Bangladeshi Migrants in Italy: An Analysis of Survival Strategies and Job Segmentations

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Bangladeshi Migrants in Italy: An Analysis of Survival Strategies and Job Segmentations

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Abstract

In the Italian labour market a new segmentation emerged and is still developing, which added to the traditional cleavage between insiders and outsiders. The new phenomenon for Italy is the internal division within insiders, among decreasing permanent workers, well protected by the welfare regime, the first segment, and unstable workers, with high risk of being entrapped in flexible contracts and/or going to and turning back from unemployment, without any form of public protection, the secondary segment. The Italian process of new segmentation shows a distinctive feature, too. As the classic theory on segmentation assumes, but also some core activities. It makes even harder to create a trust relation with external professionals or collaborators and therefore it makes the risk of a productivity’s decrease higher than in the case of the standard pattern of segmentation. Moreover, the positive relation between economic development and job supply, on one hand, and quality of flexibility, which is one of the few points of general conciliation among scholars, worsens the traditional fracture in Italy. The positive effects of work deregulation give benefits only to more developed areas, whereas the flexibility in the concentrated in agriculture and construction has mainly bad effects and become a supplementary form of exploitation beside black employment. Thus, other innovative policies are required in order to fight the discouragement effect and consequently the exclusion from labour market; indeed, the deregulation of contracts isn’t enough. Therefore, more funded and more efficient employment services and training programs would be very important: active labour market policies should be also addressed to unskilled and low skilled temporary workers in order to reduce social inequalities in relation to working opportunities.

Keywords: migration, labour-market, segmentation, low-skilled, unskilled, temporary, Bangladesh, Italy
1.1 INTRODUCTION

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. It was not until the 1980s that a large number of Bangladeshis reached the Peninsula, due to the closure of other European countries’ borders along with deep economic and social transformations and a turbulent political scenario taking shape in Bangladesh. Italy qualified as an important destination during the 1990s; following the 1986 amnesty for irregular migrants, the number of residence permits issued by the Italian government to Bangladeshis barely exceeded 100 units; however, following the 1990 amnesty, this had increased to almost 4000 and by the early 2000s, more than 70,000. The Bangladeshi community today represents the sixth biggest non-European community, numbering between 130,000 and 150,000. Bangladeshi migrants were concentrated almost exclusively in Rome (92%) (Knights 1996), which is home to the second largest Bangladeshi community in Europe, after London. However, the 1990s were also characterised by the dispersion of this community across the country. Once in possession of a valid residence permit, they left the capital, the very context that allowed them, as irregular migrants, to blend into a dense community of compatriots. Subsequently, different small Bangladeshi communities came into being in many different areas of the country, as migrants found working and residential stability in local contexts, usually close to major industrial centres in northern regions.

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is much more recent and illustrates how, after the 1980s, new gateways into Europe opened up for migrants coming from non-traditional origins sending countries with no prior links through colonial history or language affinity to the destination country. In the connection between Bangladesh and Italy, the supply chain lay not in Sylhet and seamen, but in central Bangladesh, including the capital Dhaka, and urban middle-class migrants (Knights & King 1998). The first Bangladeshi immigrants to Italy arrived in the 1980s, due to the closure of borders of other European countries, making this migration opportunistic (King & Knights 1994). Hence, not only did new migrants arrive from Bangladesh, but also Bangladeshis already living in other European countries, notably France and Germany, came to Italy, pulled by the attraction of periodic amnesties for irregular migrants to legalize their status. It is important to highlight that the first wave of Bangladeshis arriving in Italy was almost entirely composed of men. At first, the Bangladeshi community in Italy was almost exclusively made up of men.
However, women and children have become more numerous over time as a result of family-reunification migration.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Bangladeshi migrants to Italy were heavily concentrated in Rome, where they worked in the city’s extensive informal economy as street-hawkers or in catering and other tourism-related services (Knights & King 1998). Subsequently, having obtained legal residence through one of Italy’s amnesties, migrants dispersed to other parts of the country, especially the prosperous northeast, where they found factory work and affordable housing and created their own diaspora identity and the Bangladeshi community in Italy had grown with major concentrations in Rome and the Veneto region. The temporal rhythms of work, personal, and family life in Italy evolved over two main stages corresponding to a change in Bangladeshis’ geographic settlement pattern and civil status an initial concentration in Rome, where they worked as single men mainly engaged in street-selling, and then a transfer to northeast Italy’s expanding industrial economy, where they found factory jobs and settled with their growing families.

