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Working papers

Torn Nets. How to explain the gap of refugees and humanitarian migrants in the access to the Italian labour market.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we present some data documenting the difficulties of migrants arriving in the last couple of years as asylum seekers in finding jobs in the Italian labour market. Given the virtual absence of data on how recent refugees and asylum seekers are faring in the labour market in Italy, we believe even our very fragmentary data is a contribution. We then contextualize the problem in the general finding reported in the literature that (with some exceptions) refugees find it more difficult and take longer to "integrate into the labour market" not only when compared with natives but also with other migrants. We briefly discuss the various explanations proposed in the literature for this "refugee gap", cite evidence showing that individual characteristics of refugees cannot fully explain the size of the gap, and argue that existing explanations are insufficient.

We then argue that the differences in the employment rates of migrants arriving via different channels (international protection, family reunion, employment, study) deserves attention in general, not just as a topic for "refugee studies". We discuss the differences of various migration trajectories and the effects these have on social networks formed in the country of arrival, and consequently on ability to integrate into the job market.

Contents

1. Recent asylum seekers in Italy: fragmentary data on "integration"

83.970 persons asked for asylum in Italy in 2015 and 123.600 in 2016. In terms of nationality, the largest number of claims came from Nigeria, followed by Pakistan, Gambia and Senegal (migrants from these four countries made up more than half of the total in 2016). Men made up 85% of the total[1]. After initial identification and a stay in a first reception centre, these persons were sent to more permanent centres scattered over the country. At the end of 2016, around 80% of asylum seekers and refugees (137.218 persons)[2], were in a temporary structure, mostly in a CAS (*Centro di accoglienza straordinaria)*, and 20% (34.039 persons) in a SPRAR programme (*Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* – the system which was originally intended to house all asylum seekers)[3]. The latter differ from the CAS managed by the Prefectures in various ways, but these differences do not concern us in this paper. In this context we simply wish to stress the importance of non-profit organizations. In some cases, these organizations have a long history of working with migrants, in many other cases, they are new to the field. We should also point out that documentation for SPRAR programmes is more complete than for the CAS, which are selected in a public application process by the local Prefectures, to meet needs of increasing numbers of asylum seekers. For this reason, we have had to use documentation for the SPRAR system, even though these projects contain only a fifth of all asylum seekers. When issuing a call for applications to manage centres, at least in 2106 contractors have to meet criteria developed by the SPRAR system, therefore SPRAR documents are relevant also for CAS. The objectives are very ambitious: "the services and activities provided in the centres must be directed right from the beginning to achieve social inclusion, otherwise all subsequent efforts will be vain".[4] A wide series of services are provided in addition to material aid in order to achieve this aim of integration: language instruction and information about Italian cultural conventions; vocational courses and re-training; information and advice about services available locally; advice and assistance in finding

[1] These data are from the Ministry of the Interior: http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/riepilogo_dati_2015_2016_0.pdf.

[2] https://www.google.it/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi18rDRr7bVAhXGDZoKHctAC54QFggsMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fallegati%2Fcruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31_dicembre.pdf&usg=AFQjCNF6YLzG4_fUBlYth55olCQHWeeWzQ

[3] In the intention of the 2014 National Plan for refugees approved by the *Conferenza Stato Regioni* (a consultative body coordinating policy between the central state and regions), the CAS were supposed to be gradually run down as the SPRAR system was enlarged. As can be seen, this has not happened.

[4] Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (a cura di), *I percorsi di inserimento socio-economico nello SPRAR. Metodologie, strategie, strumenti*, 2016:14.

employment; advice and assistance in finding housing; advice and assistance in social integration; legal advice and assistance; health and psychological care[5].

However, information about the actual *effect* of the programmes in achieving "autonomy" and "inclusion" is extremely patchy to say the least. The 2016 SPRAR Annual Report claims that in 2016 41,3% of those leaving the SPRAR system (12.171 persons) were in a state of "socio-economic integration"[6]. But this only means that, "they have made progress towards socio-economic integration". In other words, it does not necessarily mean, for example, that the person in question has found a job, it may just mean that they are on a training course. In fact the Annual Report makes it clear that insertion into work is not a "specific obligation" of the SPRAR projects, but rather a "possible outcome"[7] of the programmes activities of orientation towards the labour market. 2.842 people are said to have been placed in the labour market, but it is unclear what this means exactly, whether for example, the people in question obtained a normal contract, or only a *borsa lavoro*, a measure intended for disadvantaged subjects like ex-prisoners, the handicapped or psychiatric patients, and not paid for, at least initially, by the employer. In any case, 2.842 cases of "insertion into work" is a modest figure compared to the total number of persons leaving the SPRAR projects.

The data above are the situation of persons *at the moment* they leave the projects. There is an almost total lack of official information on what is happening to migrants *after* they have left the programmes, and this means that we have to rely on information from those working in the individual centres. We asked staff of two associations managing apartments in the north of Italy to record systematically what they knew of the migrants who had left the programmes. We do not present these data as in any sense representative: on the contrary, since both associations providing data have been involved with projects for refugees and other migrants since the 1990s, we believe that residents leaving their programmes were probably better prepared to cope with life in Italy (including the labour market) than those leaving many other programmes.

The first thing that is worth noting is that even these two very professional associations have no information on the majority of the people who have left the programmes. In total they gave us

[5] Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (a cura di), *Manuale operativo per l'attivazione e la gestione di servizi di accoglienza integrata in favore di richiedenti e titolari di protezione internazionale e umanitaria,* 2015.

[6] ANCI, Ministero dell'Interno, Cittalia (a cura di), *Rapporto Annuale SPRAR 2016*: 52

[7] ibidem: 116

data on 137 people who had left the programmes, but they had no information on what 86 of these were doing. This seems to us indicative of the general lack of knowledge in Italy about how effective the programmes are in achieving any of the integration aims they set themselves.

The second thing which is clear from our data is that "integration into the labour market" – a fundamental aspect of the "social inclusion" aimed at by the government and by migrants themselves – is extremely low. Only 10 persons were known to have a job with a regular contract. Another 5 persons said they had a job without a contract, and for a further 3 it was not clear whether their job was in the formal or informal sector, 33 persons had a *borsa lavoro* (see below). Paid by the association for the first months, in some circumstances, this measure is extended for a few months paid for not by the association but by the employer[8]. The widespread use of this measure is indicative of the difficulties which many asylum seekers have, and the fact that they are considered very disadvantaged on the labour market.

