



## SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Onward migration and intra-European mobilities: A critical and theoretical overview

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to give a theoretical introduction on onward migration and provide a review of empirical research on this topic in the EU. While there is a growing body of work on the topic, this still remains an under-researched phenomenon. Existing studies have looked at different, often overlapping, dimensions of onward migration and how it may be an effect of mobility capital or influenced by variables as diverse as economic crises, gender, country of origin, age and skills. In this article, we proceed by isolating some of these variables and identify common issues across research. The first section provides some defining points and conceptualizes different types of onward movement. The second section focuses on different dimensions of onward migration and highlights some key areas examined by research such as push and pull factors, different forms of capital including the role of EU citizenship and the economic crisis of 2008.

**INTRODUCTION**

The 2008 economic crisis and the events following the Arab Spring in 2011, including the refugee flows of 2015, have had a huge impact on international migration in the EU and on integration processes (Fischer-Souan, 2019). Relations between member states and the meaning of European citizenship have been heavily affected, with implications for internal mobility and migratory movements (Basso, 2014; Bonifazi & Marini, 2014; Lafleur & Stanek, 2017). Mediterranean countries, which were particularly hit by a collapse of economic growth and very high youth unemployment, have returned to a previous status of “semi-peripheries” around core countries, such as Germany, France, the UK and Sweden and have once again become countries that export labour migrants (Toma & Castagnone, 2015; Tintori & Romei, 2017).

Alongside this reorientation of migratory dynamics from southern to northern Europe, the East-West trend has continued. Mobility from Eastern Europe has also diversified and become more complex. Furthermore, refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East are moving, or trying to move, through the so-called 'Balkan route' towards Western European countries; there is a progressive intensification of depopulation in Eastern European and Balkan countries due to the younger sections of populations emigrating to the EU.

This general framework of the reconfiguration of migratory scenarios is generating intense scientific debate and interesting intertwined lines of research. In fact, during the last decade, a substantial literature has analysed intra-EU labour migrations, articulated along different lines. These include the transformations connected to migration from Eastern Europe to the West, following the enlargement of the EU towards the East (Anghel, 2008); studies focusing on circular migration – also connected to the recent phenomenon of posted workers and transnational recruitment agencies (Pijpers, 2010; Lillie, 2012; Çaro *et al.*, 2015; Cillo, 2017; Perocco, 2018; Kovacheva *et al.*, 2019); research aimed at analysing the transformations of European citizenship in a neo-liberal integration perspective (Favell, 2014; Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2009; for a critique see Castles & Ozkul, 2014; Wickramasekara, 2011)<sup>1</sup>; work that investigates new migrations from Mediterranean Europe to the central-northern countries of the EU (Lafleur & Stanek, 2017); and those granted refuge in a country and then moving within Europe after acquiring national and therefore European citizenship (Kelly, 2013; Ahrens *et al.*, 2016).

Within this last perspective, a specific line of studies is emerging aimed at examining the relatively recent phenomenon of so-called “*onward migration*,” that is the process whereby people leave their country of origin, settle in a second country for a period of time and then migrate on to a third country (Rezaei & Goli, 2011; van Liempt, 2011; Stewart, 2012; Toma & Castagnone, 2015; Ahrens *et al.*, 2016; Danaj & Çaro, 2016; Mas Giral, 2017; Della Puppa & King, 2018; Ramos, 2018).

This paper aims to provide a review of empirical research on onward migration in the EU. While there is a growing body of work on the topic, this still remains an under-researched phenomenon. Existing studies have looked at different, often overlapping, dimensions of onward migration and how it may be an effect of mobility capital or influenced by variables as diverse as economic crises, gender, country of origin, age and skills. By isolating some of these variables and identifying common issues across research, we hope also to identify the gaps and give our contribution to future research. The first section provides a definition of onward migration and conceptualizes different types of movement. Although they may refer to different forms of mobility, they all understand migration as a more complex phenomenon than a bipolar trajectory from a place of origin to a place of destination. The second section examines much of the state of the art on onward migration. As we show research has focused on socio-economic factors such as social immobility and the search for better opportunities, the role played by different forms of capital, including “migration capital” of which the EU citizenship is one of them, and on the economic crisis of 2008 and its lasting effects over migrant lives and their decision to move onward. In the concluding section, we highlight some missing areas and how Brexit may impact on onward migration in the EU.