The length of stay in the initial migratory destination has been up to 25 years in Italy, but it lasted two or three generations in East Africa. There is a marked difference in the strength of connection to the original ‘homeland’: East African Asians in Britain generally have few links to the Indian subcontinent, whereas the Bangladeshis are still in touch with their country of origin and make regular visits. Bangladeshi migration to Italy is much more recent. A key trigger was a large-scale regularisation of ‘irregular’ migrants made possible by the Martelli Law of 1990, which attracted large numbers of Bangladeshis, including many who were already present in other European countries: a case, in the words of King and Knights (1994), of ‘migratory opportunism’. The growth of the community has been extremely rapid: from around 4000 in 1990 to 70,000 in the early 2000s and an estimated 120,000–150,000 ten years later.

1.2 THEORETICAL ELEMENTS OF LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION

The first theoretical tradition is the labour market segmentation approach as conceived in the 1970s and early 1980s (Craig et al. 1982; Doeringer & Piore 1971; Edwards et al. 1975; Gordon et al. 1982; Rubery 1978; Sengenberger 1981; Wilkinson 1981). In a radical break from the economics orthodoxy at the time, segmentation theory rejected the assumption that labour market divisions

could be attributed mainly to inadequate levels of human capital or differences in productivity. Instead, it placed the demand side of the labour market centre stage in its analysis of divisions, inequalities and dualisms in capitalist employment structures. Its long-standing significance lies in its opposition to neoclassical economics, which assumes employers automatically adjust to supply-side shifts in education and skill so that they utilise all potential productivity in the labour market, albeit constrained by institutional ‘imperfections’ in the labour market.

Instead, drawing on empirical case studies of employer practices and worker experiences, labour market segmentation theorists argued that employers and the wider economic conditions play a key role in shaping inequalities in the labour market via selective access to career and training opportunities (Doeringer & Piore 1971) model of primary and secondary labour market segments; changing responses to economic conditions that affect workers’ job queue prospects (Rubery 1988; Sengenberger 1981); under-investment in productive structures leading to low-wage, low-skill vicious cycles (Wilkinson 1983); and the undermining of worker resistance through divide-and-rule tactics (Edwards et al. 1975). The argument is that these practices contribute to a continuous regeneration of inequalities through the construction of ‘noncompeting groups’ (Cairnes 1874), variously based on personal attributes such as social class, race, gender, migrant status, age and disability, among others. In other words, inequalities are not fostered only on the supply side through exogenous societal or cultural rules and conventions but also, and perhaps predominantly, through formal and informal institutionalised policies and practices in labour markets and workplaces.

The second area of literature underpinning our new labour market segmentation approach is comparative institutionalist theory. This research reveals a rich diversity of employment arrangements around the world and a wide variety of distributive outcomes in wages, household income, job quality and lifetime prospects. Moreover, this theoretical tradition is premised on the ontological notion that labour markets are socially constructed, an idea accepted by some leading economists (Solow 1990), but mostly forgotten or ignored by others. This approach rejects the universalist theorising common to neoclassical economics, as well as some strands of Marxist theories from the USA. Instead it incorporates into the analysis both the systemic forces for change that are characteristic of advanced capitalist development (such as financialisation,
digitalisation, migration, liberalisation and internationalisation) and the potentially diverse ‘societal effects’ associated with institutionalised labour markets and the surrounding nexus of product market, innovation, corporate governance, industrial relations and welfare state arrangements. This approach does not mean we ought to rule out the possibility of future convergence say around an Anglo-American model of employment. Rather, it cautions against applying universalist theorising about processes of labour market segmentation and inequalities (Almond & Rubery 2000).