As already mentioned, it is striking that these difficulties co-exist with a fairly high level of support. This is especially true if we compare migrants arriving through a request for international protection with labour migrants arriving through a permit for work or undocumented. All those on the SPRAR and CAS programmes attend language courses (although the number of hours provided is not as high as in some countries), many have attended vocational training, and all have received information and advice about locally available services.

With regard to the type of job obtained, these are mainly unskilled, from kitchen assistant to park attendant to agricultural labourer, cleaner, warehouseman.

The marginality of many asylum seekers' "socio-economic integration" is reflected also in the housing conditions of those who have left the programmes. It is striking, for example, that 9 people migrants (out of the 50 persons on whom the associations have information) were sleeping in public dormitories. Another 3 were known to be squatting or in similar situations[9].

Some of these people may have chosen to not pay a rent, giving priority to sending money back home, or to repay debts incurred for migration, or for other reasons; however it is difficult not to see their situation as far removed from "socio-economic integration". It should be noted, in addition, that marginal housing is not only a characteristic of the undocumented[10]. Apart from

[8]In the development of the current research it will be important to obtain data on how many *borse lavoro* are converted into normal contracts.

[9] Once again, it is interesting to note that the associations have no information on 87 persons.

[10] Medici Senza Frontiere, *Fuori campo,* 2016.

housing, another sign of marginality is the fact that it is common for passers-by in Italian cities to see young Africans begging.

Another indication of weakness of the networks "rooting" asylum seekers to a particular local area is the high level of geographical mobility. Labour migrants in general tend to move more than natives within the country of arrival (for recent data for Italy, Bonifazi, Heins, and Tucci 2014). However, it seems possible that refugees may be even more geographically mobile. Only 39 of the persons in our sample who had left the reception programmes were living in the same municipality or province. 21 were known to have gone abroad, while 32 were living in another province in Italy. Our associations had no knowledge of the residence of 45 persons.

These figures, indicating high mobility internationally but also within Italy's frontiers, seem similar to the national data available for persons who obtained a permit to stay for international protection in 2011 (mostly persons arriving during the "North Africa Emergency" following the so-called "Arab Spring"). Many of these people, too, subsequently left for another country (ISTAT 2016: 5-8). But internal mobility was also high: "among the persons who entered Italy in 2011 with a permit for humanitarian reasons and who were still present in Italy in 2016, the percentage registered at a municipal registry office was much lower than for persons who entered with a permit for work or for family reunion"; in addition, 70% of those who were registered at all were registered in a different province from that where they originally arrived and obtained their permit (ISTAT 2016: 8-9 and Fig. 4).

This high mobility is partly explicable by the gender and age composition of these migrants. In 2011 88% of requests for asylum in Italy came from males[11], and 83% of these were men aged 18-34. Research on residential mobility has always found young adults to be particularly mobile, and usually found that mobility for work is higher for males than for females. The high rates of mobility cited above also reflect the occupational niches where these recent asylum seekers and refugees in Italy managed to find work - niches which are intrinsically seasonal such as crop picking or peddling various objects up and down summer holiday beaches. In these jobs migrants may spend a month in one area of southern Italy picking tomatoes, then move to another area where the crop has matured a little later, then move to central Italy for the harvest of another product, and

[11] Unlike the refugee population worldwide, refugees who reach the West tend to be predominantly male. The percentage of males is particularly high in Italy, but in the European Union as a whole in 2011 69% of all asylum seekers were males: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en
The proportion was similar in 2016 at 68%. This aspect of the specificities of refugees and asylum seekers (in the West) does not seem to have been investigated. Yet the gender balance of a migration flow is an important aspect of the social relations migrants establish, and may have consequences, among other things, for the labour market.

so on. However, such high rates of residential mobility (and possibly also mobility from one job to another, possibly interspersed with periods of unemployment) certainly make it difficult to establish a stable position either in employment or in Italian society. Reliance on jobs of this kind is, we would argue, another piece of evidence regarding the weakness of the ties refugees in Italy have into a local labour market associated with a stable residence.

2. A general disadvantage of refugees in the labour market: tied to the "migration trajectory"?

There are various reasons for this low level of socio-economic integration, some of which concern the individual characteristics of recent asylum seekers in Italy (for example, it is of obvious importance that the numbers of illiterates arriving among recent asylum seekers is high) or the Italian economy, which has never fully emerged from the crisis. However, notwithstanding these specificities, we wish to place the difficulties of recent migrants to Italy in the context of findings elsewhere that note what seem to be particular difficulties among migrants arriving through the asylum track.

In fact a number of recent European studies find differences in the employment record of migrants according to their "class of admission" (with a permit for international protection, family reunion, work, study, etc.), and qualitative studies also report particular difficulties for refugees. We believe that these legal categories are not just administrative artefacts, and do not only reflect migrants' experience in their country of origin, but also indicate "migration trajectories". In other words, we argue that treating legal class of admission as a significant category is not only a matter of methodological convenience (government databases often divide migrants by their legal channel of admission so statistics are available on this basis), but can have sense theoretically[12]. In fact we claim that migrants arriving by these different tracks tend to be inserted in different social networks, and that this has a large part in explaining the employment difficulties of refugees and asylum seekers.

Recent migration to Italy is interesting from the point of view of our argument because many people are not "classic refugees", in the sense that many do not come from war zones, and are not able to demonstrate political persecution. 60% of those claiming asylum had their claim denied in

[12] In this context we are not concerned with the issue of categorizations of refugees as an " institutional fractioning" device (Zetter 2007), a device which has the aim of distinguishing between "forced" and "economic" migration for political and control reasons (Fassin 2013; Scheel, Squire 2014). As Pastore (2015) says, Europe's current preoccupation about migration and asylum can even be seen as a "categorization crisis".

2016 whereas only 5% were given full refugee status (according to the Geneva Convention) and 14% subsidiary protection[13]. We certainly do not imagine that the judgments of the commissions responsible for assessing asylum claims are invariably correct, but it is widely recognized by those close to the ground that not all those seeking asylum correspond to current definitions of a refugee[14], and that the closure of other channels of access to the West forces many people to present themselves as in need of international protection. It is significant of the widespread recognition of this situation that the UNHCR in Italy often uses the term "mixed migrations".