## DEFINING AND CONCEPTUALIZING ONWARD MIGRATION

“Onward migration” can be understood as a form of reactivation of migration and mobility of third-country nationals (TCNs) who use their new citizenship acquired in an EU country, that is, their increased ‘motility’ (Kaufman *et al.*, 2004; Paul, 2015; Moret, 2018), to move to another EU country (Toma & Castagnone, 2015; Danaj & Çaro, 2016; Della Puppa, 2018; Della Puppa & King, 2018; Ramos, 2018). These new migratory movements interweave internal mobility and international migration (King & Skeldon, 2010; Riccio, 2016) and continue the process of geographical settlement and social stabilization in Europe of migrants from the global south. They are frequently directed towards countries that were former colonial powers in their home countries and which still attract them on the basis of linguistic, cultural, family and social links (van Liempt, 2011; Ahrens *et al.*, 2016).

In this context, acquired European citizenship is configured, for some, as the end goal of a path of rootedness and stabilization in the country of acquisition (Ambrosini, 2016; Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016), while, for others, it is the key to access renewed mobility and the possibility of undertaking further migration (Danaj & Çaro, 2016; Della Puppa & King, 2018; de Hoon, 2019; King & Karamoschou, 2019).

The concept of onward migration, thus, enriches the emerging debate critical of the conceptualization of international migration as a simple bipolar event of “destination-origin” (Stewart, 2012; Yan *et al.*, 2014; Ciobanu, 2015). In fact, there are different perspectives in the literature and, consequently, definitions and terms that describe the multiple mobilities within the same migration trajectory. The concept of “transit migration” was adopted to analyse the transit of asylum seekers and irregular migrants directed towards a destination other than that in which they find themselves (Collyer & de Haas, 2010; Düvell, 2012). The expression “secondary migration” has been used to reflect on the trajectories of citizens from countries in the “global south” who have stayed regularly and for prolonged periods, but temporarily, in national contexts with advanced economies before reaching the final destination (for Europe see Bang Nielsen, 2004; for North America refer to Takenaka, 2007). This experience of mobility is described through the construct of “stepwise international migration,” as a deliberate and often complex strategy adopted by migrants to accumulate the economic, social and relational resources necessary to reach the ultimate goal of migration, the “dream destinations” usually in Europe and/or North America (King & Newbold, 2007; Paul, 2015; Tsujimoto, 2016). The term “multiple migrations” explains a migrant’s journey from the country of origin to a primary destination, intersecting both spatialities and temporalities of migration (Salamonska, 2017). After a period of residence in the initial destination, migrants move onto a second country to fulfil their migration goals. In the same way, Migration may happen in several locations during their lives (Ciobanu, 2015). It has been argued that in these cases of “multiple migration mobilities,” migrants have a clear plan for intermediate and final countries of settlement (Ahrens *et al.*, 2016; Mas Giral, 2017). Ossman (2004) uses the term “serial migration” to refer to the “migration career” of subjects who have lived for a significant period of time in at least three national contexts, reaching a good level of social inclusion, and who have activated this international mobility to pursue improved educational and professional opportunities or to follow family members. The same term is also by Parreñas *et al.* (2019), who, however, relates it to migrant domestic workers who are forced to move due to temporary contracts or deportations. “Twice-migration” was used by Bhachu (1985) – then adopted in more recent years by other authors (Della Puppa & King, 2018) – in her study on the migration of Sikh populations who, after leaving Punjab in the early twentieth century for Kenya and Uganda, where they found employment in the construction of the national railways, moved to the UK with the beginning of “Africanisation” in the years immediately following the independence of former colonies on the continent. In other words, it was a mobility directly linked to the consequences of British colonialism, and internal to nations that belonged to the Commonwealth.