This theoretical conceptualisation of segmentation provides a more holistic framework for labour market analysis that considers the dynamic interactions of the demand and supply sides, integrating inter-capital relations and capital–labour struggles, as well as the role of gender and societal institutions in shaping employment outcomes for different groups of workers, without exonerating employers from their responsibility for employment outcomes. In doing so, this approach enables new understandings about how labour market inequalities are created and recreated especially when labour market change increases opportunities for employers to take advantage of low-cost labour.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Southern Europe have been a major destination region for both European and non-European migrants starting in the late 1970s and increasing through the 1980s (Anthias & Lazaridis 2000). Of these Southern European countries, Italy has recently become particularly attractive for Bangladeshi migrants. King and Knights (1994) and Knights (1996) have been among the first to explore Bangladeshi emigration to Italy and how it developed, as a ‘of migratory opportunism provoked by the basic push forces back home and by lax entry controls and regularisation drives in Italy’ (King & Knights 1994:128). Mannan and Kozlov (1997) delve out the transits and transnational route of Bangladeshi migration and trafficking to Italy and shows how social capital and networks role in migrants’ labour market outcomes in Italy (Mannan & Krueger 1998). Furthermore, Mannan and Kozlov (1999) explores Bangladeshi migrant’s decision-making process during the journey to way of Italy and the dynamics of the prospect migrants (Mannan & Krueger 2000). In addition, Mannan and Kozlov (2001) shows the cost-benefit analysis of Bangladeshi migrants between Bangladesh and Italy and why they take such risky journey towards Italy (Mannan & Krueger 2002).

According to Knights, the emergence of a permanent Bangladeshi migrant community in Italy was favoured by
Italian legislation. In particular the Martelli Law of 1990 gave rise to three different immigration processes for Bangladeshis: opportunistic migration - Bangladeshis from other countries came to Italy to seize the opportunity of becoming regular migrants and subsequently permanent or renewable-status residents in Italy; recruitment migration; and finally, family or kinship migration (Knights 1996). After 1990, geopolitical changes in different parts of the world affected migration flows from Bangladesh to Italy. In Bangladesh the collapse of General Ershad government in 1990 led to a situation of political and social unrest that incentivised people to migrate and discouraged short term migrants to the Middle East to return.

Further, part of the 2 million workers expelled from Kuwait after the Gulf War also preferred to move on towards Europe rather than returning to Bangladesh. As a consequence of these events the family and adam bepari (Adam bapari is a Bengali term widely used by Bangladeshi migrants and local media to describe those people who are familiar with migration procedures and cash in on this familiarity, access or connection for economic advantage) in-movements grew. To a certain extent these movements were interlinked as adam bepari simplifies the process of family reunion. Gradually men began to bring their wives. Others, ‘the opportunists’ began to return to Italy from elsewhere in Europe when their asylum permits expired. (Knights 1996).

Despite this growing scientific interest in the so-called Bangladeshi diaspora, existing empirical research on international migration from Bangladesh has not taken significant account of the engagement of migrant especially in job segmentation. However, some studies (Eade et al. 2002) have indicated that Bangladeshis have formed various associations in the USA and the UK, which are mainly based on their districts, villages and towns of origin. Nevertheless, it is true that the USA and the UK have a long history of Bangladeshi migration and that bigger Bangladeshi communities have already been established there (Gardner 1995). However, it could be interesting to know, as they are a relatively new migrant group in other European countries, why Bangladeshis form their own associations and how these organizations help them to sustain their transnational engagement.

Probashi, the Bangla term for emigrants in Italy were initially concentrated almost exclusively in Rome (King & Knights 1994). Indeed, the Italian capital exercised a great power of attraction over them given the presence of fellow countrymen, pioneers of this migration,
who were strengthening the networks and offering the first support to newcomers, and the fascinating imagery that it evoked among the middle-class educated youth of the world’s peripheries. The main reasons, however, were the work placement opportunities in the context of the informal economy and the possibility of mimesis within the dense mesh of a community of fellow countrymen, which the metropolis initially offered to migrants without a valid residence permit. On obtaining a regular residence permit through one of the many amnesties that characterized Italian migration policies during the 1990s (King & Knights 1994), they moved and obtained work and stable housing across the country. The establishment of a Bangladeshi community in different Province started during the mid-1980s. The Bangladeshi community grew because wives joined their husbands, who had migrated earlier. In fact, it must be underlined that the first generation of probashi in Italy was almost entirely composed of men. Therefore, family reunifications in the first phase of Bangladeshi migration to Italy were configured exclusively as male reunifications. Usually, the first-generation migrant, after meeting the necessary conditions, returned to his country of origin to marry, usually via an arranged marriage, a woman who, soon after the wedding, was reunited with him in Italy. Although there are rare cases of intermarriage, usually with Italian women, the vast majority of marriages involving the first generation of Bangladeshis in Italy are endogamous.

