveal patterns implying male and female specific pull and push effects of return migration to Iceland. The reasons for the high proportion of women returnees considering wishing to bring up children in Iceland might be explained by female-specific pull factors to Iceland. Given Iceland´s high score on the Gender Equality Index, these might include the women friendly labour market, where women´s labour participation is facilitated by affordable and accessible childcare, leave of absence from work for child´s sickness and the expectation of men´s participation in child rearing. A suggestion for future research would be to investigate these factors specifically targeting the different impact of migration and return migration experiences of men and women which are under-researched in the social sphere within the Icelandic context.

Another gap in knowledge identified in this thesis is the attraction forces of employment opportunities in Iceland. We cannot tell from the data how many of the men and women in this study considered their own employment opportunities as a reason for the return, nor how many (if any) considered their partner´s career opportunities as a reason for the return. Since gender-norms and power-relations in heterosexual relationships affect migration decisions, including those of the white and privileged, an investigation into the employment driver from a gendered perspective warrants further research.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has explored return migration of Icelandic citizens, both the characteristics of returnees compared to not returnees, and the influence of sex, marital status, education, age at the time of return and current town of residence on five different drivers of return migration. The results from the data analysis suggest that the majority of out-migrating Icelandic citizens who return have a university level of education. Although a great proportion of returnees live in the capital region, Icelandic returnees make up to between 6-11% of the population other towns in Iceland.

The predicted effect of university education indicates an increase in likelihood for all the migration drivers studied compared to those with no university education, with a stronger effect for those who obtained their university education abroad, statistically significant for all the models. The predicted effect of returning in the the age cohorts of 31-40 and 41-50 is associated with an increase in probability for all the drivers, also statistically significant for all the models. Furthermore, the results imply that those living in the western part of Reykjavík are less likely to move back for child rearing and likelier to move back for employment opportunities, compared with residents elsewhere in Iceland.

Do Icelandic citizens return home for kin or career? The results suggest that women are likelier to return for kin and men are likelier to return for career. Women have a higher probability of considering proximity to friends and family and child rearing as a reason for return, whereas men are likelier to move back for employment opportunities. Increased knowledge and understanding on the attraction forces behind return migration of Icelandic citizens is valuable for future policy direction and population distribution.

Heimildir

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