The difficulties recent migrants to Italy have in finding work probably cannot be explained, therefore, by reference to traumatic experience in war, or to the fact that war forced persons to migrate who would not otherwise have done so. In this sense, the difficulties in the labour market which seem to characterize recent asylum seekers may perhaps be considered a relatively pure case of difficulties connected with the networks used in their migration trajectory.

In this theoretical framework of "migration trajectories", we may even draw what might seem an improbable analogy with persons arriving via family reunion. People arriving via family reunion are obviously very different from refugees and asylum seekers in terms of selection at the point of origin, and in terms of much of their experience in the country of immigration. But we argue that it is no accident that both persons arriving via the asylum track and those arriving via family reunion have difficulty in finding work, especially in the early years, and that this similarity has roots in the inadequacy of the networks providing access to employment (cf. par.6).

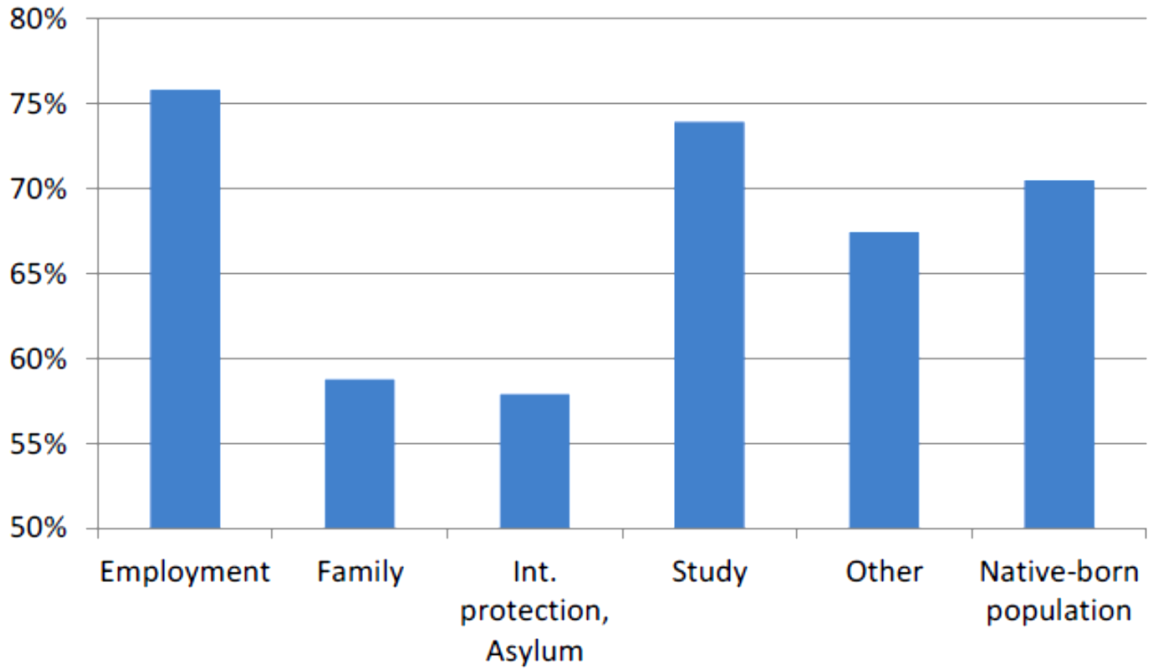
3. International data on the "refugee gap"

But first of all, let us describe some of the evidence on refugees' employment. The recent wave of asylum seekers in Europe has elicited considerable interest in the question of how previous refugees fared in the labour market. Analyses based on the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2014 ad hoc module (AHM) on migrants show a clear disadvantage of refugees not only with respect to natives but also with regard to migrants arriving via provisions for work.

[13] 21% were given a permit to stay for "humanitarian protection", which can be conceded to those who do not meet the criteria of subsidiary protection.

[14] It is worth noting in this context that the concept of a refugee as sharply distinguished from a migrant seeking work is relatively new (Long 2013). The Nansen passports issued by the League of Nations in the 1920s and '30s in fact presumed that the persons in question would work and did not require proof of political persecution.

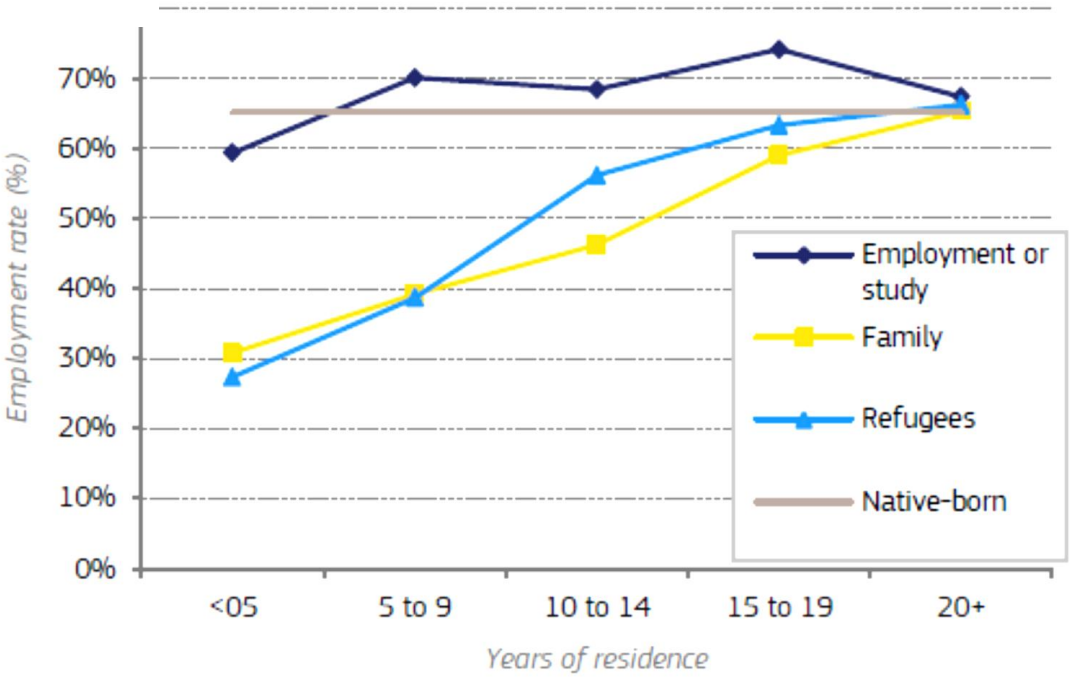
Figure 1 – 2014 employment rates (25-64 year olds) by channel of migration in EU.