The term “onward migration” (Nekby, 2006; Mas Giral, 2017; Ramos, 2018) is part of the framework for reflections on intra-European mobility, in which migrants originating from a third country and “naturalised” or holding an European long-term residence permit are the protagonists (Tuckett, 2016; Sarpong *et al.*, 2018). Unlike the protagonists of mobility presented above, the migrants involved in onward migration would not have planned this migration reactivation at the beginning of their migration experience (Toma & Castagnone, 2015; Mas Giral, 2017; King & Karamoschou, 2019). Instead, they concretised this decision following changes in the socio-economic context of residence, a changed horizon of possibilities, or an expansion of their migration aspirations (Kelly, 2013; Della Puppa & King, 2018). According to what Nekby analyses as part of migrants’ “optimal life-cycle location plan” (2006:199), this is either pre-planned or generated from experiences in several societies of destinations, or both. In fact, some research has focused on the role played by aspirations in the decision to migrate again. Within this framework, intention is considered the second step, in so far as it transforms the aspiration to migrate again into actual onward movement. Conversely, when intention lacks aspiration to move again, this does not turn into a new migration (Paul, 2015; Carling & Schewel, 2018).

A phenomenon with many similar aspects, but not fully comparable to that of onward migrations, consists of workers who – within the EU, but increasingly also from third countries – are posted to a member country

(Pijpers, 2010; Lillie, 2012; Çaro *et al.*, 2015; Cillo, 2017; Perocco, 2018; Kovacheva *et al.*, 2019). They do so for short periods as part of labour movements in diverse sectors and belong primarily to low-skilled sections of the labour market, although with an increasing number of highly skilled. These two forms of intra-European mobility appear to overlap and intersect with one another, although one is based on circular and short-term migration, while the other seems to have broader time and stabilization horizons. In other words, there are workers who previously immigrated from a third country (usually in North Africa or non-EU Eastern Europe) to an EU country (usually Mediterranean or Eastern Europe) and were subsequently posted to another EU member country (usually in Central Europe). That is, we see the temporary migration within the EU of migrant workers already present in the EU (Perocco, 2018, 2019) as a consequence of the furthering of neo-liberal policies and the refining of strategies for extracting value from the work forces of recruitment agencies and transnational companies – especially in the construction sector, but increasingly in the tourism sector, the hotel industry, care and agriculture. In this regard, there is comprehensive research clarifying if some of these migrant workers are able to convert their posted status into a more permanent one.

## DIMENSIONS OF ONWARD MIGRATION

Although still an under-investigated phenomenon, there is an expanding literature on onward migration. With regard to the European context, this focuses on its varied dimensions and motivations. However, the prevailing approach is through national or ethnic case studies. Most of the studies investigate how individual nationalities and ethnicities, either as refugee groups (notably Somalis and Iranians – see Bang Nielsen, 2004; van Liempt, 2011; Kelly, 2013; Ahrens *et al.*, 2016) or as so-called “economic migrants” from countries such as Nigeria (Ahrens, 2013), Senegal (Toma & Castagnone, 2015), Bangladesh (Della Puppa & King, 2018) and Latin America (Mas Giralt, 2017; Ramos, 2018; McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019). These national case studies are then investigated in different, often intersecting, dimensions. Therefore, rather than focusing on different clusters or groups of studies, or grouping these studies according to whether they investigate asylum seekers or economic migrants, in the following section we will look at some of the broader socio-economic dimensions within a comparative perspective.

