Choosing to migrate illegally: Evidence from return migrants

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Abstract

We assess who among migrants is likely to choose unauthorized migration. While the literature has addressed reasons for unauthorized migration, we are the first to model individual choice of actual unauthorized migration. By using data from Albanian return migrants, we can ascertain that we capture actual migration – behaviour – rather than intentions to migrate, and respondents have no incentives to hide unauthorized migration as there are no consequences at this stage. At the individual level, unauthorized migration in a context of circular migration is linked to being young and male – interpreted as risk-taking individuals – and being free of social responsibilities like having a partner or children. Social responsibilities appear to moderate the impact of risk-taking on choosing unauthorized migration.

CHOOSING UNAUTHORIZED MIGRATION: EVIDENCE FROM RETURN MIGRANTS

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Keywords: unauthorized migration, irregular migration, undocumented migration, circular migration, risk taking, Albania

INTRODUCTION

Migration has become a major issue for many countries in the world, affecting both countries of origin and destination in profound ways. The crossing of borders and residence in the destination country may be formally registered and be in accordance with current rules and regulations like having a valid work permit. By contrast, some individuals migrate outside these formal channels – something often referred to as unauthorized or undocumented migration to highlight the lack of adequate documents (Heckmann 2004; Hanson 2007). Several studies have examined why unauthorized migration can and does occur (e.g. Vickstrom 2014; Borodak and Tichit 2014; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). They highlight labour demand in the country of destination,

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migrant networks, and that border enforcement has little impact on the overall flow of migration. Many studies have examined the nature of unauthorized migration – most frequently from the perspective of destination countries (e.g. Bloch 2010; Triandafyllidou 2012). These studies highlight the precarious situation of unauthorized migrants and that they are at the same time 'welcomed' for their economic contributions, especially in the informal economy. Yet little is known about who among migrants chooses unauthorized entry rather than a channel sanctioned by the country of destination. We use data on Albanian return migrants to identify individual characteristics associated with actual unauthorized migration in a context characterized by circular migration.

For a full understanding of migratory patterns it is essential to understand motivations for and processes of migration. This is particularly the case for sending countries like Albania where internal and international migration have a profound impact on for instance marriage behaviour, fertility, and the ageing of society (Lerch 2014; Vullnetari 2015; Agorastakis and Sidiropoulos 2007). To this end, recent theoretical developments on the reasons to migrate have refined the commonly used notions of push and pull effects. A distinction between aspirations to emigrate, capabilities to move, and opportunities to migrate is drawn (de Haas 2010). We extend on this work by arguing that individual characteristics shape whether certain opportunities are taken up – in this case unauthorized migration. The focus of this article is on the *mode* of border crossing, not the decision to migrate in the first place. Our central argument is that in the context of circular migration unauthorized migration is linked to individuals being risk-taking: Unauthorized migration is not (only) a story of desperation and push effects, but dependent on individual risk assessments which in turn are contingent on age, sex, and social responsibilities in the country of origin – like childcare or dependants.

DECISIONS TO MIGRATE AND THE DECISION OF UNAUTHORIZED MIGRATION

Traditionally the individual decision to emigrate has often been approached with so-called push and pull effects, an evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of the country of origin and the country of destination (Lee 1966). Push effects are individual and contextual situations that push people to seek 'greener pastures' elsewhere, including poverty, the lack of economic opportunities, natural disasters, climate change, and armed conflict. By contrast, pull effects are perceptions of improved opportunities in a different place, like increased earnings or political stability.

Recent developments in theory have refined these notions of push and pull effects and greatly de-emphasized them. A distinction can be drawn between aspirations to emigrate, capabilities to move, and opportunities to migrate (de Haas 2010; Flahaux and de Haas 2016). A person without aspirations to emigrate is unlikely to do so, but the concept of aspirations can be understood in broad terms so that classic push effects like famines can be considered as causing aspirations to migrate. A key contribution of these recent developments is to put the capability to move at the centre of the theory – rather than acknowledging it in passing –, highlighting that an aspiration to emigrate on its own will not result in migration. This can explain why the poorest individuals of a community often do not migrate despite the highest pressure to do so: They are selected out of migration because they cannot afford it, or cannot afford to take the risk of failure inherent in every migration (Chiswick 1999). When they are able to migrate, the poorest tend to migrate under conditions that impede them from improving their well-being and indeed may make them economically worse off (Mosse, Gupta, and Rees 2002; Sloan and Morrison 2016), but overall risks at the household level may still be reduced in the long-term (Stark and Bloom 1985; Massey and Espinosa 1997). Individuals with better education, skills and labour market experience, by contrast, are expected to be more

likely to migrate because of their ability to capture the rewards of migration (de Haas 2010).