Source: Peschner, 2017, 1: 8 . Calculations based on EU LFS 2014 AHM.

Unemployment remains higher and employment rates lower even several years after arrival in the country of immigration (so the gap cannot be explained by provisions forbidding asylum seekers from working until their request has been processed, although this may have some effect initially). As Fig. 1 shows, the difference between migrants arriving via different channels is quite substantial; only those arriving via family reunion procedures are anything like as disadvantaged. Figure 2 gives data from the same source but divided by length of residence in Europe. The graph below shows the very large initial difference compared with migrants arriving with a permit for work or study, followed by recovery after a number of years (the levels do not reach those of immigrants arriving with a permit for work or study but this is partly due to individual characteristics). This graph therefore both illustrates why scholars have talked of a “refugee gap”, and the change in disadvantage over time. We believe that this pattern suggests that what is at issue is not so much unchanging individual characteristics (such as national origin, for example) but rather of difficulty in “entering” the labour market.

Figure 2 - 2014 Employment rate by reason for migration and years of residence in the European Union, 15-64



Source: OECD and EC, 20169: 119. Calculations based on EU LFS 2014 AHM.

Note: Data cover 25 countries of the European Union.

It might be thought that migrants arriving with a permit for work would inevitably have higher employment rates than those arriving via asylum procedures since they would already have a job to go to. In reality, permits for work are often an officialization of a *de facto* situation, in which the migrant has found a job informally and then regularized his/her legal position. This is particularly true for Italy, where work permits have generally been given to migrants who had found a job as an undocumented migrant (having entered for tourism and then over-stayed)[15]. It might also be thought that refugees could not work until they had obtained official recognition of their status. However, the situation has changed in the last few years, and now in most countries asylum seekers can work after a few months. In Italy they can now work two months after making their request for asylum so this does not explain the disadvantage we refer to above.

[15] Finotelli and Arango (2011:5) summarize the largest Italian regularizations as follows: "The fifth regularization in twenty years was carried out in 2002, it turned out to be the most successful one, with 702,000 applications and 634,728 residence permits issued . In addition, in 2006 Berlusconi's government approved a so-called 'maxi-decree' on annual entry quotas, allowing the entry of 470,000 foreign workers. Nevertheless, the objective of the decree was not to allow 'new' workers to enter but to regularize irregular immigrants who were already living in Italy as overstayers. The maxi-decree was followed by two new bogus 'decrees on flows' in 2007 and 2008, whereas a 'more proper' regularization process —though limited to domestic and care workers — was carried out in 2009".

Controlling for age, education, gender and other individual factors reduces the disadvantage of refugees and asylum seekers but does not abolish it (Aiyar et al. 2016; Dumont et al. 2016; Konle-Seidel and Bolits 2016). In fact, only quite a modest amount of the disadvantage can be explained by these individual characteristics.

These results for persons arriving in Europe in past decades and present in the 2014 ad hoc sample of the EU Labour Force Survey need to be set against a background of other research conducted in different geographical contexts and different time periods which also finds a "refugee gap". The finding is not universal because there are notable "success stories". A well-known example is that of the first wave of migrants leaving Cuba for the to escape the Castro regime (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes 1987). Such exceptions require explanation[16] but should not detract from the more frequent picture of disadvantage. Among others, Coughlan (1998) Bloch (2002), Valtonen (1998), Wooden (1991) and Engbersen et al. (2015) all report significant disadvantage in the various national contexts studied, as does Ott's (2013) meta-analysis. As with the various studies referred to above using EU Labour Force Survey data, these studies all show that the extent of the disadvantage cannot be explained by refugees' human capital or other individual characteristics. Both quantitative and qualitative studies show that even educated refugees, who had highly-skilled jobs in their country of origin, relatively high education and good language skills in the language of the country of immigration had difficulties in the labour market (not just working in lower-skilled jobs, but often being unemployed: Bloch 2002; Valtonen 1998; 1999). In some cases, in fact, controlling for individual characteristics like gender, education, work experience and language competence accentuates the refugee gap rather than narrowing it.

Connor (2010), working on United States data for legal migrants registering in 2003, finds refugees disadvantaged (net of individual variables) compared with other migrants in terms of type of employment and salary, but not in terms of being in employment. However, Connor's subjects had all been legal migrants in the USA for several years; since the European studies also show that refugees catch up after about five or six years, these apparently contrasting results may not be incompatible. In fact, it is possible that rather than talk of a "refugee gap" it may be better to talk of greater difficulties, and *slower entry* into the labour force. We agree, therefore, with Bakker, Dagevos and Engbersen's (2017) term "refugee entry effect". Bakker and her colleagues have

[16] Apart from the very favourable "reception context" (Portes and Rumbaut 2014) of the first wave of Cuban immigrants and concrete aid given by United States governments, the high proportions of entrepreneurs and professionals with experience in business among these Cuban refugees was certainly an important element in the ability to establish a flourishing ethnic enclave economy. And once established, this enclave economy greatly eased the entry into employment of many other Cuban emigrants coming as asylum seekers.

longitudinal data whereas the Labour Force Survey has cross-sectional data (albeit for persons who arrived at different moments in the past), and in their Dutch administrative data they are able to study the employment record of refugees and other migrants as it changes over time. Focusing on migrants who gained a residence permit for asylum, work, family reunion, etc. in the Netherlands between 1995 and 1999, they also find that that although there was a significant "refugee gap" vis-à-vis other migrants, there was also considerable catching up over time.

