



## Migrants' experiences of formal and informal channels of mobility

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## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Formal and informal channels of mobility .....	4
Formal channels .....	4
Public employment agencies.....	5
Private recruitment agencies .....	8
Informal channels.....	15
Illegal channels of labour force mobility .....	16
Social ties.....	18
The referees .....	20
University channels and professional networks.....	21
Direct search/recruitment.....	22
Conclusions .....	27
References.....	28

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## Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the Comparative report on individual factors and recruitment channels to be delivered under WP4 of the GEMM Project (D4.3).

The paper relies on the information provided by national research teams in their overview reports on recruitment channels and individual factors and in their country reports on individual factors and recruitment channels. We will focus on the research findings of the national teams as contained in their country reports on individual factors and recruitment channels; it is worth mentioning in this regard that four country research teams have produced and submitted such reports (BG, ES, IT, and RO) due to the specificity of the tasks assigned to the other two teams (UK, DE).

The paper addresses the formal and informal channels of mobility as revealed by our research; to the extent that available research data allow we will point out features that are gender specific and/or are specific to certain categories of migrants, such as highly or low qualified, age groups or nationality. The paper ends with some conclusions.

As revealed by the country overviews on migration related studies, there is plenty of research on migration phenomenon and on migration flows in the GEMM participating countries but in most cases focused on either macro-level (countries/regions of emigration or immigration, main categories of migrants, such as economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers etc.) or micro-level (specific ethnic or religious groups, host communities, migrants' dependents etc.). Little knowledge exists on the migration strategies and related implementation mechanisms and on the motivation behind these strategies; relatively little attention has been devoted to high skilled migrants.

Labour force mobility is an economic necessity arising, *inter alia*, from the ununiformly economic development over the territory of a country or other territorial entity governed by common rules. More developed areas attracting labour force from less developed areas is a natural phenomenon but since it is accompanied by social problems relating to housing, education, social assistance and protection, demographic balances etc, public authorities (from local to international levels) have issued and imposed rules that regulated this mobility. Such rules not only prescribe how social action should take place but also impose political objectives according to specific local, regional or national interests (e.g. rural-urban migration during accelerated industrialisation in former socialist countries, the East-West migration after the fall of the 'iron curtain', or the demographic oriented migration policy of Canada). While aiming at responding to public needs and interests these rules often enter in conflict with individual interests and needs or even with the interests of larger groups, such as the owners of businesses faced by a lack of labour force on local labour markets.

The analysis of our qualitative research data has revealed that in fact the individual pathways of international mobility are the results of an interplay between individual characteristics, interests and needs and structural constraints imposed by public authorities in specific life contexts, and derived from non-correspondence of national policies of EU member states.

Hence, in spite of formal channels of mobility, such as recruitment agencies, direct recruitment websites or services of the employers, the EURES network, or services set up under intergovernmental

agreements, providing better protection of migrants' interests, in most cases and especially in the case of low-skilled migrants the opting for informal channels, especially social ties but often direct job search in the destination country prevails. In the predominantly sending countries (Romania and Bulgaria) this also applies to many highly-skilled migrants. While job search in the destination countries is not common among high skilled workers from Italy and Spain, social ties are frequently used. They are likely to be of different nature (ex-colleagues, friends from Erasmus experience; creation of new contacts or latent contacts through social media) in comparison to social ties used by Romanians and Bulgarians. This may be also explained, beside the education environment, by the more advanced and longer institutional development in the area of labour mediation in Italy and Spain.

The features of the labour force emigration phenomenon in Italy and Spain, yet being based on the same channels, are different from those in Bulgaria and Romania; it has emerged more recently and has been mainly related to the outcomes of the latest international economic crisis, has reached lower dimensions and has mostly affected medium and highly qualified people.

## Formal and informal channels of mobility

The channels through which migrants get a job in the destination countries are one of the more common topics analysed by the sociological literature on (un)employment and labour markets. Basically, the literature focused the attention on the differences between formal channels (public employment agencies, job centres, newspaper advertisements, private employment agencies, head hunters, specialized employment websites) and informal channels (job through direct application, friends and relatives, social media, informal mediators).

As revealed by our qualitative research data, migrants have rarely used a single channel in their endeavours to find a job abroad. Therefore, when discussing the extent to which some channels or types of channels have been more frequently used by economic migrants we do not exclude the use (in parallel or subsequently) of other channels but just point out the prevalence of such channels in the lived experiences of migrants. However, for the purpose of this report we are trying to treat separately channels and categories of channels of labour force mobility and to point out common and specific aspects in the participating countries.

### Formal channels

The use of formal channels of international mobility has not been quite frequently evoked by the participants in our qualitative research and when it did it referred to public employment agencies and private recruitment/employment agencies, sometimes the private ones having also acted as head hunters. Specialised websites have also been evoked but in conjunction with employment agencies (especially in the case of EURES but not only). For the financial sector, the recruitment process can start during the last year at the university. In fact, some interviewees worked in the company where they did

an internship when they still were university students. In particular, international banks usually offer summer training programmes or short period internships (usually of 10 weeks). In this way, not only the candidates had the opportunity to do an internship, but they acquired useful information on the functioning of finance sector abroad. Doing an internship or participation in clinic laboratories with low (or even no) remuneration can also be the first step of the recruitment process for job-seekers in the health sector.

In consideration of the above, in this section we refer in principal to employment/recruitment agencies and only on the side to head hunters and specialised websites.

#### Public employment agencies

In Bulgaria, Romania and Spain, the public employment agencies are organised at central/national and regional levels and function under the authority of the ministries of labour as state agencies with territorial branches in the regions (NUTS2 in Spain, NUTS 3 in Bulgaria and Romania, and in some cases also at local level). These agencies have also been accredited as EURES partners and include special units for the EURES programme, staffed with councillors trained under the programme (EURES is a network of the public employment services of the European Economic Area and is accessible via the European Commission's EU mobility internet portal).

In Italy, since 1990s, job placement and employment services in Italy changed their nature, structure and functions. A number of legislative interventions promoted changes basically based on both the decentralization of functions to regional and local authorities (for the public services) and de-monopolization of employment services, with the opening to private actors. However, empirical evidences have showed that official recruitment channels are generally little used. The research data collected under the WP4 do not allow comments on EURES structures and activities in Italy, most likely because the informants there had not interfered with this network.

The interviewed experts from the public employment agencies commonly defined their responsibilities as establishing contacts between foreign employers wishing to hire people from the countries where they work and candidates for the announced jobs. They described in details the procedures which the international mediation entailed: information campaigns, consultations, selection of potential candidates, help for the preparation of a CV, a cover letter and additional information about the country in which candidates wish to work, organizing interviews between employers and job seekers or doing the interviews themselves. The EURES advisors serve people who have not only the desire to work in another European country, but also have the necessary professional qualifications for the job they want and the language skills required to work and live in the foreign country. Intermediation for work inside the country may include vocational training, but for jobseekers abroad this does not apply - they must have the required skills at the time of application. The experts stated that each EU member state individually decided whether, how many and what kind of labour immigrants from non-member countries it could accept. The specific mediation procedure for work abroad included: receiving information about job vacancies either directly from an employer abroad or through by the EURES Adviser in the relevant country and publishing it on the national EURES site. With this the job vacancies become visible to all and the interested candidates for the declared workplace can apply to their local employment office. The

EURES adviser collects all the applications, checks them, makes a selection and then contacts the employer who can either hire them directly or organize skype or face-to-face interviews or comes to a place in the sending country for specific interviews. This depends on the number of vacancies, the number of candidates, the features of the specific job sector, and the employer's own discretion. EURES advisers consult jobseekers abroad not only for the specific workplace but also for the administrative regulations in the foreign country such as address and social security registration and the tax system. They see it as their duty to inform the applicants of the obligations they have to respect in the respective state. They also tell them what rights they have as European citizens.

According to the report for 2016 of the Bulgarian National Agency for Employment (Employment Agency, 2017: 33-34) the Bulgarian project team calculated that the whole number of jobseekers the Agency consulted individually or during organized events was more than 50,000 and of them about 1,000 people had found work abroad and concluded that the state agency is still far from meeting its objective *'to promote labour mobility within the EU and contribute to overcoming workforce shortages, permanently unoccupied jobs and inconsistencies between demand and qualifications.'* (p.33).