A focus on the capability to move in itself, however, is unable to explain the occurrence of unauthorized migration. Massey and Espinosa (1997) emphasize the lack of a sufficient number of work visas as a prerequisite for unauthorized migration. The economic situation in both the country of origin and destination plays a role: Economists highlight asymmetries between demand for specific labour and supply of authorized migrants with matching qualifications (Borjas 1987). In most Western countries, immigration policies favour highly-skilled workers and family reunion, implying that low-skilled labour migration is pushed towards unauthorized migration channels (Hanson 2007). A sizeable informal economy, like it can be found in South-Eastern Europe, means many opportunities for unauthorized migrants to find work, but it is important to note that unauthorized migrants also find work in the formal economy, and authorized migrants also work in the informal economy (Maroukis, Iglicka, and Gmaj 2011). Implicit in these considerations is the view that the supply of unauthorized migrants encourages certain economic arrangements: It is *because* of the presence of unauthorized immigrants that employers see opportunities to employ them. In the absence of unauthorized immigrants different arrangements would be used – probably with an unfavourable economic outcome for the employer.

At the same time, migrant networks play an important role in maintaining flows of unauthorized migration in spite of restrictive border controls (Massey and Riosmena 2010; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016; but see Krissman 2005 on the limits of what migrant networks can explain). While migrant networks can facilitate the flow of knowledge how to cross borders illegally and obtain work in the informal economy, they do not explain why some individuals choose a formal and others an informal channel of migration. Existing research focuses on migration from Mexico to the United States, where in the past almost all of the migrants crossed the border without documents or using a tourist visa to work (Massey and Espinosa 1997). Empirically, this means that existing research is in a poor position to distinguish between the decision to emigrate and the decision to do so as an unauthorized migrant. Despite these limitations, some contributions like Massey and Espinosa examine the two modes in separate models – contrasting both with not migrating at all –, but they do not examine individual-level variables behind the differences.

Existing research on the first unauthorized trip Mexicans take to the United States highlights migrant networks: having a family member who migrated to the United States increases the odds of Mexicans choosing unauthorized migration compared to not migrating at all (Massey and Riosmena 2010), while individuals who own land or a business in Mexico are less likely to leave, as are those in skilled occupations (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). The costs of migration and border enforcement do not seem to affect unauthorized migration (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey and Riosmena 2010; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016).

As far as we could determine, there is only one study modelling the mode of migration. Ryo (2013) focuses on the intent of unauthorized migration and examines economic variables (interpreted as the cost-benefit analysis highlighted in neoclassical economic theory) as well as normative variables around the legitimacy of (immigration) laws. She highlights perceptions of the danger of border crossing as an economic consideration. Ryo's research highlights that the intent to cross borders illegally is higher for younger individuals and those who are not head of households. Rather than treating these as control variables, we argue that these factors are central for understanding why individuals choose unauthorized migration: They reflect the extent to which individuals are risk-taking. After all, the variables examined by Ryo capture perceptions *before* migrants depart, and not necessarily the objective economic costs.

MIGRATION IN ALBANIA

To examine the choice of unauthorized migration, we study the situation in Albania, a small country in South-Eastern Europe. Between 1946 and 1992 Albania was ruled by a communist regime under the leadership of Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour. During the communist era, the country experienced isolation from much of the world, including most other communist countries. The communist regime heavily restricted the internal and external mobility of Albanians. Very few (privileged) Albanians were allowed to travel yet alone live abroad. The transition to a market economy after the end of the communist regime has brought economic growth – recently despite the economic crisis in Europe –, but the GDP per capita of Albania remains around a third of the European average. Levels of unemployment are lower than in many countries in the region, but youth unemployment is an important problem. Despite a shift towards services, agriculture remains one of the most important sectors in the country (World Bank 2015).