4. Some explanations of the "refugee gap"

Apart from human capital, attempts to explain the disadvantage of refugees quite often refer to nationality of origin and to the possibility that discrimination by employers may be particularly great. In some cases, the national origins of refugees do differ from those of other migrants and so one might imagine that the "cultural distance" from natives was particularly great for refugees from some countries. Certainly research often finds differences among the labour market record of different nationalities, among refugees as among other migrants (e.g. Bratsberg, Raaum and Røed 2017). However, one should be cautious about interpreting these results in terms of cultural distance: scholars rarely have any measure of cultural distance, relying on impressions; yet there is the endogeneity problem that perceived cultural distance tends to depend on degree of "integration", including integration in the labour market. Hypotheses about cultural distance as a causal factor also tend not to take into account other cases which might seem to contradict the notion. Were South East Asians arriving as refugees in North America or Europe more culturally distant than Chinese, arriving with a work permit, often seen (in recent decades) as a "success" case among immigrants to the United States? Were Middle Eastern or central African refugees more "culturally distant" from natives than migrants arriving in Europe from Asia or Africa through the work permit channel? Finally, since "national origin" does not change over time, we may ask whether the hypothesis is compatible with the evidence referred to in the previous section that employment of refugees changes over time.

Other accounts refer to the idea that refugees may continue to be oriented towards the political struggle in their country of origin (Kunz 1981). Certainly, the Russian exiles portrayed in nineteenth century novels were more oriented towards continuing the political battle than getting ahead in the local labour market, and there are many twentieth century equivalents (cf. Bloch 2002 on Congolese refugees in East London in the 1990s). However, qualitative studies suggest

that exiles of this kind are a small minority of the total. We do not believe that they are numerous among recent migrants in Italy.

In other words, the widespread research finding that refugees tend to be disadvantaged in the labour market should not necessarily be explained by any common-sense conception of who is a refugee. As mentioned earlier, it is only relatively recently that refugees have been categorized as a separate category of migrants (Long 2013). And, as is widely accepted, who goes down the legal track for refugees rather than for "economic migrants" depends partly on what channels are open, so variable by geographical and historical context (Sciortino 2017; Long 2013).

5. Migration chains, social networks, employment niches

Many studies on refugees and employment make brief references to social networks as a factor affecting employment chances, and several studies find a positive effect in their data (e.g. Correa-Velez, Barnett and Gifford 2015; Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Green et al. 2011). However, researchers rarely seem to have contextualized this in a general explanation of the employment and unemployment differences between migrants arriving via different classes of admission, or they have done so by generic reference to "ethnic networks" and "support" from the "ethnic community" which does not make the mechanisms in play clear.

As sociologists and economists have long recognized social networks are fundamental for job search generally, for Granovetter's high-skilled natives (Granovetter 1974) as for low-skilled migrants. But migrants rely even more at least on direct recourse to personal networks. Data from the Labour Force Survey in Italy shows that little more than 5% of immigrants found their job through impersonal channels such as announcements in the press or the internet or via a labour exchange (Ministero del lavoro 2016: 38, Tab. III)[17]. Data for the European Union as a whole are somewhat higher, but the overwhelming prevalence of channels involving some form of personal tie is clear. Biographical interviews with migrants also show the overwhelming prevalence of personal networks for obtaining a *first* job (the LFS question asks interviewees about their current job). And among the various kinds of personal ties mentioned, it is ties with other migrants (often kin) which predominate heavily. Ties with people met through work, with local employers and colleagues are fundamental for subsequent jobs. But this importance of contacts obtained via jobs

[17] In addition, 16% said they "contacted the employer directly" and some of these people no doubt found their job "impersonally" by going, say, from one restaurant to another or one shop to another, asking for work. However, as previous research on the labour market has shown, most of those answering in this way actually contacted an employer they actually knew directly, or through some informant.

and via a wider work ambiance for obtaining another job (one of the main lessons of Granovetter's work) makes it clear that the phrase "*entry* into the labour market" has a very definite sense.

As we have argued, most migrants classified in administrative databases as arriving with a permit for work go to a very specific labour market. The geographical clustering of migrants in particular towns and regions is one sign of this connection to a labour market, a niche in a particular occupation and a local set of contacts (and of knowledge about where to look for opportunities). It seems appropriate to talk about a tie "to a labour market" because the "migration chains" which most labour migrants use to effect their actual migration are at the same time "employment chains" leading to specific workplaces, employers and occupations. So it is not solely a question of a tie, for example, to a brother who works in that occupation, but - through the brother - a tie to the brother's employer, the other employers the employer knows, etc.

When researchers talk of a "niche" for a certain group of immigrants, they are referring to data which shows concentration and over-representation in a certain occupation. This means that it is not a question of one particular individual happening to find a job in some occupation, but an occupation where a large number of migrants have found a job. It is this tie to a relative or acquaintance who has a job in a workplace and an industrial segment which has adjusted its work organization to having an immigrant workforce in certain positions which makes the tie so precious for the newly-arrived immigrant. Having a tie to a co-national – even to a relative – who is *not* in this situation is of little use: in fact, however my brother may wish to help me, he probably will not be able to if he does not work in a "niche", where jobs for migrants are regularly generated.

The importance of networks for newly-arrived migrants is thus the importance of a tie to a local set of employers who have reorganized their production process taking into account migrant workers (often in a context where local workers have found other alternatives and have deserted the industry). For the textile and clothing industries, diverse aspects of this process of adjustment have been described by Roger Waldinger (1986) for New York, Mauro Magatti (1991) for the towns surrounding Manchester, Nancy Green (1986) for the Marais district of Paris. These accounts give good descriptions of the structural conditions which form the context of a migration chain providing opportunities for new migrants – sometimes in firms owned by fellow-ethnics, sometimes in native-owned enterprises. They describe, for example, changes in the work process which lead many local workers to leave the industry, setting the background for "ethnic succession". In Lancashire, for example, the introduction of new machinery which had to be run 24

hours a day, forcing workers to do night shifts, was crucial in persuading the overwhelmingly female local workforce to search for jobs elsewhere, thus creating a labour shortage which firms solved by recruiting Pakistanis. In New York, the interdependence of large garment firms and small contractors – itself a product of the highly shifting nature of demand for fashion goods - created opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs, who employed kin and acquaintances, prepared to work flexibly and at low wages. In Paris, legislation protecting workers in factories persuaded many French women to move out of homeworking, creating places for immigrants in an outputting system. This is not the place to go into the structural conditions which create a viable niche in the labour market – in the textile or clothing industry, in agriculture, domestic service or elsewhere. What is relevant in the context of this paper is the intrinsic tie between migration chains and employment chains in an industrial segment which has organized itself structurally to conditions which require migrant labour (Piore 1979). Migration chains do not stand alone.