According to the interviewed experts from Bulgaria, most of the vacancies they manage are for jobs in agriculture, hotel and restauration services. The employment is usually seasonal and low-skilled. Much less are the openings for highly skilled workers: medical staff, IT specialists and engineers (no such job fairs were listed in the cited report for 2016). The usual employment period in the highly skilled sector is longer. According to the experts there is a high demand for medical professionals: doctors, nurses, carers. Most medium and highly skilled job vacancies come from Germany and the UK and low skilled jobs in agriculture - mainly from Spain and Portugal. The countries most preferred by Bulgarian emigrants according to an interviewed manager, are:

*'Germany for sure because of the good social policy ...; Spain is also preferred because there are already many Bulgarians there, and for those who are in the area of restaurant and hotel business, most attractive to them are Switzerland and Austria, because the jobs in the winter resorts... offer good pay'* (BG.BG.AG.9.F.51).

The advantages of the public employment agencies are linked to the wide network they maintain with experts in Europe and the wide scope of vacancies they announce on the specialized website. One of the state experts pointed at the fact that they received vacancies from employers who were customers of the state employment services in their countries thus making the network very wide covering all European countries. (BG.BG.AG.9.F.51). Unlike private agencies, the state ones had more printed informational materials for the work abroad which they could offer to their clients. The EURES information site offered a wealth of information on living conditions in different European countries, local legislation and culture. Their view was that they had more vacancies than people ready and qualified to take up the positions.

According to ANOFM Romania (2017) (ANOFM Romania is the national employment agency in Romania), in 2016, almost 19,000 people looking for a job in European countries contacted experts from EURES Romania in order to obtain information about finding a job. More than 4,800 vacancies were received from European employers and promoted by EURES Romania in 2016 (on its website [www.eures.anofm.ro](http://www.eures.anofm.ro)). This number of jobs was higher by 18% than in 2015 (4,105 vacancies received from European employers).

As a matter of fact, in 2016, about 1,800 people found a job by accessing EURES Romania (about 70% of the persons participated in the selection process). Besides, the other jobs were found by other activities organized by ANOFM based on specific agreements between countries such as the Project with Sweden "Your first EURES job" (YFEJ) addressed to 18-35-year-old people.

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As a trend, the number of work contracts signed by migrants increased in the last 10 years from 65 in 2007 to about 1,800 in 2016, accounting over 10,000 contracts in this period.

The main receiving countries in 2016 for employees assisted by EURES Romania were Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This is a very different situation compared to people who found a job by using social networks. Italy and Spain are on the first two places in this hierarchy, while the social structure of this group of migrants could be defined by their occupations (most of them work in agriculture, about 60% of them are young 18-35 years old, about 75% of them are women, and almost half of them are low educated (under high school). Over time, the weight of people with a high level of education among those who use EURES decreased. Regarding the sending regions of Romania, most of these people come from the East and South of the country, regions that are less urbanized than other parts of Romania.

In the Spanish case, the state and regional public employment services websites may be playing an important role. Specifically, within the EURES framework, yet very rarely cited as an important job search channel among Spanish respondents, Spain has established a network of 'Puentes de Colaboración Permanente' (PCPs) ('Bridges of Permanent Collaboration') with other European Economic Area countries. Spain's PCPs are divided into different country groups, including partnerships with Germany (the first and most developed of the partnerships), the Nordic countries, a single group for France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Switzerland and another 'mixed group' for other countries. Through these country and area-specific PCP agreements, the Spanish EURES network aims at increasing access to the European labour market for high-skilled Spanish workers by marketing their capabilities to European countries with a higher demand for skilled labour. On-going examples of the effectiveness of these country and area-specific agreements with Spain include Scandinavian companies such as Volvo and Aker Solutions who regularly hire Spanish engineers through their PCPs (EURES 2013).

Between 2012 and 2013, 255,224 employment seekers used the services of Spain's EURES advisors (a sharp increase compared to the 5,000 users recorded in 2008) (EURES 2013). Not only are job-seekers using this portal more than at the beginning of the economic crisis, but employers, specifically German, Nordic and Dutch firms are increasingly connecting with the Spanish EURES network with employment opportunities. For the period between June 2012 and May 2013, of the 3,157 vacancies advertised through the EURES Spain portal as well as Spain's PCCs with other countries, the majority were targeted at engineers (26%) nurses (14%), low-skill manual workers (12%) and flight attendants (8%). In terms of the actual hiring trends for the same period (i.e., which of these 3,157 vacancies resulted in jobs for applicants), 1,764 Spanish residents found employment in other countries through the network. The occupations that resulted in the most hirings were nursing (31%), engineering (15%) and restaurant service (10%). These 1,764 new job opportunities were overwhelmingly concentrated in Germany (40%), followed by Norway (11%), the United Kingdom (11%) and France (9%). The vacancies advertised, hiring patterns observed and main destinations arrived at through the EURES portal for the 2012-2013 period demonstrate that users of the web portal tend to be highly-skilled, although the high level of recruitment of waiters (10% of all recruitments through the website) may

suggest that it attracts a significant number of lower-skilled job-seekers and/or that a number of people with tertiary education in Spain accept work as waiters in other countries).<sup>1</sup>

A report published by Adecco and the Spanish employment portal Infoempleo echoes these findings regarding employment opportunities outside of Spain. It notes that for the year 2015, vacancies advertised through Spanish employment services for jobs abroad increased by 5.2% compared to 2014. The sectors with the highest demand for Spanish workers in other countries were general consulting, real estate, and new technologies. 98% of these job offers required professional training or a university or graduate degree and the most highly demanded educational profiles were software engineering, industrial engineering and nursing (Adecco-infoempleo). With respect to less qualified Spanish potential migrants, the EURES portal draws our attention to a pilot project that has been launched between the Spanish and German employment ministries called the DUAL Professional Training in Germany programme, dubbed 'the job of my life,' which, within the next few years will combine vocational training programmes for 5,000 unemployed Spanish youth with an employment contract (EURES 2013).

A minority of informants (5) reported systematic use of public employment agency websites and applying for employment via these public job banks in their international job search. Those who did had used the public employment services websites of Spain, the region of Catalonia, Germany and Sweden as well as EURES, the EU's Labour Mobility portal. One informant, a nurse, found her first job in Germany through the EURES website. A telecommunications engineer was dissatisfied with his experience applying for jobs via the EURES portal, claiming he didn't receive any answers or feedback regarding his applications from employers. On the other hand, other respondents who contacted EURES councillors both in Spain or in the destination country for specialized labour market information found the service very useful and highlighted the amount of follow-up on the part of councillors, even when it didn't result in a job offer.

#### Private recruitment agencies

The private recruitment agencies respond to the same need for mediation between the offer and the demand on the labour market but have emerged much more recently in the former socialist countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, as compared to Western European countries because under the previous political regime on the one hand labour mediation (including mobility) was centrally managed by the state and on the other hand international mobility was strictly limited to the inter-governmental agreements. According as the restrictions to international mobility of the labour force, from both sending and receiving countries have been reduced the need for international labour mediators has increased and the public employment services could not keep the pace with the diversity and the complexity of the new needs for labour mediation. Besides, the public employment agencies are bound by public employment policies, which sometimes require discouraging international labour force mobility in certain sectors or within certain qualifications, while private recruitment agencies are free to follow the real trends of the labour force demand. Several such agencies in Romania and Bulgaria have been established as a response to the demands of foreign

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<sup>1</sup> This would reinforce González Enríquez and Martínez Romera's findings that some of the difficulties faced by Spanish emigrants in their country of residence include problems with recognition of their degree and qualifications (15% of e-survey respondents) as well as being over-qualified for their job (over 20% of respondents).



employment agencies or even important employers and some are members of international recruitment organisations (e.g. ADECCO in Romania and the Polish private recruiting agencies in Bulgaria). Such agencies have benefitted from training and transfer of knowledge from their foreign/international partners.

The private recruitment agencies are usually smaller than the public ones and focus on certain sectors or categories of jobs and in spite of often reacting to specific demands of specific employers they are more proactive as compared to public agencies. They develop specialised websites (as the public ones also do) and sometimes send specialised recruiters in the targeted countries (as for medical personnel in Romania and in Italy) or even establish subsidiaries in such countries (e.g. German agencies in Italy).