After the end of communist rule travelling restrictions were lifted in 1993, and the country has experienced substantial internal migration towards major cities and international migration. The most common destinations countries for Albanians are Italy and Greece with which Albania shares a border (Mai and Paladini 2013; Galanxhi et al. 2014; Lerch 2014). Initially both internal and international migration were interpreted as a necessary correction after the communist restrictions (Maroukis and Gema 2013; Galanxhi et al. 2004), but the trend shows no sign of abating (Galanxhi et al. 2014). With many Albanians living abroad, the country's population has decreased from 3.3 million in 1991 to under 2.9 million in 2014 (World Bank 2016).

However, circular migration is commonplace in Albania: repeated stays abroad interceded by returns to the country (Stampini, Carletto, and Davis 2008; Vullnetari 2015; see Vathi, Duci, and Dhembo 2016 for a discussion of the challenges of returning migrants in Albania). When working abroad, the majority of Albanians work in low-skilled and unskilled sectors of the economy, often in the informal economy. In qualitative research, Albanians often present (temporary) emigration as a 'solution' to their problems in the country, rarely as a choice. Lack of opportunities, unemployment and under-employment are often cited as problems (Mai and Paladini 2013). Qualitative evidence also suggests that much of Albanian migration is circular in character because the involved individuals prefer to maintain their base in Albania (Maroukis and Gema 2013). A (temporary) return to Albania may occur for many reasons, but usually is caused by the lack of employment. After the Great Recession affected Greece and Italy in 2008, the number of Albanians returning increased (Galanxhi et al. 2014) and the number of apprehensions of unauthorized migrants in Greece decreased (Triandafyllidou et al. 2014). Many return migrants, however, expressed a clear intent to emigrate again when the opportunity arises (Maroukis and Gema 2013), a typical sign of circular migration.

Most Albanians who emigrate are of working age, and a majority are male. This gender imbalance is linked to a patriarchal family model that remains dominant in Albania, where men are often the breadwinners (Filipi et al. 2014). The gender imbalance, however, has decreased in comparison to the 1990s (Galanxhi et al. 2014). In line with the patriarchal family model, the most common reason Albanian *women* give for emigration is family reunification, usually linked to a male worker having found a relatively stable opportunity abroad. Where work opportunities are clearly more temporary, families often choose to leave the woman and possible children in Albania, frequently supported by members of the wider family. Despite an economy not heavily affected by the 2008 financial crisis, many young adults only perceive limited economic opportunities in the country and seek opportunities abroad (Vullnetari 2015).

In the early 1990s, it was near impossible for Albanians to obtain work visas, leading to unauthorized migration (Chindea et al. 2008). In 1996, however, a bilateral employment agreement was signed between Albania and Greece, followed by one with Italy in 1997. These agreements brought legal opportunities for some workers, and introduced the possibility of family reunification and studying abroad. Two decades after these changes and legal possibilities to work abroad, unauthorized migration remains a common form for Albanians, and is commonly referred to as characteristic of Albanian migration (Barjaba and King 2005; Maroukis 2012; Vullnetari 2015). Indeed, Albanian continues to be among the most common nationalities found to be illegally present in the European Union (Sabbati and Poptcheva 2015). The high rate of unauthorized migration is a reflection of opportunities due to geographical proximity and lenient enforcement in Greece (compare Eschbach et al. 1999; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016 on the effects of strong enforcement in the case of the Mexican—US border). There are no incentives like potential access to citizenship in the long term. A visa liberalisation regime in December 2010 seems to have reduced the number of individuals apprehended for illegal border crossing to Greece to some degree (Triandafyllidou et al. 2014), but unauthorized migration has far from disappeared.

The focus on Albania allows us to disentangle factors associated with the decision to emigrate from factors associated with the choice of unauthorized migration. We examine the contrast between authorized and unauthorized migration among a sample of migrants and do not compare these migrants with non-migrants who chose to remain in Albania. Empirically, the case has the advantage of having a sufficient number of unauthorized migrants: neither as dominant as in the Mexican—US case in the past, nor as rare as in most Western European countries. We also add fresh data to a literature dominated by the excellent Mexican Migration Project (MMP), and situate unauthorized migration in a contemporary framework of migration decisions (de Haas 2010).