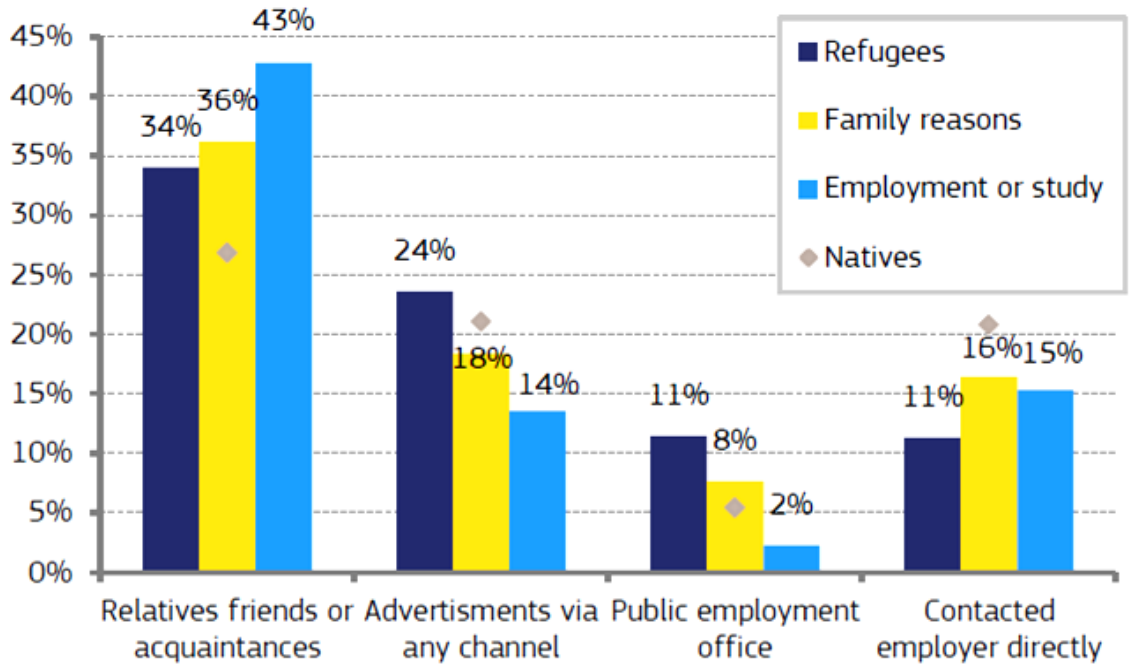
This is not always clear when reference is made to migration chains and networks in discussion of how migrants find jobs, for it sometimes seems to be assumed that what is in question is a question of solidarity and mutual aid (sometimes with facile assumptions, frequently contradicted by the empirical evidence, regarding solidarity among co-ethnics, co-religionists, etc.). However, as mentioned above, what is most significant about data showing the clustering of a particular set of migrants in a particular industry or occupation is rather the existence of a contact in a niche which for structural reasons (the decisions of employers to organize production in a certain way, the decision of local workers to leave the industry, etc.) are taking on significant numbers of migrant workers who are prepared to accept the conditions.

This may clarify why newly-arrived migrants tend to rely so heavily on other migrants. Newly-arrived migrants of course tend to have a small network composed mainly or exclusively of co-nationals simply because they cannot have made ties with locals yet; so they have only ties already established back home or through people known at home. However, even recent migrants do sometimes have a few contacts with locals. This is certainly the case with refugees who spend a period in a reception centre. In Italy, as we have mentioned, asylum seekers in the SPRAR and CAS programmes receive aid and advice from staff, who are often very motivated to help, and who often facilitate contacts with persons in the local community. The schemes of voluntary work which are common in SPRAR and CAS projects also have as one of their main functions to help asylum seekers to make contacts with local people who may be able to give them work or put them in contact with others who can find them a job. These contacts do, in fact, sometimes

provide work, but they do not necessarily constitute an entry into a niche which has a structural demand for migrant labour. The jobs which such contacts provide thus tend to be extremely temporary and not to lead to other jobs. They may lead to something more stable for some individuals but are unlikely to lead to a "chain" of recruitment.

It is interesting to consider the information LFS data contains regarding job search in this context. The LFS studies show that refugees differ significantly from other migrants (and from natives) in the ways they obtained their job. As can be seen from the graph below refugees were less likely than migrants arriving via the work track to have obtained their job via relatives, friends and acquaintances. We believe that this suggests that the relatives, friends and acquaintances of refugees were less likely to be able to give help.

Figure 4 – Methods used most to successfully find a job, by reason for migration, EU, 2014



Source: OECD and EC, 2016:129. Calculations based on EU LFS 2014 AHM.

Note: Data cover 25 countries of the European Union.

It is significant that refugees were more likely to find jobs through formal channels such as the employment exchange or advertisements. Use of these channels - which find jobs for small numbers of natives and even smaller numbers of migrants arriving via the work channel - is indicative of the weakness of refugees' networks. The same conclusion could be drawn from the

fact that refugees are also less likely to be contacted by employers (former employers, employers of a friend of the refugee, etc.).

It should also be noted that the results emerging from surveys like the LFS capture only part of the total effect of networks on employment chances. Such surveys usually ask interviewees how they found their current job. Yet previous jobs are fundamental in making a base of acquaintances for subsequent jobs, for giving me skills which make me a presentable candidate, simply in telling me how jobs in that particular industry are found. So even if I got my job through an impersonal channel like an advertisement, the social network which got me my previous job may have been crucial. In addition, the LFS and similar surveys usually provide interviewees with a list of options, of which they can tick just one. However, if I found a job by applying online and sending my CV – but only did this because a friend told me about the website – my access was partly due to the personal connection with my friend, yet this does not emerge in the survey.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, the geographical clustering of migrants from a particular origin is a classic of migration research. But if I happen to live in an area where a particular niche provides many jobs to migrants, this is not an 'accident' but an effect of my networks: the migration trajectory I am in has placed me geographically. In fact, a migration chain establishes itself precisely where there is a structural demand for migrant labour. In other words, it is mistaken to think of migration chains as simply a question of having a relative or friend willing to help; it is also a more structural matter.