The recruitment practices of private agencies do not differ very much from one to another and in many points are similar to the practices of public employment agencies. In some cases, the range of services provided to jobseekers tends to compete with public employment agencies, though their resources are more limited.

On the other hand, our research findings have shown that applying to the services of private recruitment agencies is not an extended practice among economic migrants either, especially among low qualified migrants. This seemed to be to a certain extent the effect of some bad practices of such recruitment agencies, disseminated by 'the word of mouth' among prospective migrants, but the main reasons seem to relate to the lack of information and to the practice of taking the first and/or easiest way for finding a job abroad.

The lived experiences of the participants in our research with private recruitment agencies have been diverse and so were the degrees of using their services in different participating countries. With a view to enable a more clear and extended image of the migrants' experiences with private recruitment agencies we provide below some country specific information.

The private agencies from Bulgaria that took part in our study were much smaller than the network of the regional and local employment agencies and report to have one to three employees. Most were independent institutionally and only one was a member of the network of Polish private recruiting agencies. While most were trying to mediate for all kinds of jobs there was somewhat higher specialization concerning the sector of the job openings. Thus, one agency was dealing with IT specialists only, another agency offered jobs in caring and another one in manufacturing. The rest recruited seasonal workers in agriculture as the state agencies did.

Not all mediators gave the number of the vacancies that they usually filled in per year but those few who did cited numbers around a hundred. The comparison of the results from the public and private mediation seems to be in favour of the private ones: agencies with one to three employees managed to recruit a hundred employees for jobs abroad per year (in a ratio of 3:100) while more than 2300 public consultants succeeded to recruit 1000 job seekers (in a ratio of 2:1). Our data provide interesting insights into the factors influencing the different efficiency of the mediation practices.

The experts in the private agencies described the same steps in the recruitment process as did the EURES advisors in the state agencies. What was clearly different was that the private recruiters were more involved in creating the profiles of the job seekers than the state experts most of whom considered that this was the responsibility of the potential emigrants themselves. While the state experts insisted on the high professionalism of the services they provided (including support from

psychologists and legal counsellors), the private experts focused on their personal engagement both with employers' demands and with the jobseekers' applications.

*'We help them write their CVs because this is the first thing that the different employers read. And if they like the people, our goal is to connect them. Employers come here to Bulgaria. They organize a presentation with translators and people see what they are offering. They have the right to ask any questions. If people like them, and the employer likes the people after the interview, these people go abroad and work for them'* (BG.BG.AG.2.M.31).

Almost all experts noted that highly skilled job seekers often found jobs abroad themselves and did not need mediation. But the low skilled and those who did not speak the language or poorly knew it needed the mediation of an agency. They would find it difficult to arrange accommodation and transport, to deal with the necessary documentation. One of the experts in a private agency that mediated unqualified agricultural job seekers said they offered help with getting national insurance numbers in the receiving country (BG.BG.AG.2.M.31).

The experts in the private agencies, in the same way as those in the public agencies claimed that finding suitable candidates was not an easy task. It was particularly hard to fill in openings in health care both for highly skilled and low-skilled jobs, because of the high professional and linguistic requirements. They tried to compensate with widening their search on various sites and not waiting for applicants to contact them. The private mediators also attracted job seekers by offering help with buying cheap air tickets and transport from the airport to the employer's farm. Unlike the state experts, the interviewed manager of a private agency claimed that there was competition for agricultural jobs, *'every employer, if he is looking for 50 people to hire, he wants to see, interview at least one 70-80. This means ... 30% of the people who will see the employer will not be given a job'* (BG.BG.AG.2.M.31). The manager in the state agency admitted that the private agencies did more thorough selection than was done in the public offices.

The interviewees often made focused comments on the advantages of their agencies as channels for recruitment. A private agency employee claimed that the people in the public agency were 'very passive' and worked only for their salaries while she was personally engaged and interested in what she did (BG.BG.AG.6.F.40).

Some of the private agencies did not maintain their own website but rather sought contacts with job seekers on the common job-search sites. Vacancies were also not advertised on the web and were replaced by the personal activities of the mediators. This practice was defined as 'network marketing'. *"We have neither a flyer nor a website. We generally rely on the so-called network marketing - from person to person. Someone has gone abroad, is happy, he says this to 10 people, they start looking for us"*. (BG.BG.AG.2.M.31). This kind of semi-formal practice makes the private mediators very flexible and allows them bypass some legal regulations which would otherwise limit their activities, for example applying selection criteria that would be declared discriminatory if published.

Both private and public mediators said that they provided greater security than the informal channels that many people used. Job seekers abroad were turning to them mainly because they relied on the formal channels for greater security of the employment contract and greater protection from incorrect behaviour of the employers.

Private experts were interested in sending more people to work and made more efforts to meet the demands of the employers who have called for them, but they also recognized that they should not compromise on the selection of candidates because it would then create problems for them. They did the selection not only on the basis of the candidates' skills but also on personal qualities, such as being tolerant toward the others or a conflicting temperament. One explained:

*'For example, there are, although we can never be sure, people who come here, and everything seemed fine, I found the skills appropriate, but going there and starting drinking alcohol in the evenings and then fights with knives even ... I have judge, it may be very subjective, but if there is such a threat, I tell then the jobs was not suitable and they a disgruntled but that's part of the work that I have to do' (BG.BG.AG.6.F.40).*

Another significant difference in the recruitment practices between the public and private agencies is the type of contacts they keep with their clients. For the private agencies these are more personal and regular which allows them to receive feedback on a more regular basis. All EURES counsellors admitted that they did not usually get feedback except in cases when a problem had arisen. In contrast the private mediators boasted with keeping regular contacts and boasted with the souvenirs they received by satisfied clients.

According to data collected by the Romanian team, the main practices of private recruitment agencies are similar with the public recruitment agencies, but maybe they are a little bit more flexible. They work upon request by beneficiary employers. In addition, the private agencies work usually with fewer countries or foreign agencies than the public ones. The specificity of the services offered by the private recruitment agencies are synthesised as follows: they do not work with employers from countries where work permits, residence permits or visas are required; move faster than public agencies; each private agency recruit about the same number of people per year as the overall public agencies; the employers pay for their recruitment services; not getting feedback from the employers (except where there are cases of complaints from the employers), but only from employees; compared to public recruitment agencies, are assessed by their own experts as being more efficient, since the personnel is paid based on their results.

Romanian recruitment agencies are focused on recruiting candidates or job seekers, but in many cases they also provide training courses for vocational qualification and foreign languages, helping the candidates prepare for working abroad. These services are provided by both public and private agencies. The importance of the agencies has increased over the past years mainly by expanding their activity in the direct mediation between potential migrants and the future employers.

One actual migrant from Germany started to find a job in ITC field using e-jobs website, job fairs and recruitment agencies as he said *"... I went to job fairs, I visited the main recruitment websites but often the recruiters found me and weekly I participated at interviews. [...] I used a recruitment agency from Poland which told me about the company from Leipzig and finally I was invited and tested at the company where I work now."* (RO.DE.AC.1.M.33).

Some of the actual migrants used e-jobs website and/or employment firms or recruitment agencies as the main channel to get a job in the destination countries (RO.UK.AC.4.M.36).

The research data collected under the WP4 have not revealed relevant differences between the roles and functions of public and private agencies in Italy but one should take into account that the

experiences lived by Italian migrants with employment agencies related only to private ones, including subsidiaries or agents in Italy of private employment agencies from the destination countries (acting mostly in the health sector). The fieldwork in Italy highlighted that some professional categories of high-skilled workers commonly use formal channels to get a job abroad. In some cases, formal channels can assume a very structured form in which the recruitment process is almost entirely managed by formal intermediaries (generally employment agencies) that provide a series of services to both job-seekers and employers. The employment agencies that operate abroad usually organise job fairs and the first interview in Italy (with the support of their Italian branches or of some employment agencies that already operate in Italy), while the second interview is often organised in the country of destination. Moreover, employment agencies can provide various services to the workers who get a job: specifically, they offer language courses, advices and services to fulfil all the bureaucratic and administrative procedures that are required to start a job abroad and, in some cases, housing services. For instance, four nurses interviewed got their first job through employment agencies. In these cases, representatives of public and private hospitals and health structures located in the UK or Germany participated in job fairs in Italy with the aim to attract Italian health professionals in their countries. At that day, job-seekers had the opportunity to ask information and be interviewed by professional recruiters who decided the allocation of job opportunities in basis of the outcome of the interview. The interviews for the German employers were carried out through a translator.