The social, occupational, family and administrative trajectories, as well as the class background, of the probashi in the community of coincide with those of the protagonists of other studies on the Bangladeshi migration in Italy (King & Knights 1994). In fact, they are mainly men from the upper-middle class, with a higher education qualification: sons of lawyers, landowners, teachers, entrepreneurs, public administration employees, military officers and managers, who grew up in wealthy families in post-independence Bangladesh and are today working as unskilled workers, inclined to work overtime and categorized by low-profile contracts in factories in Italy. They do not correspond to the working class in their country of origin, and the work they do in Italy as they would never dream of doing in their home country. This distance between their social position in the country of origin and the country of destination, as will be explained below, results in an apparently contradictory political orientation of many probashi.

The emotional logics of migration proposed herein fits the heterogeneity of

women’s pre-migration experiences as the wives left behind wives of migrant men; some of the wives feel oppressed by the position of daughter-in-law in their parents-in-law’s households; others due to holding higher social class positions remain living with their own parents and enjoying more freedom. On the other hand, it takes into account the suffering experienced by women who are often reunited against their will. Although issues of emotional work and management have been explored in the sociological literature (Hochschild 1979), only a few studies have focused on the emotional logics of transnational migration in relation to the experience of separation and reunification (Harre 1986; Gardner 1995). Starting from this perspective, the present article will take into account the class gap between the country of origin and the country of destination experienced by Bangladeshi migrants, and will view the emotional dimension as a fundamental part of the migratory and family reunification experiences.

Several older and recent studies discuss the characteristics of Bangladeshi migration to Italy. Yeoh, Graham, and Boyle, (2002) describe migrants as ‘predominantly single and male’ living under ‘transnationally split’ conditions with strong economic and social relations with their family members back home. The migrant places the wellbeing of the extended family above his own interests and as soon as he gets a stable position in Italy, he starts the procedures for family reunion. Bangladeshi migration towards Italy and Spain does not seem to have much in common with the oldest flows to the Middle East, the UK and the US (Knights 1996). Furthermore, as my data also show, while those who migrated to Italy at the end of the eighties and in the nineties have been able to settle down and establish themselves in Italy, more recent migrants.

Migration is a feature of social and economic life across many areas of the world, with up until today an important impact on both host and country-of-origin societies. The migratory context, migrants play an important role in Italy by offsetting the effects of negative demographic trends such as workforce ageing and decline as well as more general depopulation. This is all the more visible in the economy. Over the last few years, the foreign component in the labour market has become key in the Italian economy, not only because of the importance that foreign workers have had and continue to have in the performance of specific tasks, but also by virtue of the compensatory effect they have determined.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding sectorial variations, the importance of foreign workers is evident in various economic domains. Migrant workforce is particularly concentrated in low-wage service segments such as the domestic and care sectors, the hotel and restaurant sectors, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, small-scale urban services and commerce. Foreign workers are overwhelmingly employed as employees in someone else’s company, and generally concentrated in low-skilled jobs. Italy is therefore characterised by a sharp professional segmentation of its labour market when it comes to Italian nationals versus foreign nationals. The secondary data also indicates a marked waste of human capital, that of foreign citizens, who are often employed in professions for which they are either overqualified or overeducated. This mismatch is made worse and is often linked to various degrees of labour exploitation in the context of the peculiar Italian economic structure, where a significant portion of the economy is informal or unregulated, if not altogether linked to illicit or criminal activities.

The phenomenon of salary degradation is particularly evident in disadvantaged areas of the country, where social tensions and immigrant bashing have grown most acute. In these areas, the large number of migrants employed in low-skilled jobs may enter in competition with the Italian workforce into the segment of unqualified work, as reported for some agricultural areas of the South. Notwithstanding the overall economic and financial advantages provided by migrant contribution to the Italian State, there is a widespread social and political perception that migrants exert great pressure on social services and welfare provisions. This is all the more debated at the local level, especially with respect to social housing rights and priority lists, access to kindergarten and school meals services, services that the local migrant population is formally entitled to access. In certain cases, municipalities have addressed tensions by trying to set up discriminatory mechanisms barring migrant families from accessing particular services.

3.1 METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1.1 Data

Empirical data for this paper derive from 350 questionnaire survey interviews with Bangladeshi migrants in Italy. The interviews were conducted during two phases of fieldwork: in Italy during the first half year and second half year in Bangladesh in 2002. All interviewees were male engaged in different employment and self-employed. We consciously focused on male respondents.
and their narrated experiences because we wanted to analyze the changes in daily work rhythms and other temporalities of those who had the role of family. We made a reflexive effort to take into account our own gender positioning in the field, remaining sensitive to gender dynamics in the ensuing analysis, albeit based on male participants’ direct voices.