### Escaping social immobility and searching for better opportunities

The socio-economic factors represent an initial broad dimension raised by several studies on onward migration. These have revealed that onward migration is driven by a variety of factors, such as the need to overcome barriers to employment and career progression and to (re)activate an upward social mobility; the search for educational opportunities for themselves and/or for younger generations and children; racism, cultural and religious discrimination and Islamophobia in the ‘first’ hosting countries, and the ways these may impact on socio-economic opportunities (Ahrens *et al.*, 2016; Della Puppa & King, 2018); diaspora-related motives – joining relatives, friends and larger co-ethnic communities; social, political and cultural reasons, including the wish to be part of a more cosmopolitan, multicultural society. For example, Ahrens *et al.* (2016) and Van Liempt (2011) look at onward migration in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden that is not a result of economic crisis, and investigate how Somali, Iranian and Nigerian refugees aim to move on from societies to which they do not feel they belong and/or which lack job and career opportunities. Onward migration becomes an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with persistent and increasing racism against Migrants and to accomplish the integration process that migrants regard as interrupted in the first country of immigration. In a similar vein, in a qualitative study on Bangladeshi ‘economic’ migrants in Italy who are onward-migrating to London, Della Puppa and King (2018) have recently found that most Bangladeshis move to London to escape factory work in Italy, to invest in the English-language education of their children and to join the largest Bangladeshi community outside of their country of origin. Della Puppa (2018) also

explored how, the onward migration could be a strategy to cope with the sudden unemployment situation that arose with the economic crisis for many Bangladeshis and Moroccans in Italy.

This leads us to an intertwining dimension. While migrants move onward to escape social immobility and discrimination they experience both in the labour market and more generally in the first host country, they are also drawn by the opportunities offered in other countries. Some tend to move onward to North America and Australia (Valentine *et al.*, 2009; Haandrikman & Hassanen, 2014), but the UK seems to be the most popular destination of these intra-EU mobilities (Ahrens *et al.*, 2014). Some move to escape unemployment, as has been the case of Latin Americans in Spain (McCarthy, 2019) or Bangladeshis and Moroccans in Italy (Della Puppa, 2018). Those who migrate to the UK may find skills and learning opportunities for themselves and their children (Ramos, 2018), the opportunity of preserving their family unity (Della Puppa, 2018) – even if often losing their social status and credentials as well as their working position (Della Puppa & King, 2018), especially if they have a poor command of the language (Ramos, 2018); they expect to feel more comfortable culturally and economically (Ahrens *et al.*, 2016), and reactivate the mobility and integration process (Van Liempt, 2011).

However, within this framework, the “Brexit” referendum in 2016 has been reshaping migration trajectories and the mobility practices of onward migrants and European citizens already resident in the UK

– along with their values and their attitudes to the possession of European citizenship and the prospect of acquiring British citizenship (Botterill *et al.*, 2019; Danaj & Çaro, 2016; de Hoon, 2019; Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016; Lulle *et al.*, 2019; McCarthy, 2019). Sredanovic and Della Puppa (2020), for example, by comparing research conducted in the UK, Italy and Belgium with both third-country nationals and EU citizens, explore how Brexit impacts on the value of both national and EU citizenship, and how it introduces new practices of mobility and reshapes social, migration and biographic trajectories, and increasing naturalizations. On the one hand, EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the rest of the EU feel for the first time the threat of losing their rights of free movement and plan to naturalize to counter the loss of residence and socio-economic rights (e.g. welfare and benefits). On the other hand, Brexit frustrates the trajectories of many migrants who moved or were planning to move to the UK after obtaining citizenship of another EU member state and have to reconfigure their tactics in order not to be excluded a second time from the UK territory and its social rights. Conversely, the Greek-Albanians protagonists of the study by King and Karamoschou (2019), faced with the possibility of a “hard Brexit,” seem willing to return to Greece, expressing a widespread feeling of nostalgia for their lives there and considering that the Greek economy is now less crisis-ridden than in the past, and also because their European citizenship still gives them free movement within the EU. We may also see a return among those who, although working, have experienced downward labour market mobility as with older Latin Americans in London going back to Spain where they may still have property and family (Ramos, 2018).

Therefore, some ‘push’ factors may be traced to explain onward migration – such as discrimination, unemployment or underemployment, changes in personal and family circumstances – as well as ‘pull’ factors from the new country of destination, such as the hope of higher incomes, better career prospects, more conducive social environment towards migrants, better education systems for children, more opportunities of upward social mobility, or a desire to join a larger community of diasporic co-nationals (Ibidem).