*R: There was a fair in Rome where all these German companies had jobs' offers. Whoever was interested could take part in a meeting in Rome: basically, it was a cognitive interview where all companies came and offered jobs, showing and explaining what they wanted, what they did not want from the candidates. They talked with the candidates and they decided if the candidate was more appropriate for caring services at home, or in hospital, etc. I did this interview for the hospital where I currently work. I was chosen in short by the two representatives of the hospital who were present during the meeting in Rome, so once I was chosen I started the German course, and during the course I had already signed the contract that provided six months of trial; after those six months the contract became open-ended (IT.GE.AC.17.F.25 – Nurse).*

*I: What did you do to find this job?*

*R: It was very simple, the simplest thing in the world. I saw the open position on Facebook, I sent my CV to the agency that recruited these nurses. They called me after two days. They said in English: Do you want to come to Bologna and talk with us for this position? I didn't know well English language and I remember that I understood little during the phone call; however, I said Okay, I come! They arranged a meeting in Bologna and I came. I spoke not only with the agency but also with three hospital managers who interviewed me. After few minutes, I was sitting on an armchair, a girl came and said. They took you [...] (IT.UK.AC.5.M.38 - Nurse).*

*We went to the UK and I remembered there was a two-days for the recruitment: The first day was a kind of open day and the second was dedicated to the interview. After the first day we thought the English level was very high and consequently we were not so inclined to continue. But at the end we went also the second day: there was a written test with questions that were not very difficult, so even with my very basic English level I was able to answer to the questions. After that, there was an interview with the so-called matrons, that is who would be the nurses' department managers. [...] I waited few minutes outside, and after the two matrons approached me and they said: Okay, you have to come to the UK! The selection process was so brief! A few minutes after the interview was*

*over it was already possible to know the outcome of the selection! [...] It was December 20 and they wanted me in the UK on January 10<sup>th</sup> (IT.UK.AC.16.F.25 - Nurse).*

For the health sector, there also are specialized intermediaries who work as own-account workers and collaborate with various hospitals/clinics in different countries. They usually operate by collecting CVs of health professionals and matching labour offer and demand between employers and job-seekers. These recruiters usually publish advertisements in specialized webpages of generic social networks (for instance Facebook groups) and interview candidates for specific vacancies. They make the first selection, and, then, the candidate may have a further interaction with the employer, even if it seems that hospitals usually trust recruiters' options.

*For instance, we hypothetically suppose that vacancy is for 10 free positions. I contact as many people as possible, and I will hear a hundred of them. I try to create groups that let me choose the 10 people I say, in the sense that I try to bring 12-13 people, that is 10 real candidates and 2 or 3 people who need to do the interview for the first time, so they can break the ice with the interviews, or they are people who just want to get information. Ordinarily the 10 I selected are always taken from the hospital which did the jobs' offer. I prepare the candidates I selected: I usually do simulations of talks, I prepare them on the alcoholism test, I give them basic information concerning the methods of drugs' administration, or concerning other types of administration. In short I prepare them well. I think I do well this stage, but it takes a while (IT.IT.AG.3.M.35 – Formal intermediary).*

Also other categories of high-skilled workers we interviewed frequently used formal channels to get a job. In particular, head-hunters and specialized websites are used by workers in financial sector and engineering. In these cases, searching a job usually includes posting one's curriculum vitae on online professional social networking forums (for instance LinkedIn) that are followed, not only by potential employers, but also by recruiters or head-hunters. These intermediary figures usually contact job-seekers to propose them job-opportunities, or advise them on (1) the preparation for the interview, (2) how to overcome language-related difficulties, and (3) how to improve their CV. In this way, specialized websites, online professional social networks and intermediaries facilitate the match between labour demand and offer. Moreover, for these categories of high-skilled workers also Italian universities' websites may give virtual space to advertisements, and facilitate the interaction between intermediaries and its graduates.

*I: I would ask you about your current job. How did you get this position?*

*R: In a very direct way. I visited the website Financial Careers in 2009 and this is one of the many positions for which I applied on. I did it through head-hunters. Head-hunters gave me the opportunity to come in the UK and to do an interview; and during that interview I did a good performance. [...]*

*R: the mechanism is quite simple. For example, Goldman Sachs gives the ABC company a mandate to find a person for a specific position. Maybe Goldman Sachs gives the mandate to many employment agencies/head-hunters, then if the ABC company brings to Goldman the right candidate Goldman Sachs pays a percentage to ABC company.*

*I: Did you have to pay something?*

*R: No, it's Goldman Sachs that pays ... It is the bank in this case that pays the ABC company (IT.UK.AC.14.M.36 - Investment Analyst).*

Nine Spanish interviewees found their first form of employment in the country of destination through a private recruitment agency, a private healthcare services provider that actively recruits on the international market, or a specialized sub-contracting company. All informants who became employed through these channels, with the exception of one, had received the job offer prior to migration.

Private recruitment agencies were of highest relevance for healthcare workers and IT engineering informants. All recruitment agencies used by the informants were located in the country of destination, and not in Spain, with the exception of one case. In the case of recently certified nurses, selection occurred along with a large pool of candidates, usually in a hotel in a major Spanish city and applicants were required to take a test and then interviewed by the human resources representatives or recruiters on the spot. This is a case of private healthcare providers or specialized healthcare recruitment agencies 'harvesting' candidates for a large number of positions they've been contracted to fill in the country of destination.

Other healthcare informants who had more work experience opted for a more personalized application process through recruitment agencies by getting in touch directly with the recruiters. They would then attend a general 'screening' interview (by phone if the candidate was still in Spain) with an agency representative or head-hunter and were then assigned to a number of interviews with separate employers. In the case of an experienced nurse in Spain, he was specifically flown out to London for interviews by the hospitals who were interested in his profile.

The role of healthcare specialized recruitment agencies appears to be of greater importance in the UK than in Germany, both within the British National Health Service and in the private healthcare system alike. The two nurses interviewed in Germany were recruited directly from Spain by German private healthcare providers. None of the physicians interviewed in Germany had used the service of a recruitment agencies.

The case of a software engineer who received an offer to work in Berlin as a sub-contractor for an IT company without having directly applied for it is notable. He had applied for a job with the same subcontracting company in the UK 4 years prior and his CV had remained in the pipeline ever since. This illustrates the degree of mobilization of private actors that are dedicated to matching international labour supply and demand.

Another formal channel of recruitment mentioned by respondents in high skill sectors is through specialized sector employment websites and publications. Specifically, an architect in Berlin found her first job by applying for a position advertised in a German architecture industry publication. Similarly, a young investment fund manager found the advertisement for his job while browsing an entrepreneurship website.

## Informal channels

The research findings regarding informal channels of mobility have revealed a high level of similarity among the lived experiences of international mobility. Nevertheless, one special feature of labour force migration has been specific only to the former socialist countries (Bulgaria and Romania), namely the illegal migration for work, and therefore we have to approach it separately.

The main channel used by Romanian migrants to work abroad relates to social ties, by which “friends are helping friends, relatives are helping relatives, individuals from the same community are helping their fellow countrymen, people with some religious orientation, especially Adventism, Baptism and Pentecostalism branches, are helping people with same religious beliefs and those with some ethnic background are helping the fellows sharing same ethnic background.” (Şerban M. and Voicu B. 2010) This has been confirmed by the analysis of data collected by the Romanian team through qualitative research under WP4. Most of the interviewed migrants said that they used or will use relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbours that are already working abroad in order to be informed about the labour market in the destination countries and for helping them finding a job. They use this informal channel because is easy to do it and they have confidence in them. That means using the social capital, mainly by those in rural areas of Romania, who, in fact, account for the majority of the Romanian migrants. Most of the interviewed migrants have not contacted any recruitment agency or undertaken any administrative steps in order to get a job in the destination countries.

The importance of social ties was crucial as a mobility channel for Bulgarian migrants working in low qualified jobs, as noted by the Bulgarian project team in their Overview report on recruitment channels and individual factors. After 2000 entering the host country was no longer a problem and the social ties were used when searching for the first job, or looking for housing. Many people used travel companies to arrange entering the foreign countries and stay there after that looking for work. Friends, neighbours and acquaintances already living and working abroad were most valuable ‘social capital’ which many migrants used in this period. Although travel was now legal and easier to arrange, still many people suffered misconduct from such ‘contacts’. In the third period after Bulgaria joining the EU in 2007 the migrants looking for low skilled jobs still relied on acquaintances, friends and relatives.