Interviewees were accessed via a variety of initial approaches, through key informant representatives of ethnic associations, friendship networks, and more casual contacts, and then supplemented by snowballing. As is typical with this kind of mixed research, our research participants cannot be considered a true random sample. In interviews, we stressed a dialogic approach, using a flexible interview schema through “generative” questions (Becker 1998) that allowed process to emerge, rather than mere information, and often started from the narration of concrete episodes. According to this approach, we avoided evaluative questions, as they can be deemed threatening and result in defensive answers.

Although interviews were deliberately carried out in a relaxed conversational style to build trust and enhance information flow, they aimed at gathering data on a series of pre-determined themes: social background in Bangladesh and social positioning in Italy; motivations and strategies underpinning the move; everyday life and the nature of personal, family, working, and leisure life in Italy; and future plans. Interviews were conducted in Bengali, according to interviewees’ preferences, as all participants were mother tongue. Interviews were recorded, subject to participants’ consent, fully transcribed, and, translated into English. Repeated reading and annotation of interview transcripts were followed by coding of the various thematic segments pertinent to this paper’s subject and then by an integrated comparative analysis of the work segmentation and social life. All participants have pseudonyms.

3.1.2 Empirical Model

Besides analyzing the overall pattern of immigrants’ occupational trajectory controlling for compositional factors, our theoretical and conceptual framework required disentangling some of the mechanisms underlying the first and second transitions. In both cases, we relied on OLS regressions with robust standard errors, applying population weights provided in the datasets. As regards the immigrants’ occupational status on arrival was modeled with the following specification:
\[ B_{\text{mE}_t} = V_\beta (B_{\text{mE}_{t-1}} \times \text{region}) + G_d + H_c + M_g \ldots \ldots \ldots (1) \]

where \( t \) represents the time of first job in the destination country, \( t-1 \) the time of the last job in origin, and \( V \) a vector of beta coefficients (one for each area of origin) expressing the association between last \( B_{\text{mE}_t} \) at origin (\( B_{\text{mE}_{t-1}} \)). Besides controlling for gender (\( G_d \)), \( H_c \) and \( M_g \) represent vectors of coefficients for human capital (educational level, language skills, and age on arrival) and other immigrants’ characteristics (married and having children on arrival, reason for migrating, having found a job before migrating and migration trajectory). Stepwise models were implemented: a first model only controlled for \( G_d \) and \( H_c \); in a second step, the model was augmented with \( M_g \).

As regards, how human capital factors affect occupational mobility between first and present job was modeled with the following specification:

\[ B_{\text{mE}_{t+1}} - B_{\text{mE}_t} = B_{\text{mE}_t} + \{(B_{\text{mE}_{t-1}} - B_{\text{mE}_t}) \times Y_{0M_g}\} + R_g + G_d + H_c + M_g \ldots \ldots (2) \]

Where \( t+1 \) represents represents the time of the present job in destination country. This model specification expresses the difference between the \( B_{\text{mE}} \) of present and first job in the destination country (\( B_{\text{mE}_{t+1}} - B_{\text{mE}_t} \)) as dependent on the occupational attainment in the first job, and on the interaction between the intensity of occupational downgrade in the first transition (\( B_{\text{mE}_{t+1}} - B_{\text{mE}_t} \)) and years since migration (\( Y_{0M_g} \)), which, consistent with human capital mechanisms, should be associated with a higher status recovery. Differently from Model (1), the model for the second transition was augmented with interactions between area of origin and \( Y_{0M_g} \) and education, in order to assess how the effects of human capital factors vary across immigrant groups.

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Qualitative findings shows that upon arrival at the processing centres and as they were distributed to centres across Italy, surveyed migrants found themselves in a deep state of confusion. Some also expressed fear, having been transported in the middle of the night with no details on their destination. The initial confusion and uncertainty waned in the days and weeks that followed their arrival to their assigned centres. They gradually got used to the everyday life of the facilities where they were assigned. Most migrants developed strong bonds with the people they travelled with, primarily as a result of the powerful experience of the journey, in addition to the distribution mechanisms that appeared to allocate...
people travelling together to the same centres. The survey indicates these first social relationships prove to be one of the most transcendental in migrants’ experiences in Italy, regardless of their eventual placement or location. Many migrants had spent several days, if not weeks together by the time they arrived ashore, and had come to rely on each other for emotional social, financial and even labour-related support, especially as the uncertainty of the first few weeks settled in.