Unauthorized entry and more commonly residence without adequate permits, such as when a tourist visa is used to enter a country for work purposes as is often done by Albanians in Greece and Italy. We refer to a choice of unauthorized migration to emphasize that technically legal entry is a – in many cases perhaps hypothetical – possibility and that the migrants in question are not so-called forced migrants. In the case of Albania, workers usually need a valid work contract to obtain a visa, something difficult to obtain for work in the informal economy. In the context of unauthorized migration from Mexico to the United States it is often highlighted that unauthorized migrants *do* apply for work visas, but are unable to obtain them quickly enough to respond to current opportunities and choose unauthorized migration in the meantime (Hanson 2007). We still consider this a choice – they could have waited, and many Mexicans do not seek unauthorized work in the United States –, just like in the present case of Albania. In Albania, however, many migrants never even try to obtain a legal permit, often because they lack a concrete job offer.

We focus on unauthorized migration as a particular kind of opportunity to migrate; once aspirations and capabilities align, individuals still have a choice of different modes of migration. The focus is on unauthorized migration as opposed to authorized migration and as opposed to over-stayers who enter a country legally. Individuals who choose not to migrate are not considered; without evidence to the contrary, we assume that the availability of illegal channels as such does not affect *aspirations* to emigrate. We argue that unauthorized migration is best understood as a form of risk taking (compare Jaeger et al. 2010 on risk attitudes and propensities to migrate). From this general intuition we derive three hypotheses that spell out individual characteristics linked to increased risk-taking behaviour relevant to migration, acknowledging that these are relatively crude proxies of the propensity of being risk-taking at the individual level, although proxies that are relatively robust (Williams and Baláž 2012; Mather et al. 2012; Croson and Gneezy 2009).

First, individuals with social responsibilities like being married or having children (family constraints) are likely to consider their close ones and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour. That said, with social responsibilities the pressure to gain additional income may be increased, but we expect the overall effect to be a reduced likelihood to engage in risky behaviour (compare Stark and Bloom 1985; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016). Second and third, risk taking reduces with increased age, and is more common among men than women (Kam 2012; Croson and Gneezy 2009). These are generic associations between individual characteristics and circumstances on the one hand, and risk taking on the other, and future research should illuminate these associations further, for instance by using data covering personality types (see Schwartz et al. 2014 for a generic frame).

> H1: Individuals without social responsibilities are more likely to choose unauthorized migration.

> H2: Younger individuals are more likely to choose unauthorized migration.

> H3: Men are more likely to choose unauthorized migration.

Moreover, we consider statistical interactions between the three identified groups to examine whether there are particular subgroups that are especially prone to choosing unauthorized migration. If there are significant statistical interactions, we expect them to be reinforcing in the case of younger individuals without responsibilities (particularly risk-taking), while the effects between being male and having responsibilities may be reducing each other to some extent. We do not have strong expectations as to which variable is likely to dominate, nor whether statistical interactions are likely to be substantively consequential for the phenomenon under observation.

DATA AND METHODS

We use individual-level data from the 2013 Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania survey (refer to Filipi et al. 2014 for a technical report). There are three significant advantages of using data on return migrants: First, we are able to disentangle determinants of migration (or aspirations to migrate) from the choice of unauthorized migration. All the individuals in our sample did migrate. Second, we are able to ascertain that actual migration – behaviour – is captured rather than intentions to migrate. The data focus on the last migration experience in cases of so-called multiple or circular migration. Third, by surveying individuals who have returned, respondents have no incentives to hide unauthorized migration as there are no consequences at this stage. This is a great advantage over surveys in the country of destination. A disadvantage is that we do not capture permanent migration to other countries, and are thus unable to establish whether the choice of unauthorized migration is different for those who intend to emigrate permanently. Assuming that unauthorized migration is more common in circular migration, we will overestimate the incidence of unauthorized migration generally, but not in the case of circular migration.

The Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania survey used the 2011 Population and Housing Census as the sampling frame, drawing from individuals who have returned to Albania after 2009. Proportional probability to size-systematic sampling was used, and all Albanians aged 18 or over who returned to Albania either voluntary or involuntary were included in the sampling frame. The inclusion of involuntary return seems important to us, because it reflects the risk inherent in unauthorized migration, despite efforts to blend in when abroad (Kokkali 2015). Both long-term and short-term migration was considered, as was temporary and permanent return. When the pre-selected individual was not present, he or she was replaced by the next individual in the same household who fulfilled the conditions (randomly selected). The response rate of the survey is 91%, and there are 1,878 individuals in the dataset. The survey asks about

the situation before leaving Albania, the experience in the last country of destination, and post-return conditions – the analysis in this article uses largely data from the first module which includes demographic and social characteristics, reasons for leaving Albania, the social and financial situation, the composition of the household, education, skills, and professional experience.