Refugees may have one or two contacts who would be willing to help them. In this they are very similar to millions of non-migrants round the world. But this does not make them a member of a migration chain. As we have argued, the difference between the position of most refugees, network-wise and many other migrants is quite sharp.

6. Comparison with arrivals via family reunion

As the analyses of differences in employment across admission classes show, migrants arriving via family reunion procedures also have much lower employment rates than migrants arriving through the work channel. At first sight, it might be thought that this was evidence which contradicted our hypothesis regarding the centrality of networks, and of networks shaped in large part by the migration trajectory. For it might be thought that a spouse arriving via family reunion would be in a strong position network-wise since the husband/wife would be very motivated to help and would have their own network established. However, we see it as confirming our thesis.

In a qualitative study among women migrants in the Province of Asti (Eve, Perino and Bonapace 2010), we found that women arriving via family reunion had more difficulty in getting a job – something many interviewees wanted intensely, due to their family's financial difficulties and in order to avoid being confined to the home. This difficulty in finding employment seemed to be independent of individuals' differences in education or work experience. We found that the social networks of women arriving via family reunion were heavily dominated by their husband's networks. But in a context where occupational niches of migrants were heavily segregated by gender, husbands (and their heavily male friendship network) could not provide them with any ties useful for finding work. A husband who worked in construction might have considerable information and contacts for building jobs, but these were of no use to his wife. The networks of these women were very different from those of women who arrived independently (and who later got a permit to stay for work). These latter women in fact tended to arrive via a sister, a female friend, a cousin who was already inserted into an occupational niche (typically as a carer for old people or children, or some form of domestic work). They quite frequently came precisely because their relative or friend told them about a specific opportunity coming up. But even when there was not this direct link to a job, their relatives and friends could give them immediate access to a series of persons and to a fund of information concerning job opportunities for women, and into a sector which was in rapid expansion (Colombo 2005).

7. Comparison with economic migrants who are not in a consolidated migration chain

We have emphasized the contrast between migrants arriving through the asylum channel and those arriving via a migration chain. Of course, even apart from refugees or persons arriving via family reunion procedures, not *all* migrants have the kind of ties to a niche in the labour market which can provide them with an initial "entry" into a local labour market. Some arrive in an area where there are no people they know, where there are very few co-nationals, let alone relatives or friends. This is particularly true of the first persons who arrive in a migration flow. The concept of "pioneers" can be misleading, because the first migrants who arrive in a place of immigration do not necessarily lack ties: in fact persons who later come to be classified as "pioneers" because they were e.g. the first Pakistanis to arrive in place X sometimes have strong ties with *locals*, and it is precisely this which enables them to become pioneers, starting off a migration chain because the strength of their position allowed them to call relatives and others. However, some pioneers

do seem to have very weak ties at the beginning. It is interesting, therefore, in our attempt to describe the situation of refugees vis-à-vis networks giving access to work, to reflect briefly on cases of this kind.

In Cingolani's (2009) account of Romanian migration to Turin, interviewees who arrived in the early 1990s, before any immigrant niche was established, describe reliance on charity (provided by the Orthodox church and by Catholic centres) and extremely marginal sources of money: a few hours' work setting out stalls in the market or cleaning up afterwards, a day's work here and there, or forms of extracting money from car-drivers, acting as a *parcheggiatore*, guiding them in to a parking space (drivers give some loose change because they fear that otherwise their car may not be 'protected'). Vasile describes how he eventually broke into repair work: "In the first years nobody knew us, and for building work Italians took Albanians or Moroccans, because they were here for years. Then a volunteer who knew me at the soup gave my name to another Italian who was looking for someone to do up his flat. When the Italians got to know us, they gave us the keys. This man had several flats and he gave us a lot of work, to me and my brother" (Cingolani 2009: 113). Vasile describes the construction of a reputation as good workers, and relationships of trust to describe his entry into the building industry. Reputation and trust are certainly fundamental (Donatiello 2013). But it is also crucial that the volunteer at the soup kitchen gave Vasile an introduction to a man who could start him in an industry like building and repair work, well known as a classic immigrant niche[18]. Organized in small and very small firms, requiring little capital, this part of the building industry also later became a field where many Romanians could set up their own firms, employing kin and acquaintances. It was also crucial that in the 1990s this sector was undergoing both expansion and a moment of ethnic succession, when many regional migrants were retiring.

In other words, Romanians in Turin did not find an ethnic niche in just any sector, but precisely in a sector where there was a potential for ethnic succession and for expansion of an immigrant workforce. The heavy concentration of Romanian men in building and not in other sectors can only be understood in this context.

Building is obviously not the only immigrant niche and it is possible that, after a while, the African migrants who have arrived in Italy in the last couple of years will move out from their present extremely marginal position, in the same way as Vasile and other early Romanian migrants in Turin

[18] Before the arrival of international migrants, building was dominated by regional migrants from the South of Italy: cf. Eve and Ceravolo, 2016 for evidence on Turin, just one of numerous cases in the migration literature.

stopped doing odd jobs, semi-illegal activities like *parcheggiatore* and work by the day. However, the experience of these Romanian pioneers in the early 1990s confirms the difficulty of "entering" a labour market when there is not a consolidated tie with an occupational niche.

8. Asylum seekers and the hand of the state (protective and restrictive)

Even if our hypothesis that the fundamental reason why asylum seekers and refugees find it more difficult to "enter into the labour market" lies in the fundamental difference between their networks and those who arrive via a consolidated migration chain is correct, it is still possible that the administrative specificity of asylum seekers may have important effects. It should be remembered, in fact, that asylum seekers differ from other migrants in receiving significant aid, but at the same time as being more controlled. This has effects on various aspects of their lives.

Numerous studies, in Italy as elsewhere, tend to show that waiting for a decision on one's application for asylum is a frustrating period, where one is making little progress in achieving anything (it is no accident that scholars use titles like "lives on hold" and "*vite sospese*". Since they do not know whether they will be able to stay (legally) in the country where they have asked for asylum, it seems reasonable to think that this may also have effects on how committed asylum seekers are in preparing themselves for life in the immigration country (for example, by learning the language). Bakker, Degavos and Engbersen (2015) in the Netherlands and Hainmueller, Hangartner and Lawrence (2016) in Switzerland have examined the effect of the duration of the period asylum seekers have to wait on their subsequent chances of being employed, and both find that longer stays in a reception centre are associated with greater difficulties in subsequent employment. Although their databases do not allow them to control for all individual and institutional variables, the findings fit in with human capital theory which suggests that workers will "invest" less in their human capital if there is uncertainty about whether they can actually put that investment to use.