## Onward mobility and different forms of capital

Another dimension relates to the different forms of capital possessed by migrants (economic, cultural and social, to use the Bourdieusian categories) that participate in shaping their intra-European mobility trajectories and, therefore, their onward migration as well as their “social integration” strategies (Popivanov & Kovacheva, 2019), as with the “first migration experience.” Regarding social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990), ties of family and friends, as well as fellow nationals who made a similar move to the “new” destination country, are an important

support to the new migratory project. These networks become “social guides” that steer onward migrants to the “new” social context, favouring their access to local and national welfare, public benefits, labour and housing markets and community organizations (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015; Della Puppa & King, 2018; Coletto & Fullin, 2019; Dimitriadis *et al.*, 2019).

Making a comparison between Moroccan migrants and Bangladeshi migrants in Italy – both potential onward migrants in other EU countries – Della Puppa (2018) shows how, on the one hand, “migration seniority” in the “first destination country” can be a resource (in terms of family and friend ties, possibility of buying a house, reconstruction of an extended family circle, etc.), on the other hand, it can constitute a bond that makes new mobility more difficult, as it is more difficult to leave the life context where more social relationships have been developed over the years and the family life path has been consolidated and stabilized, engaging the different members of the family. In particular, as already mentioned, if the presence of children and the investment in their future can be a reason for the onward migration, when the children are beyond the school age and are deeply inserted in the social context of residence (through school, social and friendship networks, their own emotional and family relationships, etc.), onward migration seems to be rarer or to be carried out by only one family member (usually the first-migrant male breadwinner) and not by the whole reunited family. As Ramos (2018:1853-1854) highlights in her work on Latin Americans from Spain to London:

Mature onward migrants leave more reluctantly. Understanding what migration entails and knowing that beginnings are difficult, they highlight that having to move, readapt and learn a new language at a later age is much more challenging, especially after having achieved upward mobility in their first move. [...]. Mid-life onward migrants, however, are more optimistic. Some would be happy staying in London, as they find opportunities for themselves and their children, and see the new move as part of their migratory process in search of advancement.

Therefore, the role of children and “migration seniority” in the onward migration projects are closely connected to that of the life course (Ramos, 2018) and migration career (Martiniello & Rea, 2014). That is, new mobility is part of the migration process and biography of migrants and it does not mean a disconnection from their first destination country, rather an adaptation to circumstances shaped by life-course junctures (Ramos, 2018).

With respect to cultural capital, in some cases, the tools and preparation strategies of highly skilled workers seem to differ markedly from those possessing medium and low skills. The “preparation phase” for onward movement may change in relation to cultural capital (Coletto & Fullin, 2019; Dimitriadis *et al.*, 2019). While medium and low-skilled (onward) migrants rely heavily on their social networks in order to gather information about the destination, the highly skilled have a perception of “smooth” mobility across the EU and do not appear to worry overly about possible obstacles in their migration paths. Research shows that highly skilled migrants use their cultural capital, ‘weak ties’, and the internet in a more extensive and ‘targeted’ way (Coletto & Fullin, 2019). There seems to be an inverse relationship regarding the possession of these forms of capital: those with low cultural capital rely more on the resources provided by their social capital, while those with high educational and professional skills rely more on cultural capital and less on their networks.

Till now, most of the contributions on onward migration are based on qualitative research, so there is still no data on the breakdown of the educational qualifications and cultural capital of onward migrants, but it could be assumed that they are the most educated and those with more cultural resources – as well as social and “legal” ones – to undertake the new migration.

Research also shows that even when well-educated and skilled migrants (Nekby, 2006; Takenaka, 2007) have fewer job opportunities and lower level of income, they nonetheless tend to be more mobile (Kelly, 2013; Haandrikman & Hassanen, 2014; Bartolini *et al.*, 2017; Ortensi & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2018). However, in this regard, women possessing the same qualifications, education and skills, are not usually engaged in multiple migrations except when unemployed (Ciobanu, 2015; Ortensi & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2018).