Our analytical strategy is to use these data on return migrants in Albania to find out who chose unauthorized migration as part of their migration experience. Our outcome variable draws on the following question: "Under what conditions did you go abroad?" which has three response categories ("with official documents", 46% of respondents; "no official documents", 46% of respondents; and "with false documents", 8% of respondents). We collapsed this into a binary variable distinguishing between unauthorized migration (54% of respondents) and authorized migration (46% of respondents). The responses given are plausible inasmuch individuals travelling without legal documents with very rare exceptions do not report having travelled by aeroplane, in which case travelling without official documents seems implausible. Similarly, being expelled as a reason for return is almost exclusive for those indicating a lack of official documents. Logistic regression analysis is used to statistically explain individual choice of unauthorized migration when emigrating. Three predictor variables are used. Social responsibilities are captured with a binary variable, coded 1 for married individuals or those with dependent children (49% of respondents) and 0 otherwise. Sex is captured using a binary variable, and age as a continuous variable. 74% of the return migrants are men, and the median age before emigrating was 27 years. With a median age of 26 years, men were slightly younger than women with a median age of 30 years.

Several control variables are included. The level of education was measured in a categorical way in the survey but converted into (typical) years of schooling following the current Albanian education system. To capture differences in preparations for working abroad (see Sladkova 2016 for qualitative evidence that such resources are important), a binary variable was created, coded 1 for individuals who know at least one foreign language (28% of respondents) or have completed vocational training before leaving Albania (5% of respondents). A separate variable captures whether individuals worked before migrating (19% of respondents). Three variables are used to capture living conditions before migrating. The first measures precarious work conditions, which was coded 1 if the individual was self-employed, unemployed, a student, or employed with a fixed-term contract (80% of respondents). The second captures the self-assessed financial situation (49% in a poor situation), while the third looks at the material situation by asking whether respondents owned a range of durable goods. In a different variable, reasons to migrate were classified into push factors (lack of employment, lack of housing, general insecurity in Albania, social reasons, medical reasons; coded +1) and pull factors (employment offer abroad, better job opportunities, better income prospects abroad, to join family, to join friends; coded -1) and then added up to capture whether push or pull factors dominate for an individual's choice to migrate. In 74% of cases pull factors dominate. Finally, to capture period effects, a binary variable measures whether an individual left Albania after the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 (36% of respondents).

FINDINGS

For Albanians, the most common countries of destination are Greece and Italy. Of the returnees, 54% report having crossed the borders without or with forged legal documents. We have no expectation that this figure translates to other contexts because border control and economic opportunities in the country of destination differ (compare Eschbach et al. 1999 on border enforcement), but we argue that the underlying mechanisms are likely to apply to other similar contexts dominated by circular

migration. Table 1 presents bivariate evidence in support of the hypotheses: Individuals without social responsibilities like children and dependants are more likely to choose unauthorized migration, and men are much more likely to do so than women. These gender differences are similar in size to what is reported for unauthorized Mexican—US migration (Valdez-Suiter, Rosas-López, and Pagaza 2007). The median age of unauthorized migrants is lower than for authorized migrants, bearing in mind that migrants tend to be young in either case.

[TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

For the control variables, the associations are as expected, suggesting that they constitute alternative influences on the choice of unauthorized migration. For instance, the typical unauthorized migrant has eight years of education (58%), while for authorized migration, twelve years are the norm. This pattern corresponds to unauthorized Mexican—US migration (Valdez-Suiter, Rosas-López, and Pagaza 2007; Ryo 2013). Similarly, we observe that most migrants were not particularly well prepared for their venture abroad in the sense that only 30% had knowledge of a foreign language or completed vocational training. This percentage is lower among unauthorized migrants (21%). This may be linked to the fact that a clear majority of unauthorized migrants were not in regular work before migrating (84%). Using an alternative measure to capture the security of the position before migrating, we estimate that 80% were in a precarious situation, but among unauthorized migrants the figure was 89%. A similar picture can be drawn when property ownership and the financial situation are focused on rather than job security – unauthorized migrants report having been in a worse situation than those choosing authorized migration.