Alongside travel companions, the staff at their centres, and in particular, cultural mediators, was systematically identified as fundamental sources of support and information. In sum, while the majority of surveyed migrants arrived in Italy with no expectations, these began to form immediately after their rescue, and through the interactions with rescue teams, humanitarian staff and migrants already on the mainland. Narratives of Italy as a country that welcomes migrants, and that was respectful of human rights and humanitarian law circulate at this stage, and gradually shape some of the understandings of migrants concerning Italy, Europe and the asylum system. Most migrants have no expectations of the kind of system that awaits them. They start to experience increasing levels of uncertainty as months go by, which in some cases may play a role in their decision to consider secondary movements.

During the first few weeks following their arrival, migrants start to realise that many of the initial messages about being welcomed in Italy are not necessarily reflective of the conditions that they face. The survey revealed how most migrants feel conditions in Italy are far from conducive to integration, but rather isolate them and increase their precariousness. Migrants’ experiences also reveal how the protection system plays a role in their vulnerability, particularly as they are unable to become employed legally upon their arrival, which increases the likelihood of them opting for informal employment with poor pay and labour conditions. This section describes the challenges migrants encounter in the weeks and months that follow their arrival. Surveyed and interviewed migrants report a widespread climate of uncertainty that arises from their inability to earn a living through regular employment, despite the more limited employment restrictions recently introduced in Italy for asylum seekers. For many, as noted above, the ability to work had traditionally been seen or perceived as a given in the context of their experiences. Finding the contrary constitutes a constant source of anxiety, especially among those with families who depend on them financially and who

expect them to become employed immediately upon their arrival.

The concerns over the inability to earn a living are further compounded in the case of migrants who took out loans in order to finance their journey. The ineligibility or difficulties to become employed has additional implications, like having to pay even higher interest rates on the loans, or the potential loss of the goods deposited as collateral. About 95 percent of the survey’s respondents still owed money borrowed to finance their journeys. In short, the inability to work increases the financial vulnerability of migrants’ families and their likelihood of becoming prey of abusive lenders.

The inability to secure a decent income upon their arrival in Italy is not the only challenge experienced by migrants. A constant source of disappointment and anxiety is their inability to adjust their immigration status and access any kind of protection. While upon their adjudication to specific centres migrants may receive some legal assistance concerning their individual cases, interviews reveal the information they receive is often incomplete, and in some cases altogether inaccurate. Most migrants soon realise that the reasons that led them to leave their country of origin do not provide the grounds for asylum. Legal mediators indicated, in interviews, that migrants frequently pay large sums of money to individuals who claim that they can assist them in building a case in front of the Commissione Territoriale. Scams of this nature are common, and leave migrants in an increased state of vulnerability, as they accumulate debts trying to get their claims approved. Other migrants, lacking access to quality legal assistance, are also often misinformed by fellow migrants or by people in the diaspora, and enter a long, often counterproductive cycle of filing petitions that are likely to be denied, all with the hope that they will eventually be allowed to stay in the country. These applications are often carried out with scant or no professional support, which reduces the likelihood of success.

The surveys and interviews revealed that while trusted actors in the migrant experience, friends, acquaintances, members of the diaspora, as well as humanitarian staff often provide inaccurate or altogether mistaken information to migrants. Many interviewed migrants reported receiving bad advice from friends, relatives and community members, and on occasion regretted having followed it. Migrants realize that, while bound by ties of kinship and friendship, their countrymen and women are not necessarily invested in their success. Others noted that some information benefits the person who
gives it, rather than the one who requests it.

In sum, migrants arrive in Italy with few if any expectations. However, they soon realise that the narratives of Italy and Europe as a welcoming place that they had become acquainted with are distant from reality. Employment restrictions limit their ability to support their families; while often fleeing from their experiences do not always result in the granting of asylum. The inability to work legally leads many to become employed in the informal economy and often to face abuse and poor working conditions. Many migrants reported being paid poorly or not being paid at all, even after months of work. For those who borrowed money in order to pay for their journeys, the inability to keep up with payments often translates into their families facing harassment by lenders, or altogether losing the collateral placed as guarantee, which often includes families’ only source of capital.