Similarly, the Italian project team, based on their research data, concluded that new emigrants may largely use informal networks to insert in the labour market, but this mechanism differs from the chain migration patterns of last decades. In particular, informal social ties are used in a more sporadic and casual way, that is new migrants may take information on job opportunities through web communities, ex colleagues and friends (for high educated also people met during Erasmus experiences abroad), independently of their level of skills and education. Moreover, the use of these kinds of channel seems to facilitate the creation and sharing of common social representations of labour markets and social contexts of destination.

The situation in Spain seems to be similar in what regards the preferred channels of international labour mobility but as mentioned by the Spanish project team in their Overview on recruitment channels and individual factors there is a lack of concrete and accurate information on the characteristics and scope of the new Spanish emigration, as many authors must piece together both quantitative and qualitative data from different sources in order to shed some light on the phenomenon. Researchers tend to agree that among the Spanish-born emigrants, most of them are

high-qualified. However, they remain a relatively 'invisible' group, since most countries do not have registries of their qualified professionals residing abroad or working for foreign institutions or businesses (Herrera Ceballos 2014).

Spanish job-seekers, though they often criticize the lack of meritocracy they perceive in their country of origin, have nonetheless been socialized in an environment in which who one knows and how well connected one's family is has an impact on quality of employment and career prospects (or at least this is the general consensus in Spain). For example, a study of recent university graduates' employability and most successful methods for finding work (in Spain) upon graduation reveals that 37% of recent graduates found work through personal contacts. 31% were hired as a result of non-network-mediated (direct) contact with employers, while 29% became employed thanks to an intermediary agency or service (18% through online job portals and 11% through public employment services). (Álvarez, 2016).

Now that we have outlined the preference of economic migrants from the four relevant migrants sending countries participating in the GEMM Project for the informal channels of mobility, we may proceed with providing more detailed descriptions of the lived experiences in this regard of the migrants having participated in our qualitative research.

Being mostly a historical feature, yet not entirely overpassed, we are starting with the illegal channels of labour force mobility. They belong to the category of informal channels and often combined several such channels but as already explained we treat them separately because they have been specific to former socialist countries and still are to a certain extent.

#### Illegal channels of labour force mobility

Up to the year 2000, Bulgarian citizens needed visas to enter EU countries. So many migrants describe how they have sought various contacts which to provide a legal reason for the trip. In the case of one woman, who migrated in 1999 to Italy, a school trip was the justification for getting the visa, which she took as a 'teacher' accompanying the group. The aim of this endeavour is to stay in Italy once the pupils were on the bus heading back to Bulgaria. However, the organizer of the trip who had collected the passports of all travellers when they arrived in Italy, asked for additional money to return her passport. Since she refused to give the sum, she had to return with the group to Bulgaria. Ten days later, she took the train to Trieste and went back to Italy. She remembers with horror this trip, as there was a delay of 12 hours in Belgrade where the traces of the war were still visible, and the Serbs themselves were very unfriendly at that time to the Bulgarians. A Bulgarian engineer explains how he arranged with a friend of his who was the President of the International Fair in Plovdiv to help him establish contacts with colleagues in the UK who then sent him and two of his colleagues and friends an invitation to attend a business fair in a British city. He is now working in construction in London. Very interesting is the case of a self-employed man in Milan who left Bulgaria in 1999. He had a contact with a man from his home town who was in Spain and who promised to find him a job. At the time he needed a visa and he was advised that the easiest way was to apply for a visa in the French Embassy. He had to prepare a lot of documents including that he had money in the bank which he did with great difficulties but finally he got the visa and left on a bus. However, the friend turned out not to be a friend and had lied to him. So, in 3 weeks he left and went to Italy where he established contacts with 'other friends' from his home town and who told him *'Come here, we are not in a good situation but you will manage somehow'*.



Until the year 2004 when some of the Western countries opened their labour markets to Romanians the main strategy of Romanian migrants was to use illegal channels for entering the destination countries (mostly by presenting their travel as touristic trips); often the touristic visas were difficult to obtain for destination countries known as targets for Eastern emigrants (e.g. Italy, Germany, the UK) so that networks of guides have appeared and offered their guiding services to interested migrants from the closest country for which touristic visa could be obtained to the destination country.

*"... my husband was already here [in Italy] ... in fact he came twice; he came once and after one month was expelled because was found clandestine and they expelled him to Romania ... the second time, same as me, he came with Austrian visa and had to cross the Italian border on the crook; there were some people who did this job; we had not realized how grave was what they were doing; our wish to come here was so high so that we came. ... the guides had the right documents and were waiting after the border ... and were accompanying us until the first railway station in the first town. ...*

*... (in my case) it was not quite similar because the passing failed, so we didn't meet the guides; after crossing the border, I don't know well what happened that we did not arrive at the meeting point or the guides didn't show up and we stayed overnight then we tried finding somebody to drive us ... 7 Km ... to the first town. ... the first car that stopped was police in plain cloth ... they drove us back to the Austrian border. ... fortunately, we had visa for one more day ... at 7 p.m. we arrived to the hotel in Vienna ... in the same evening we returned to the Customs and we succeeded to pass the border. We were very tired and the guide drove us to Rome. We paid, of course for the transport to Rome ... (she planned and started the trip with other three persons, of which two gave up and returned to Romania after the experience with Italian Police" (RO.IT.AC.6.F.49)*

Other actual migrants, with or without the help of relatives, came in the destination countries as tourists and after that found a job and remained there (this was mainly before 2007 when Romania has joined the EU). For instance, an actual migrant (RO.IT.AC.1.M.40) travelled to Italy by bus with a 3 months tourist visa and with the help of his brother from Rome who hosted him, he succeeded to find his first job in less than one month, in the construction sector, through his Romanian friend who was working there.

The main problem faced by illegal migrants was that they could not return to their families in Romania for many years (running the risk of being unable to go back as a sanction for having not observed the 3 months limit of their touristic visa).

*"My father came for the first time to the UK in 2001. ... in 2006 he came to Romania because he was tired of living here alone; he stayed some 5-6 years alone and used to send money in Romania. He had found a job ... and his earnings were pretty good but after one year he realized how it was with education, how it was with the difference between the living standard from here and from Romania, and in 2007 we took the decision to move with the whole family to UK." (RO.UK.AC.8.M.26)*

## Social ties

As we have already pointed out in a previous section, both previous research findings and our own research findings have placed the use of social ties on the top of preferred migration channels among economic migrants from all participating countries in our GEMM Project. Personal experiences have had, however, specific features from a country to another and from a category of migrants to another and their exploration certainly helps with better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. We include here first of all family members and relatives (strong ties) but also friends, acquaintances, school/university mates, professional networks, neighbours from the same locality of origin, etc. (weak ties).

Many Bulgarians joined their relatives – a sister or mother or a cousin living in the foreign country.

*'I had an aunt who knew a Bulgarian woman who had a company for house cleaners in London. So, I signed a contract with her before leaving Bulgaria and started working on the third day after arriving in London.'* (BG.UK.AC.3.F.28).

These links however did not stop the owner to keep half the wage that the young woman earned as a cleaner. Other cited relying on ethnic ties – thus the Bulgarian construction worker in Germany, himself from Turkish ethnic origin, stated that he left in a car with four of his friends who had all been working there for a few years.

*'They were our boys, there was a whole community there of our people and I was sure they would not leave me alone'* (BG.DE.AC.10.M.40).

According to Romanian research data, the majority of Romanian migrants having participated in this research (16 out of 28) have relied on social ties for finding their first job abroad; in some cases, the use of social ties was complemented with direct job search and even with applying to recruitment agencies. No relevant differences have been noticed in respect of gender but a significant difference has been noticed in respect of education level (13 low against 3 high). In most cases the job opportunities were identified in advance by the migrants' relatives or acquaintances settled already in the destination countries but often they did not refer to specific jobs but to existence of a labour force demand in the destination countries, and hence specific job search was necessary upon arrival.