Multivariate analysis: Sex, age, and social responsibilities are associated with unauthorized migration

Having found support for the hypotheses in bivariate analysis, we turn to multivariate regression models. The first model presented in Table 2 includes the predictor variables along with controls for the financial situation before migrating and preparations, namely whether individuals had knowledge of a foreign language or vocational training. The model indicates that individuals with social responsibilities are significantly less likely to choose unauthorized migration, as are older individuals. The reduction is an average 8 per cent across models 1 to 4 for those with responsibilities. With regard to age, the reduction is an average 2 per cent across models 1 to 4. This predicted effect refers to the difference of one year, and we should bear in mind that most migrants are young, thus we are looking at a substantially important difference. By contrast, men are around 4 times more likely to choose unauthorized migration, supporting the intuition that individual risk taking is a relevant factor.

[TABLE 2 AROUND HERE]

Models 2 to 4 in Table 2 add an additional control variable each to demonstrate the robustness of the findings. The addition of these variables does not increase the model fit significantly, nor are the predictor variables affected in a substantive way. For reasons of multicollinearity and lack of strong theoretical reasons we have refrained from adding additional variables in the models presented here; the models presented in

Table 2 have a VIF less than 1.73 suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern.

Additional models in the appendix highlight the robustness of the results presented and open up possible avenues for further research. The models in Table A1 include non-linear terms for age and years of education, indicating that the statistical effects of age and education decrease slightly with greater age and levels of education. They do not seem to add additional information with regard to our main variables, though. In Table A2, network variables are added: individuals who emigrate to join members of their family are much less likely to choose unauthorized migration, while individuals who emigrate to join friends and colleagues are more likely to choose unauthorized migration. These results are in line with the hypothesis on social responsibilities and research on the Mexican—US migration (Massey and Espinosa 1997), but are not elaborated in the main text for reasons of multicollinearity (VIF>5) and because the quality of the (self-reported) network variables could not be ascertained. Taken together, the models in Table 2 and the appendix are robust evidence that unauthorized migration is shaped by the variables we use to measure social responsibilities and risk taking.

Older individuals are more influenced by social responsibilities

In a final step, we examine whether the two explanations – social responsibilities and risk taking – interact in a particular way. The basic intuition is that individuals with social responsibilities are more affected by the effects of age than those without responsibilities. Figure 1 shows the interaction effect between age and social responsibilities in graphical form. The y-axis shows the predicted probabilities of choosing unauthorized migration; the x-axis shows the age at which individuals migrated. The two lines indicate the relationship between these two variables once for those with social responsibilities (solid line) and once for those without (dotted line). We can see that the two lines are in the same direction, but are not parallel. This indicates that older individuals are predicted to be less likely to choose unauthorized migration in both groups, but this declining tendency is stronger for those with social responsibilities. The addition of this interaction effect to model 2 substantially increases the model fit.

[FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

For the relationship between social responsibilities and sex, by contrast, it is difficult to formulate a clear overall expectation given that the two effects are in the opposite direction and may be cancelling each other out. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this second interaction term does not add significantly to the model fit. Table A3 in the appendix presents several models, in none of which the interaction term is statistically significant. Further research is necessary to disentangle the two stipulated effects in order to address the potential relationship between the two. These limitations notwithstanding, this section lends further support to the hypotheses that social responsibilities and risk taking are likely – and interrelated – mechanisms in shaping the choice of unauthorized migration. The interaction effect presented in Figure 1 highlights that having social responsibilities can moderate the predicted effects of being risk-taking (age).

DISCUSSION, POLICY IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This article looked at the choice of unauthorized migration – without legal documents, or with documents that are forged – in the context of Albanian migration to Greece and Italy. Little is known as to why individuals choose this form of migration, particularly

outside of the Mexican—US context. By drawing on data on return migrants from Albania, we were able to elucidate two likely mechanisms that encourage unauthorized migration at the individual level: not having social responsibilities, and being risk-taking. Only by having a better understanding of the mechanism that encourage unauthorized migration it is possible to better grasp the nature of this particular form of migration. While destination countries may prefer formal migration because it is controllable and subject to policy interventions, it is important to understand the nature of unauthorized migration – particularly *because* it is outside the realm of state control.