## Onward migration and migration capital

Other forms of capital that may affect migrants' disposition to move have been identified. For example, so-called "migration capital," already mentioned as "motility" (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2004) is directly linked to the framework of the "migration career" proposed by Martiniello and Rea (2014) and the concept of "migration knowledge" used by Ramos (2018) "that describes the potential and actual capacity of goods, information or people to be mobile both geographically and socially" (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2004:1). While we have seen how research considers social and cultural capital and how these factors affect onward migration, migrant capital may increase through the acquisition of EU citizenship, regardless of the possession of other forms of capital (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016; de Hoon *et al.*, 2019; Sredanovic & Della Puppa, 2020). Taking into consideration the concept of migrant capital, Paul (2015) describes how low-status migrant domestic workers can have a high level of international mobility through a strategic use of accumulated migrant capital and a form of constrained mobility known as onward labour migration. Due to an initial shortage of migrant capital, these aspiring migrants are unable to gain immediate and direct access to their preferred destination country, so may opt to travel to less-preferred but easier-to-enter destinations in the immediate term (McGarrigle & Ascensão, 2018). Once overseas, however, they may be in a position to acquire and accumulate new, additional, migrant capital that can underwrite further migrations to preferred countries.

A key asset in migrant capital is EU citizenship, as it makes it possible for EU citizens to move freely across its member states and provides migrants with further resources in addition to social and cultural capital. With the formal advent of EU citizenship and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, freedom of movement, settlement and employment across Europe became rights that could be fully enjoyed by most nationals from EU- and non-EU Schengen states, regardless of their country of birth. Within this framework, studies on onward migration examine EU citizenship as an opportunity for naturalized migrants to move to a different EU member state and consider its instrumental use, particularly in the post-2008 decade characterized by the economic crisis, the tightening of EU borders and general uncertainty.

The instrumental use of citizenship was already highlighted before the crisis. In a survey of 8,000 third-country nationals residing in Italy, Codini and D'Odorico (2007) found that one of the main reasons for wanting to obtain Italian citizenship was the opportunity it provides for moves to other countries, rather than a sense of belonging and/or acquiring political rights. The idea that naturalization is "opportunistic" is supported by several qualitative studies on citizenship and mobility. Examining Polish graduate migrants in the UK, Szweczyk (2016) argues that they regard British citizenship as a stepping stone to further mobility, rather than as an expression of attachment and belonging to the UK. In a kind of mobility characterized by different steps, EU citizenship acts, literally and metaphorically, as a passport to mobility, not just in Europe but beyond it. Similarly, John Graeber (2016) examined EU citizenship from an instrumental perspective as an opportunity against adversity. The capital provided by EU citizenship is a more relevant incentive than a country's GDP in predicting citizenship acquisition. Alarian (2017) argues that its acquisition has nothing to do with the crisis but rather coincides with increased migration. Through model comparisons and dyadic models, she shows that the relationship between the Euro crisis and citizenship behaviour is nuanced: "The mechanism for intra-European citizenship acquisitions as a result may not be the crisis itself but the ways in which these migrants view one's security of residence, financially and legally, in the receiving state" (2017:2,158). She argues, pragmatically, that a country's residents need some time before they are aware of state GDP and unemployment. This means that economic indicators including GDP and unemployment rates, which are usually made public during the following year's reporting, cannot affect naturalization. Rather, "fears over closing borders and new citizenship restrictions may act as a catalyst propelling intra-EU citizenship applications. The refugee crisis, Brexit, and other threatened 'exits' thus may be more powerful than the Euro crisis in changing citizenship behaviour" (*ibid.*: 2,164). Similarly, in a qualitative study involving mostly women, 21 interviews out of 30, Ramos (2018) found that citizenship is seen as an opportunity to reduce the gap between Western country and non-Western country citizens while offering personal security and symbolic value.



Albanians who gained Greek citizenship used it not only to move to another EU country but also to hide their first citizenship and as a tool to appear more European (King & Karamoschou, 2019).