*„ After the Christmas Holidays (she had spent holidays in Italy at her sister) ... I went with my sister to her workplace (in a restaurant); the owner saw me and said come to work with us in the kitchen. My sister had been cleaning there and I had come along to help her ... The next day I went to work and remained there eight years.”* (RO.IT.AC.2.F.39)

*“My brother in law was taking care of (finding jobs); being there since long time ago he had some connections and found jobs for us, sometimes on daily basis, sometimes in agriculture, as he could, until I found a stable job in the bakery.”* (RO.DE.AC.3.F.27)

An actual migrant (RO.IT.AC.1.M.40) travelled to Italy by bus with a 3 months tourist visa and with the help of his brother from Rome who hosted him, he succeeded to find his first job in less than one month, in the construction sector, through his Romanian friend who was working there.

A prospective migrant (RO.DE. PM.2.F. 28) intends to move in Germany where she has a cousin. Although she has not undertaken any administrative steps regarding this move, she plans to go to her relative from Germany to help her find a job, not being confident that by her own will make it.

Another prospective migrant (RO.UK. PM.5.M. 21) intends to move to UK where he has some friends and hopes to get a job in a church in London. Currently he is student, works as an insurance agent and intends to find a job in the finance field after he will graduate a faculty in the UK.

Virtually all Spaniards in the sample whose first job in the place of destination was in a low-skill occupation and who had little to no knowledge of the local language made use of ethnic/linguistic social capital upon arrival as a way to maximize their chances at finding work quickly. For some, activating Spanish or Spanish-speaking immigrant networks was an automatic decision, while others were initially reluctant to rely on these types of networks. A construction worker explains how he felt obliged to change his job search strategy after failed attempts to penetrate German formal and informal recruitment channels:

*'I really tried to find work on my own and wanted to deal with Germans only. I didn't want to find myself in one of those ghettos ...I kept seeing the Poles with the Poles, the Italians with the Italians, the Spaniards with the Spaniards. I know people who have been here for thirty years and my German is a hundred times better than theirs! I find that sad. I didn't want to end up like that. Later, after several months of being stubborn and wanting to do things my way [and being told that my German wasn't good enough to find a job] I finally gave in and said to myself, 'Let's go find some help in Spanish to set things in motion.'* (SP.GE.AC.9.M.35)

Not only were their several cases of relying on 'help in Spanish' to get a first job but a number of informants demonstrated that this doesn't necessarily mean help from Spanish nationals, but rather, 'help' from individuals and networks perceived as culturally similar to Spaniards. Thus, they engaged in a process of redrawing or blurring the boundaries between in and out-groups based on cultural and linguistic affinities. This type of 'bonding' in a foreign context involved reaching out to Latin American and other Southern European immigrant networks.

As the history graduate from Seville, recounts,

*P: I would wake up, get on my bike and drop-off, let's say, thirty CVs per day...I usually tried to make sure it was in some kind of South American, Spanish, Portuguese or Italian restaurant, something close to my culture.*

*I: Why is that?*

*X: Because I thought it would be easier in terms of the language. I ended up finding a job in a Portuguese restaurant and stayed there for two years. (SP.GE.AC.8.M.28)*

As discussed above, professional networks proved highly useful for respondents in high-skill jobs, whereas 'ethnic' networks and direct applications were instrumental to informants finding medium to low skill jobs. On the other hand, friendship and close personal networks yielded very few jobs among emigrants across all skill levels. Only two respondents got their first job thanks to close friendship ties. One informant found his first job in Berlin as a kitchen hand at a Spanish restaurant through a Spanish friend who knew the restaurant owners; a similar situation has been found by the Italian project team.

In line with classical studies on job recruitment process (Granovetter, 1974), low-skilled Italian respondents claimed that 'word of mouth' is a very efficient way to get a job. In this case, though, information seems to circulate within restricted groups of individuals with similar job profile: frequently family or kinship networks and friends.

*I: How did you find the job at this bar?*

*R: There was a roommate of a friend of my friend. So she told her that in this pub they took people even without knowledge of the German language and so I came here (IT.GE.AC.1.F.23).*

*I: You told me that before you came here you tried to find a job through some websites.*

*R: Yes, there were people who made ads on a specific website, Subito.it to find workers to work at the airport, and there I sent my CV.*

*I: But did you have some interviews with employers or employment agencies?*

*R: Nothing. Because when I came here my cousin came to take me to the airport, and he told me some people needed a plumber to work in the firm where he worked' (IT.GE.AC.15.M.28).*

### The referees

A special category of social ties includes the so-called referees. The 'referee' is perceived by respondents as a key figure for improving the functioning of labour market in the country of destination: on the one hand, it allows those looking for jobs to look for positions that are not easily identifiable through other channels; on the other hand, it allows the employer to reduce one of the typical information asymmetries of the labour market by acquiring a series of information about the candidate that are usually difficult (or expensive) to acquire through other recruitment paths. In this case, thus, the referee mechanism is to be a win-win solution. But this positive assessment seems to be only relevant if referee mechanism is applied in the destination countries studied in this research project: in fact, the same mechanism applied in Italy becomes for the interviewees a typical practice of clientelism, which is often indicated as one of the major problems of the Italian labour market.

The Italian team has noticed that for some high-skilled workers it is quite common the use of 'referees' in order to get a job. They usually are old university friends or old colleagues who inform their employers that there is a qualified person, who they know, looking for a job. In such cases, therefore, informal weak ties constitute an important factor in the job recruitment process.

*'Basically, I was lucky because there was a former colleague of Deutsche Bank who had moved to London and with whom I was with good relations: I was his wedding witness. He had left in September 2007 and when I returned from the training days I told him I'd like to go to London as he already did. After three weeks he called me informing that a new position has been opened in London. He said: I will propose you for an interview. So I*

did the interview thank to him. Specifically I did two interviews by phone and four interviews face-to-face' (IT.UK.AC.13.M.34).

*'There was one of my dear friends in Rome who lived here (Berlin) and said: Ah, but you want to become a radiologist. I know a guy who is radiologist at Charity, which is a very famous hospital in Berlin. It is a landmark for us, future radiologists, in Europe. He brought me to Charity, then I began to do some kind of internship' (IT.GE.AC.8.F.28).*

*'R: It was a very lucky encounter. This person I knew had a company here in London; I said to him that I did this project. I said: This Italian person has arrived, Franco, are you interested? He said: I'm very interested. I'm coming to Venice tomorrow. He came the following day and we talked; he said to me: Next week you come to London talking to my business partner. I came to London, I met the other partner [...]. A week after I was here in London, I called my girlfriend who later became my wife and I said: I'm coming to London next week and so I moved".*

*I: Was this contact a friend?*

*R: He was a merchant, a person with whom we were in good relationships, and occasionally I told him what I was doing' (IT.UK.AC.8.M.40).*

Such cases have been reported by the Romanian team as well:

*„... realizing that it was difficult to find a job I started volunteering; volunteering in fiscal domain. I succeeded to join a centre for fiscal assistance for natural persons; for example, in Italy there are offices that take in charge the (fiscal) statements of natural persons. ... I got employed) by the Bank at the beginning of December 2014. ... I received the offer from Transilvania Bank; this was my chance; I succeeded to get in contact with Transilvania (Bank) through an acquaintance, a Romanian gent having been working in the same office where I worked but being responsible for other activities; he was in the Union and I talked to him and I gave him my CV, and at a certain moment, when I was in Romania, at my mother, of course, he called me to advise me that a gent from Transilvania Bank was going to call me .... Things here function very much on recommendations basis.” (RO.IT.AC.5.F.36)*

A similar case has been noticed by the Spanish team. A Spanish emigrant got his Berlin job at an international online purchasing company through a good German friend who not only told him of the opportunity at his company but also initiated a process of internal reference on his behalf. The informant reported this as a widely encouraged practice for new talent recruitment within the company, which guarantees a bonus to the referee upon hiring of his/her proposed candidate.

#### University channels and professional networks

Many of the highly skilled migrants have entered the countries of reception by applying through the normal university system of recruiting students. This was most valid for Germany and the UK, with a few cases in Italy and Spain as well. The university channel was typical for those migrating when young.

Up to 2007 when Bulgaria joined the EU, most typical were the MA studies but since then undergraduate studies have become a more common channel. In the UK there were cases of people who had studies in American universities and have worked there till the financial crisis in 2008 and then they had moved to London. In Italy the interviewed expert in finance explained that he went to Milan in 1997 to study for an MA and when he got the degree he could not find work immediately, so he signed up for a second MA to keep his university status before finally finding a job with the help of one of his professors.