Quantitative results are presented starting from the analysis of the overall pattern of immigrants’ occupational trajectory, followed by a discussion of the role of human capital factors and other individual characteristics in the first and second transition. Overall, immigrants from non-Western countries experience a very limited recovery of occupational status between first and present job. Consistently with, predicting a lower upgrading in more segmented labor markets, the pattern results flatter in Italy, although it slightly differs across immigrant groups. However, a steeper recovery of status among the groups who downgraded the most in the first transition. These results suggest that possible differences in unobserved characteristics of migration inflows may play a minor role in accounting for the different intensity of immigrants’ occupational downgrade.

The results remain virtually unchanged, in fact, not only does the inclusion of immigrants’ characteristics not alter the patterns of occupational status reproducibility across groups, but very few of them have strong and consistent. As shown in Table 1.1, which reports estimates for all control variables included in Model 1, the only variables with statistically significant positive effects are human capital factors, such as educational attainment and knowledge of host-country language on arrival. These results suggest that, once models control for basic individual socioeconomic characteristics, the effects of other migratory characteristics, such as the reason for migrating, may be less relevant and differ across destinations.
Table 1.1: OLS Estimates on the Difference between Present and First Job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Socio-demographic Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>First Job in the Destination Country</th>
<th>Difference Present and First Job</th>
<th>between</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No any formal education</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary level</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>(0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary level</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary level</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation level</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduation level</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>(1.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of migration</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>(5.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language on arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>(0.43)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>(1.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language at present</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>(0.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
<td>(0.261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for migration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>(0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>(0.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migratory trajectory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth in host country</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>(0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth other host country</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>(0.23)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.12</td>
<td>(1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once in the host country</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job before migration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having children on arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having partner on arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>(0.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.476</td>
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In this frame, also gender and the mode of entry seem to play some role. On the one hand, immigrant women show a stronger risk of downgrade than men in more segmented labor markets, as being a female has a strong, negative, and statistically significant effect in Italy. On the other hand, having found a job before migrating, likely associated with a legal entry in the host country, tempers significantly the intensity of downgrade compared to those who entered the country without having a job. The role of human capital factors and makes several predictions on how immigrants’ occupational careers unfold during their stay in the destination country. The OLS estimates for Model 2 presented in Table 1.1 make it possible to test them across more regulated and segmented labor markets.

In spite of the overall limited chances of upward mobility, results show that, age on arrival is an important variable to assess the chances of recovery from a human capital perspective, as immigrants who arrive at a relatively older age should be less likely to experience upward mobility due to lower adaptability to different working conditions and contexts. The negative and significant coefficients associated with this variable. ČoMo still display a small but positive and significant effect. In spite of the lower chances of status recovery in more segmented labor markets, the few immigrants who do experience an occupational upgrade are to be found among those who have spent more time in the host country. Although years spent in the country foster some recovery, estimates also suggest that the rebound is rather limited.

The decision to invest in human capital specific to the host country is an especially significant possible intervening factor. In this case, the effects are in line with the recognition or acquisition of educational credentials supports upward mobility in the destination country. A tertiary degree acquired in the origin country, but not recognized in the destination one, is associated with a very marginal BmiE increase, compared to lower levels of education. Those immigrant groups suffering from the strongest occupational downgrade after migrating are also those exposed to higher risks of entrapment. To highlight whether in more segmented labor markets the acquisition of country specific human capital is particularly important for their chances of upward mobility, as Model 2 was run adding first an interaction effect between the area of origin and ČoMo and then an interaction effect between the area of origin and educational attainment.
The patterns and underlying mechanisms of immigrants’ occupational trajectories between origin and destination country has been largely formulated based on single-country studies. With time, immigrants are expected to recover their occupational status, after a downgrade on arrival due to the low transferability of human capital. On the other hand, recent studies on the labor market incorporation of immigrants in Italy have suggested that, due to the strong duality of the Italian labor market and the large demand for unskilled labor, immigrants tend to remain entrapped in the secondary segment of low- and unskilled jobs.