However, referring to the concept of “flexible citizenship” (Ong, 1993), Della Puppa and Sredanovic (2016) return to the concept of migrant capital and motility with the aim of going beyond the interpretation of naturalization as either settlement or instrumental access to a better passport, looking at citizenship as a form of resistance. Through the use of the paradigm of mobility, they make a link between citizenship and resistance, arguing that the former may be turned into a resource to move forward and therefore to resist precarity and uncertainty. Orientations on citizenship, therefore, may vary and can be explained in relation to the different configurations of mobility and motility (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016:3).

To conclude, while EU citizenship provides the legal framework for TCNs to move, settle and work in member states, it also increases migrants’ mobility capital. By increasing migrant capital, citizenship becomes a safety net and a form of protection against the progressive narrowing of migrant social rights.

## Onward migration and the economic crisis

Another dimension investigated by past research relates onward migration to some recent crises, most notably the financial and economic crisis that has affected different parts of the EU in various ways. The reactivation of the migratory project is therefore a form of adaptation to changing circumstances in the economic context. As Ramos (2018:1844) puts it, the crisis represents the “objective’ dimension of opportunity structures and constraints” and also allow for “an analysis of the ‘subjective’ dimension of how migrants’ mobilization of resources for a new move is shaped by life-course junctures.”

The global economic crisis started in 2008 and had severe effects on employment and the standard of living in Europe for several years. In Mediterranean countries, such as Italy, Spain and Greece the economic downturn has hit harder those sectors in which migrants had a significant presence, such as manufacturing and construction, leading to an increase in unemployment and the number of working poor. In this context of mass unemployment and economic uncertainty, instead of returning to their home countries, migrants activate their social and family networks and use their new citizenship as a tool for responding to the economic turmoil (Ahrens, 2013; Tsujimoto, 2016; Mas Giral, 2017; Pereira *et al.*, 2018). However, the response to economic crisis through onward migration differs according to a number of variables, including legal status, occupation, gender and education. In a quantitative study on TCNs and their migration project in Italy at times of crisis, Ortensi and Barbiano di Belgiojoso (2018) identify three main patterns based on gender, cultural capital and status. First, female and male migrants with lower education and fewer skills were more likely to conclude their migration project and possibly return to their home country. Second, highly educated male migrants tended to leave Italy and move to another EU country, following the same pattern as educated young Italian citizens who left the country in their hundreds of thousands. Such intentions were not expressed by women who have the same educational level or legal status as some female niches, such as care work, were less affected by the crisis. Other research has highlighted this difference between genders whereas men are more likely than women to move between sectors, countries and to return to their country of origin because women and children adapt more easily to the changing requirements of caring labour and because women’s responsibility for care of children may make it more difficult for them to move (Herrera, 2012). Third, undocumented migrants kept open the options of either emigrating to a third country or returning home. In this case, there was no difference between genders, while gender differences emerge when men possess more cultural capital and skills and use this to respond to the economic crisis (Herrera, 2012; Paul, 2015).

Some studies focus on how specific national groups of TCNs adapt differently to the economic crisis. While some groups, for example Latin Americans and Nigerians, face a binary choice to either return to their country of origin or move to another EU country (Herrera, 2012; Ahrens, 2013; Ramos, 2018), for Bangladeshis and Moroccans the choice to go to either UK or France is easier, as these countries already host sizeable and



long-established Bangladeshi and Moroccan communities. Moreover, while for Latin Americans onward migration becomes a strategy of adaptation in the face of unemployment or under employment and of an optimization of migrant skills (Ramos, 2018), for Bangladeshis the response to crisis intersects with other motivations, including fear of having their education and that of their children disregarded, a better welfare state, and a stronger safety net made of family and community ties (Della Puppa, 2018; Della Puppa and Sredanovic, 2016). The need to escape the consequences of Greece's economic recession was also identified by King and Karamoschou (2019) in their study of the onward migration of Albanians to the UK. While the economic crisis called into question these migrants' permanence in Greece, acquisition of EU citizenship gave them the opportunity to move freely within the EU instead of returning to Albania, where they would have faced a similar situation of economic hardship. The UK was seen as the right destination for the continuation of their migratory project. As the impact of the crisis was greatly gendered, with male dominated sectors more affected than female ones, so its impact on the decision to move onward. While male participants with no care responsibility see this as an opportunity for their education and careers, female participants find better employment opportunities and a good education for their children (King & Karamoschou, 2019:160).