Finding the first job was easier for young Romanian immigrants who started with education or vocational training in the destination countries; in general, they were recruited since their practical stages associated with education or training.

*„... the third year, which was the last but one for me, was so conceived as to have the first two trimesters for learning and the third trimester along with the summer holiday combined into 6 months practice, and everybody was doing this, and when I finishes I also received an offer; I also had some interviews at the end and I received an offer to start working next year, and so I got it.” (RO.UK.AM,1, M, 25)*

A dentist from Romania (RO.UK.AC.7.M.35) used to watch the news and read the books published in the UK with regard to dentistry and was aware to go in the UK first to learn how the medical system works and worked as teaching assistant at a college from UK. So, he came in the UK firstly as a student.

Professional and university networks were an important information and ‘word of mouth’ channel that particularly led to success for high-skilled migrants from Spain. Migrants across the health, finance and IT industry consulted co-workers and former peers for information on job opportunities in the country of destination. One was even offered a job in a Swedish technology company by his former boss who had recently began working there and wants to recruit him. Specifically, as concerns respondents educated in elite business universities, they made considerable use of their university alumni network in finding a new job.

Similar cases have been reported by the Italian team. For the financial sector, the recruitment process can start during the last year at the university. In fact, some interviewees worked in the company where they did an internship when they still were university students. In particular, international banks usually offer summer training programmes or short period internships (usually of 10 weeks). In this way, not only the candidates had the opportunity to do an internship, but they acquired useful information on the functioning of finance sector abroad; they may also organise fairs in Italian Universities. Doing an internship or participation in clinic laboratories with low (or even no) remuneration can also be the first step of the recruitment process for job-seekers in the health sector.

#### Direct search/recruitment

In many cases the use of social ties is not enough for finding a job. Sometimes this only provides information on what kind of qualifications are looked for on a certain local labour market, so that migrants have to undertake direct job search upon arrival in the destination country.

As noticed by the Bulgarian project team, other channels also used by the highly qualified migrants were direct contact with employers, posting CV on the relevant websites, registering with private agencies, getting information from friends and relatives. Some experts like the one working for a

mobile operator in Spain and another one working in the IT sector in London had used opportunities created by the Bulgarian companies in which they had worked by developing different projects in foreign market. The nurses have been recruited by foreign employers coming to Bulgaria or through competitions organized by the Ministry of Health on bi-lateral agreements. All mentioned social ties which were important for them not so much in the job search than for the adaptation in the new place.

Although using professional sites was more common for the highly qualified specialists, the younger people among the Bulgarian migrants also explained using the Internet for work opportunities abroad. A recent university graduate in anthropology from a Bulgarian university looked for low qualified jobs on the Internet and found the offer for a courier job from a Bulgarian logistics company registered in London. It was before the restrictions for Bulgarians to work in the UK labour market were lifted. He took a bank loan of 3000 BGN (about 1500 EUR) to meet first demands. Of these he paid a half to the company that arranged the work and had 600 pounds left for everything in the first months. The company was official, he checked it on the internet and there were no complaints but he was afraid that they might deceive him. He is still grateful for the opportunity. A cleaner working in an office building in the City of London listed the ways he looked for jobs:

*'First through familiar Bulgarians, then through strangers, in the sense - when someone says something, and I immediately go. Then through the Internet - you find what you find... Just, you need anything to hook up and yes, to go on from there...'* (BG.UK.AC.12.M.36).

At their turn, the Romanian project team noticed that a large majority of highly educated migrants (11 out of 14) have either received direct job offers from the employers (4) or have applied to the services of recruitment agencies (5), or undertaken direct job search on the spot (2).

*"I left through a recruitment agency; everything started following an update of my CV on e-jobs.ro; and I updated it as available for working abroad and then, while thinking what step should logically be next, several agencies started calling me with offers ... for medical assistant. ... I have chosen an agency, I attended some interviews with the employer via Skype; I knew that they were placing labour force in the public health system and I was enchanted about this. Following these interviews (3 interviews) I was accepted, so to say, in all; it was mostly about a friendly discussion in which they proudly spoke about their conditions offered and the advantages one may have; they were accepting also assistants with 0 experience; there are many without previous experience .... After that I was called by the recruitment company who told me that I may choose from the three towns, the salary being the same; I have chosen a town that was better located; I undertook some search on Google about how is life there and I've chosen a small town (Warwick) in the centre of England."* (RO.UK.AC.4.M.36)

*„... In some regions are organised public tenders for emergency services ... Eventually the state is responsible for these organizations, for these tenders that are organised at five years intervals. In this region, where we are, these non-governmental organizations have been eliminated since the first of January 2013 and the local authorities have taken over the organisation of the emergency services, and I'm now working for local authorities ... I participated in a contest ... I am full-time employed by the local emergency services and, besides, I am a trainer ... not only here but also for a school from a locality close to this one."* (RO.DE.AC.6.M.33)

*„In May I had the discussion with the principal; I told him that I wanted to come for learning the (German) language and possibly to get a job. He told me that I may come to learn the language at any time, to do also some practice; at the moment I am determined I may also take the ‘probation’ and in case they have vacancies (at that time) they hire me .... They didn’t have vacancies ... afterwards, one year and one month later, a position became vacant and I came back.” (RO.DE.AC.7.M.31)*

Another actual migrant in Germany (RO.DE.AC.2.M.44) was recruited directly by a German hospital through a medical doctor who had good connection within the medical system in Cluj, Romania.

Some other actual migrants used the internet as a channel to find a job, at least in the first stage of the preparedness. For instance, an actual migrant from Spain (RO.ES.AC.3.M.31) looked for information on the website of the Spanish Health Ministry and prepared prior to departing from Romania the documents needed in Spain. They (he and his wife) went to a job fair but did not find the job desired in Spain, thus they decided to go to their relatives in Armeria (Spain) as tourists. That is, they used both the internet and relatives to find a job in Spain.

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Similar cases have been referred to by the Spanish project team. Applying directly for a job, via an employer’s website or by delivering a CV at the place of employment was reported as crucial to most informants whose first job was in lower-skill occupations, usually bars, hotels, restaurants and manual work. However, an engineer and some physicians and architects in both Berlin and London also described direct application for positions as common practice. Where lower-skill occupations are concerned, many respondents highlight the importance of ‘getting out on your bike’ or walking through the city and discovering neighbourhoods and places to work as an exciting phase of the job search *in situ*, which illustrates the limits of more passive forms of ‘online’ search methods and the importance of personal initiative.

Social media such as Facebook groups, blogs and forums dedicated to the Spanish and Italian communities in specific local contexts are often used as an information source on labour market and housing conditions by informants. They also frequently consulted job search websites, especially at the outset of the job search. Simply typing “Jobs in English in Germany” or “nursing jobs in London” as search keywords in Google were cited as initial steps for people with no previous experience in Germany or the United Kingdom.

While ‘luck’ was a recurring motif in many discussions of the circumstances that led to the first job, most of these allusions were references to the key information or help in a hiring process supplied through professional networks. However, there were several cases in which ‘luck’ played a role in the search for low and medium-skilled jobs that have nothing to do with help from professional or ‘ethnic’ networks. For example, a young man who had recently taken a one year period of unpaid leave from his job in Barcelona describes a lucky encounter in an East London café that led to his first job:

*After a day of dropping-off CVs with a friend, I still had a few left in my folder. We felt like a coffee so we went to an Italian café nearby. As we were talking at our table, I noticed a girl next to us sorting through a pile of CVs, making all these calls with the CVs in her hand...So I said to her, politely, “I’m sorry to interrupt but it seems like you’re looking for staff:’...She told me to have a seat next to her, I showed her my CV and she asked me, ‘Do you have ten minutes for a quick interview?’ (SP.UK.AC.5.M.30)*



A skilled carpenter recalls rather poetically how he 'stumbled upon' his first job in North London:

*I was walking down the High Road. I suddenly smelt wood, it smelt of sappeli, I can still remember the smell. I went [and found the workshop]. I told them, 'I'm a carpenter.' And without speaking any English, I showed them my work [portfolio]. The boss drew something and asked me to make a window lath...he asked me if I could make it out of wood, which is one of the hardest things to do...and I did it...I was barely speaking English, but carpenters understand each other. (SP.UK.AC.16.M.43)*

These examples stand out in that they illustrate that certain individual characteristics linked to the ability to seize opportunities may be just as crucial as 'being in the right place at the right time'.