In this paper, we have developed a comparative framework that sees labor market structures as crucial moderators of the patterns and underlying mechanisms of immigrants’ occupational careers. From a theoretical point of view, we have argued that the degree of labor market segmentation shapes the pattern of immigrants’ occupational mobility as regards both the risks of different immigrant groups experiencing occupational downgrade after migrating and their chances of subsequent occupational status recovery. The argument is that, in more segmented labor markets, immigrants are at higher risk of both occupational downgrading and blocked mobility, despite the importance of individual endowments of human capital. From an empirical point of view, this study has comparatively analyzed immigrants’ occupational trajectories between origin and destination countries considering the Italian regulated and segmented European labor markets, although to a different degree.

Although some immigrant groups are at higher risk of occupational downgrade after migrating, which predicts immigrants with more highly transferable human capital to downgrade less, could not be found. This is especially true in the more segmented labor markets like the Italian, where all immigrants from high-emigration country’s experience a huge downgrade of occupational status on arrival, followed by a very limited recovery, that the stronger the downgrade, the stronger the recovery. The same immigrant groups found to downgrade after migrating are also at higher risk of not improving their socioeconomic status, after controlling for the most important socio-demographic and human capital factors that should affect immigrants’ chances of success in host-country labor markets.

However, while human capital mechanisms only partly account for differences between immigrant groups, they still operate at the individual level. Higher education and some knowledge of the host-country language predict a lower
occupational downgrade on arrival, also in more segmented labor markets like those of Italy. But it is in regard to the mechanisms driving immigrants’ chances of upward mobility that human capital factors gain in importance. Notwithstanding the very small chances of upward mobility, immigrants who do improve their occupational status as time passes are found among those who downgraded the most on their arrival. Arriving at a younger age helps immigrants to adapt to the new environment. Improved language skills and higher education, especially if recognized or acquired in the host country, also constitute important drivers of upward mobility.

Finally, the results are also consistent with the paradoxical consequences of the interplay between labor market dualism and the effects of human capital: the acquisition of human capital specific to the host country becomes even more important in enhancing chances of occupational upgrading. In fact, those immigrants who are able to escape from the trap of immigrant jobs are to be found among those with a higher number of years spent in the country and who have obtained or had recognized their educational credentials in the host country. However, results show that chances of occupational status recovery are weaker among women, which can be accounted for by their entrapment in the household and personal services sector and their lower chances of relying on self-employment as a way to upward mobility.

Our empirical analysis of immigrants’ occupational trajectories is not without limitations. From a methodological point of view, comparing regression results across surveys is always risky. While we took particular care to harmonize the analytical samples and variables, operationalizations sometimes slightly differed across surveys. Another factor that could hamper the cross-country comparison is the exclusion from the analytical sample of immigrants who are not employed at interview. Future studies could extend the comparative approach to countries with more flexible labor markets.

5.1 CONCLUSION

A preliminary consideration in this research is that in formulating and implementing policies that are meant to facilitate the integration of foreign immigrants, it is necessary to have a range of indicators capable of revealing the conditions of the newcomers in different areas of social life, and which can highlight the major problematic issues. In the course of the survey we have thus attempted to analyse the sources according to their capacity of providing integration indicators or,
however, indicators of particular and significant moments in the working life of foreign citizens. The choice of an indicator is to be anchored obviously to the historical reality in which the study is set and therefore to the model adopted. With regard to Italy, the implicit model, rather than a model designed and built explicitly by institutions, is a model that emerged spontaneously but which, nonetheless, can be seen as a relatively consistent constellation of identifiable characters. Such characters include, among others, a spontaneous arrival trend, not deriving from labour market policies or from effective measures of planned entries, and an important influence of local actors in the face of a weak direction.

On this basis, the results of the survey are partially satisfactory. An analysis of these sources provides many indications that enable us to describe, quite accurately, the most recent evolution in the condition of immigrants in the employment sector and which can be briefly summarized as, there is a situation in which the models of foreign immigrants in the labour market are increasingly adjusted to those of Italian workers, especially for those who work regularly. The models become increasingly different and peculiar in the various places. Moreover, the number of immigrants regularly employed as dependent workers has continuously increased, due to the frequent regularisations, and has reached a remarkable figure. An aspect that is closely related to the situation of complementarity rather than competition between Italian and foreign workers, is the ethnic characterisation of the labour market. A first confirmation of the tendency of some sectors to be ethnically characterised is provided by the data concerning the distribution of migrant workforce in various sectors, which seems to be insignificant in the sectors preferred most by native job seekers; estimates indicate less sectorial segregation and highlight ethnic characterisation of some professional profiles rather than entire sectors.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**References**