As already mentioned, when discussing the much more clustered geographical distribution of migrants arriving through other channels, it is a fundamental difference from other migrants that refugees are *sent* to a reception centre (and thus to a geographical place), instead of choosing it on the basis of what they know of the labour market and their contacts. National authorities have sometimes recognized that this is counterproductive (Bloch 2002) because they may be sent to an area where there are few job opportunities in general and where there is no-one (e.g. relatives or acquaintances) who can help them into a local niches. However, as Bloch also points out, in recent

years governments tend to have given priority to sharing the “burden” of refugees over the country, seeing political factors as overriding, and ignoring research which seems to find that the effects on employment of dispersal policies may have negative effects on employment (e.g. Dustmann et al. 2016).

In the case of Italy, the Dublin Convention prevents many people from reaching relatives in other European countries, as we have already mentioned (although a good many people do make the attempt). But even someone who has contacts in Italy is unlikely to be sent to a reception centre nearby these relatives or friends. In most CAS and SPRAR programmes, rules specify that residents have to ask permission to be absent, and if they leave without permission they lose their place - and the board and lodging it provides. So the geographical constraint is quite significant. Even for people who do not have personal contacts in Italy, this may limit access to work opportunities.

It is not only international mobility which is important but also the ability to move within Italy. One of the few sectors of the Italian labour market where refugees can find employment is seasonal work in agriculture (Perrotta 2014). But if the work is in another part of Italy, asylum seekers have to balance the gains and losses of taking up the job. Many of the jobs which are most easily accessible are “black work” without any contract, often paid very little and exploited by gangmasters. Nonetheless, many previous migrants have entered the labour market precisely through the informal sector (Reyneri and Fulin 2011; Mottura and Rinaldini 2009): this has probably been the most common pattern for those who have weakish networks.

This kind of control over geographical movement is not intrinsic to being a refugee. In Italy in the 1990s, refugees from the Balkans were housed by a network of the “civil society” and local authorities. As Bona (2016: 107) points out, numbers from Yugoslavia soon overwhelmed the public system for relief of refugees, and so from 1992 a series of spontaneous initiatives were set up by associations, committees, local authorities and ordinary citizens creating a network of diffuse reception. The law (Law 390/92) which legitimated this cooperation between the state and civil society "allowed entry into Italy and material and legal protection via *ad hoc* measures applicable to all those (*erga omnes*) who could simply show they came from Yugoslavia" (Bona 2016: 103). In other words, the whole system was much less formal, and placed far fewer constraints, including geographical constraints.

It is also possible that the support which reception centres give asylum seekers may have some negative effects on residents. Drawing on her experience in an association responsible for SPRAR and CAS projects, Marina Gai (2017: 182) suggests that programmes do not help asylum seekers

themselves to develop their networks as they might do if staff did not do things for them. She cites a colleague: “often it is the staff who seek out resources, a training course, or a firm, so the resident doesn’t choose the firm. How often is it explained to these young men how to search for a job, and how many people actually go out and do that? And how often do we let firms choose between different people?”. Similarly, Elisa Lipari (2016), using the term *maternage*, sees the risk that some cooperatives managing CAS tend to give little responsibility to asylum seekers. Baracco (2016), too, talks of infantilization and the tendency to treat asylum seekers purely as victims in need of support, not as adults capable of acting. So in spite of the emphasis on achieving “autonomy” in the objectives which SPRAR and CAS programmes are supposed to achieve, in many cases the situation of the asylum seeker and the organization of the programmes seems to hinder autonomy, in a way similar to that documented by Fassin in his critique of the “compassion ethos” (Fassin 2005, 2006). Part of the problem may be a question of staff without suitable training ill-equipped to see asylum-seekers differently. In other cases, it may be a question of the specific arrangements of particular CAS: for example, if a large centre is placed in an isolated location, it will probably be difficult for asylum seekers to find work locally, or make contact with the local population. And if catering is outsourced to an outside company, residents will not even have the responsibility of managing their own food.

However, many of the tendencies noted by these studies do not seem to be remediable by changes in organization or in the training of staff, for they seem rooted in a system which keeps asylum seekers waiting, fed and housed, but geographically fixed and waiting on documents, for several months, perhaps more than a year. Many of the conflicts and tensions of asylum seekers who find their situation frustrating, and attempts by staff to avoid conflicts and manage daily life in the programmes seem difficult to avoid in this kind of context – the structural contradiction between a reception system which is supposed to foster “independence” and which yet tends to limit asylum seekers’ agency.

9. Conclusion

As we made clear earlier, few of the people who have arrived in Italy in recent years are “classic refugees” fleeing from war zones. But from the point of view of their situation with regard to their migration trajectory, and the consequences for social networks and access to employment, there are deep similarities. As Marina Gai points out (2017), it is significant that few residents in the SPRAR where she works had any idea of a specific destination: they simply wanted to get “to

Europe", or some other vague destination. Some persons talk of sudden departure[19] following a local conflict with neighbours, witchcraft accusations, threats of violence following a fire which destroyed neighbours' crops, or similar events. Others talk of being recruited by smugglers who unexpectedly offered to lend them the money for the trip, in return for unpaid labour in Libya. In any case, it seems clear that for the great majority of people, the situation is very different from that described by innumerable ethnographic studies of chain migration, where a tradition is built up of emigration to specific destinations.

We believe that greater attention should be placed to the "migration trajectory" of persons arriving via different channels and on the consequences of this for networks giving access to employment. If it is to be more realistic, policy ought to consider the effects of these migration migration trajectories, and not add to the difficulties.

[19] In his theorization of the specificity of refugees, Kunz (1973) points out that "acute" refugees are forced to depart suddenly, without having time to prepare for migration, by, for example, starting to learn the language of the country of arrival (also because they may not know which country they will arrive in). Kunz talks of individual preparation such as learning a language, but we argue here that what is fundamental in the pattern of chain migration linking persons in a place of departure to others in a place of arrival is the pool of knowledge and local contacts built up by a number of earlier migrants interlinked by social ties with the newer ones.

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