Although the decision to move onward is an unwanted but necessary answer (Della Puppa and Sredanovic, 2016), expectations are generally high, particularly when compared to working experience in the country of departure. For onward migrants, the prospect of spending the rest of their lives in one of the countries particularly hit by the crisis would involve a dramatic drop in employment and economic opportunities, not only for themselves but also for their children, at a situation that has worsened with the economic crisis (Della Puppa & Morad, 2019; King & Karamoschou, 2019).

However, the outcome is often disappointing and opportunities fewer than expected. Onward migrants are employed in the informal economy and unskilled low-paid occupations, where self-exploitation and longer hours are also widespread (Della Puppa & King, 2018), thus experiencing a losing of status. This may be exacerbated by a very poor knowledge of the language which pushes them into the very lowest employment (Ramos, 2018). If in the first country of destination they had a stable working identity, associative recognition and a role in the community of their country of origin, now they are engaged in the informal economy or in low-qualified jobs and/or trapped as benefit users, living in a social fabric in which they do not yet have a well-known public identity. They have to start from scratch again and hostility often comes from fellow citizens who migrated earlier (Ramos, 2018). As has been described: "For the first-generation onward migrants, the idea that a move to London would improve their labour-market position and boost their income proved often to be a myth" (Della Puppa & King, 2018:10). In contrast with the results of such research, it is interesting to note that when the economic crisis does not play a role in the decision to move onward, as in the case of Dutch-Somalis, Swedish-Iranians and German-Nigerians, and the country of departure is not a Mediterranean country, the chances in terms of career achievements, integration and therefore socio-economic mobility can also improve (Ahrens *et al.*, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Onward migration has become prominent in the past decade among both migrant and refugee groups and, as we have examined in the article, it extends across a wide variety of groups, reasons for pursuing a migrant project and different outcomes at onward destinations which should be taken into account in a comparative analysis. We have also highlighted the significance of gender, education and age in the decision to move to a new environment and the potential success of it, and the role played by the economic crisis, on the one hand, and European citizenship on the other. While the latter increases the migration capital of individuals, the former has been an important motivating factor for many migrant workers and their families.

However, the situation is likely to change for a variety of reasons. First, as the literature on onward migration has highlighted, many of the flows have been directed towards the UK. However, with the completion of the

Brexit process at the beginning of 2021, obtaining citizenship in another EU country will not suffice and this will have an impact on onward projects. According to current government plan to introduce a new “points-based immigration system,” EU migrants will be treated the same as those from the rest of the world. This means that only those applying for a job needing medium (A level equivalent) to tertiary level of education, language proficiency (B1) and having a job offer, will be able to migrate to the UK. It means that labour migration will become much more difficult for EU citizens. Second, the dire situation of Southern European economies following the 2008 crisis has generally improved and in some instances this has probably led to some of those whose onward migration project has not been successful returning to their original European destination, especially if they have left family and property behind. Finally, the economic collapse in all countries resulting from COVID-19 and the impact on mobility of the virus is likely also to put a brake on onward migration. At the moment, there is no statistical evidence but this will be a very likely phenomenon in the future and one will deserve some in-depth investigation.

## Peer Review

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.12815>.

## ENDNOTE

1. We see how EU citizenship may be a key asset in migrant capital for TCNs in section 3.3. It suffices to say, here, that particularly relevant is the 2003 Long Term Residence Directive, extended to refugees in 2011, concerning the mobility rights, free movement, and the conditions to reside in another Member State by TCNs who are long-term residents. There is some discretion open to members states such that access to the labour market and social security and social services may be restricted, making movement by TCNs difficult.

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