The Italian team has also stated that another informal channel to apply for a job is through a direct application to a potential employer. Some interviewees directly applied to employers by physically visiting the workplace and distributing their CV. This practice is not considered a 'targeted' search, since job-seekers may enter in any place in which they consider that they have chances to be employed. The only goal might be the location of the workplace; the job-seekers shall initially aim to work at any workplace close to his/her home. Moreover it is a practice that, for many respects, is in contrast with the 'cold calling' practices (George *et al.*, 2012) that are more used by high-skilled workers, as we showed in the previous section. In fact, in the case of low-skilled workers the direct application assumes more random features. For instance, a person we interviewed started to work in an Italian restaurant in London, without having any previous experience in catering sector. In this case, it is also relevant the fact that Italian low-skilled workers may seek for co-national employers to overcome language barriers at their arrival, as the literature on migrations has well explained (Portes, 1995).

*'I found it asking around, I was lucky to hear this name; I tried it and it went well. The owner is Italian but I knew it later. I would surely learn more English words if I was with an English staff' (IT.UK.AC.9.M.26).*

The fieldwork showed that in some cases high-skilled workers mix formal and informal channels to get a job. One of the informal channels most used by the interviewees is the direct application to a potential employer. Contacting directly employers or 'cold calling' (George *et al.*, 2012) entails in sending an email to a potential employer attaching one's CV and asking information about job opportunities. In this way, job-seekers may set up an interview, create professional network and learn about future job openings. In our study this strategy was quite common among engineers and doctors. Indeed, professionals in health and engineering sectors may have a very specific specialization so it is probable that they seek for employers who are interested in such specific skills. Hence, they opt to visit employers' websites and contacting directly them by email to explore job opportunities.

*I: Which channels did you use to get a job?*

*R: Employment agencies no. Through the web, Facebook that one can exploit not only to do the cocks of others, but also for something more useful. Specifically, I visited webpages or web-communities concerning Italians in London, where you can find much useful information or where it is possible helping each other, of finding somebody who are able to give you a hand. You can find advertisement as: Look, I need a manager for my*

*restaurant in London. Are any of you interested? This kind of information is a benefit for people who decide to go abroad' (IT.UK.AC.9.M.26).*

Therefore, the use of website does not seem to depend on the educational or skill levels of the interviewees, but rather on their age. Despite this, we noticed that low-skilled workers use social media aimed at getting a job more in a passive way than the high-skilled workers.

*'I: So, did you contact employers looking for electricians?*

*R: I wrote my CV, which is still present on some websites. I just put my skills in my CV, I tried to translate them to the best I could to make it clear. It's difficult, because you should write a specific CV for each application you do, but I did not have all the time to write different versions of my CV, so I made a standard version and I put it in various websites. [...] For the moment I'm working as an electrician for a private. He contacted me through Indeed, it is a site for job-seekers where they place ads' (IT.UK.AC.9.M.26).*

*'I: What did you do to find this job?*

*R: It was very simple, the simplest thing in the world. I saw the open position on Facebook, I sent my CV to the agency that recruited these nurses. They called me after two days. They said in English: Do you want to come to Bologna and talk with us for this position? I didn't know well English language and I remember that I understood little during the phone call; however, I said Okay, I come! They arranged a meeting in Bologna and I came. I spoke not only with the agency but also with three hospital managers who interviewed me. After few minutes, I was sitting on an armchair, a girl came and said. They took you [...]'* (IT.UK.AC.5.M.38).

Moreover, for high-skilled workers, the use of social media can also assume some pro-active forms, yet references to this practice having been very limited. For instance, an Italian architect who searched a job in London created a webpage in Facebook in order to collect information, and develop a web community with Italian people who worked in the same sector and city.

*'At first, I started asking moms around here if they knew architects, but in this way I didn't collect any useful information. But I knew that there were other Italians like me - I could not be the first - since there are a lot of Italians in London: it is the fourth city outside Italy as the number of Italians present. I thus created a Facebook page, [name of page] on which I started asking for information. After that then I opened the group, then I opened the blog, and I started looking and chatting with others' (IT.UK.AC.3.F.35).*

'Word of mouth' practices widens to wider circles when relational networks are mediated by technology. In fact, also low-skilled workers use frequently social media in order to collect generic information on the city of destination, as well as to share lived experiences in web communities of Italians at London or Berlin. For instance, a cook who plans to leave Italy has already created contacts by means of a professional group on Facebook which members are mainly employed in catering sector. He got much useful information on job opportunities, and he felt prepared to find job when he arrived in Berlin:

*'Looking at the chefs' web-communities of Berlin I had an impression that the labour market in this sector was quite good. You can find a job I do not say easily, but in a short time. [...] And then I saw that the Italian Cooking Association in Berlin is very lively; someone told me; Do not do your CV in German because it is better that you do it in Italian; these are information I collected before going in Berlin' (IT.IT.PR.1.M.53).*

## Conclusions

Labour force mobility will remain a necessity as long as the geographical distributions of the labour force offer and demand persists, which most likely will be the case in the long run. Our research findings have revealed the existence of a large range of mobility channels available to prospective migrants, which, however, are not equally used and in many cases the choices are not led by the best interest of the migrant but rather by reasons of easy access and faster results. This often results in loss of human capital, mostly through underemployment but also through restricted opportunities for professional development. In the case of international mobility, the structure of opportunities defined by the rules of admission, residence and work that each Member State administers to foreign migrants living in their territory strongly influences selectivity patterns; discriminatory behaviour of employers can also work to discourage migrants, particularly highly-skilled migrants.

Since the efficient use of existing human capital and managing mobility of human capital, both from within and from outside Europe, are important drivers of growth, although migrants themselves are rarely concerned by these aspects, policy makers should keep them as paramount in any migration related policies. In doing so from a well informed and scientifically sound position, they have to rely on research findings and our GEMM Project aims at having an important contribution in this regard.

In spite of formal recruitment channels providing greater security of the employment contract and greater protection from incorrect behaviour of the employers than the informal channels, our research findings have revealed a much larger preference among job-seekers for informal channels. Indeed, this happens to a larger extent in the case of countries sending predominantly low-skilled migrants (Bulgaria and Romania) and to a lesser extent in the case of countries sending predominantly highly-skilled migrants (Italy and Spain), and data analysis in all participating countries has revealed a higher propensity of low-skilled migrants for informal channels as compared to highly-skilled migrants.

No relevant differences in terms of functions and scope of services provided have been revealed by our research data between public and private recruitment agencies, but important differences have been observed in what regards organisational structure, staffing, approach, effectiveness and efficacy. It has been noticed that private agencies have been more flexible, more pro-active and more efficient as compared to public agencies. They often cover qualifications required by the labour markets, for which little interest exists among public agencies (e.g. in the areas of health and engineering) because of their closer relationships with local, regional or national labour market policies. On the other hand, the public agencies proved to have a larger coverage, both in terms of territorial presence and in terms of international collaboration and scope of job openings, especially in the context of their involvement in the EURES network. Hence, one may say that the activities of public and private recruitment agencies are to a large extent complementary and respond to real needs of the labour markets.

In most cases the job opportunities for migrants are being identified in advance by their relatives or acquaintances settled already in the destination countries but often they did not refer to specific jobs

but to existence of a labour force demand in the destination countries, and hence specific job search are necessary upon arrival. Therefore, in many cases the use of informal channels is complemented with direct job search and even with applying to recruitment agencies. Here we have to point out that such cases have been more frequently reported among Romanian and Bulgarian migrants, while in the case of Italian and Spanish migrants the research data have shown that in most cases they have had already work arrangement before leaving their mother country.

Gender questions have not been proven much relevant and it seems that female migration patterns and getting the first job in the country of destination do not differ from features that characterize male mobility. The age of informants did not seem to play a relevant role in making the choice among available mobility channels either, except in what regards the use of websites and of social media.

The only individual factor that appeared to play a relevant role in the migrants' options for mobility channels has been the level of education and/or skills, in the sense that low-skilled migrants having participated in our research have more often opted for informal channels as compared to highly-skilled ones, which more often made use of formal channels or of a combination thereof. This is a very important observation since the low-skilled migrants proved to be also the most vulnerable prospective and actual migrants.

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