The analyses confirmed that in a context characterized by circular migration, lenient enforcement, and a large informal sector in the country of destination, individuals with social responsibilities and family constraints are less likely to choose unauthorized migration. However, we argue that the main driver behind the choice of unauthorized migration over authorized migration is being risk-taking. This personality characteristic was approached using young age and being male as indicators, and further research with dedicated survey questions is necessary to fully understand which sections of society are particularly prone to unauthorized migration. Social responsibilities seem to moderate the influence of being risk-taking in the case of age, while for sex differences the picture was unclear – something which may be due to overall effects that cancel each other out. All the reported associations are robust to the inclusion of several control variables, including period effects.

While individual characteristics appear to be linked with the choice of unauthorized migration, we should bear in mind that one reason for unauthorized migration is that without a concrete job offer, legal channels to migrate tend not to be available. Opportunities to migrate legally to search for work may greatly reduce the incidence of unauthorized migration, and with that the vulnerability of unauthorized migrants and reduced state control over parts of the migrant population. The fact some individuals take up opportunities of unauthorized migration highlights that migration policies may fail to regulate some migrant population.

Rather than focusing on push and pull effects, as it (still) often done in the literature, in our view it is more constructive to regard migration decisions and the choice of unauthorized migration in the framework of aspirations, capabilities and opportunities (de Haas 2010; Flahaux and de Haas 2016). What this article adds to recent developments on migration decisions is the insight that risk assessments seem to play an important role – at the stage of opportunities and the choice of the mode of migration (compare Ryo 2013 who used intentions to migrate rather than actual migration). The nature of the data used in this article – return migrants – means that by definition only individuals with aspirations, capabilities, and opportunities to migrate are covered: actual migrants. As a result, we are able to disentangle determinants of migration from those of unauthorized migration. The case of Albanian return migrants is particularly instructive here as it includes enough variation in the key variables and is relatively free from social desirability biases in the survey.

While the analysis is based on a case dominated by circular migration and characterized by relatively high levels of unauthorized migration, we argued that the underlying mechanisms in the choice of unauthorized migration are likely to be comparable to other contexts – perhaps with the exception of so-called forced migration –, although depending on the border involved the opportunities of unauthorized migration are likely be drastically reduced (e.g. Eschbach et al. 1999). We expect that in other cases, too, the most risk-taking individuals – particularly young men – are most prone to unauthorized migration, especially if legal entry is made difficult in the country of destination. Further research in this area is necessary to better understand the nature of unauthorized migration and whether the findings from Albania translate more widely, although they resonate findings on unauthorized migration in the Mexican—US case where the choice

of unauthorized migration cannot be distinguished so clearly from the choice of migration more generally.

Interestingly, in many ways individuals who choose unauthorized migration resemble those choosing authorized migration, notably with regard to education. This similarity resonates research on unauthorized migrants in Moldova that highlights that a key difference between authorized and unauthorized migrants is the length of each individual stay in the destination country – not the overall time in the destination country (Borodak and Tichit 2014). In the case of the Mexican—US border, too, similarities between authorized and unauthorized migrants have been highlighted (Massey and Espinosa 1997). This finding is entirely compatible with our view that the choice of unauthorized migration is a reflection of risk taking and (lack of) social responsibilities, and more research on the length of stay and its link to unauthorized migration is warranted, especially outside the Mexican—US case. Despite being more risk-taking, the involved unauthorized migrants are likely to minimize the risk of deportation at the borders, especially at borders with stricter control than in the case of Albania. The results presented here are also compatible with existing studies that highlight the role of attitudes towards legal norms (Ryo 2013), or social networks (Massey and Riosmena 2010; Sladkova 2016). Further research is necessary to examine how these different mechanisms – being risk-taking, having social responsibilities, attitudes and norms – interact with economic assessments and one another.

Data from return migrants seem suitable to address these questions, particularly because actual behaviour rather than intentions to migrate are captured. Indeed, the focus on return migrants as a method is often overlooked in the literature and by policymakers, and deserves more attention, especially now that middle income countries are increasingly (able to) produce high quality surveys on migrants. Different to the common surveys on intentions to migrate, however, surveys on return migrants include data on (reported) actual behaviour. Contrary to surveys in countries of destination, data on return migrants are likely to free of social desirability bias on this particular question given that there is no risk of deportation. As a limitation, however, truly permanent patterns of migration are not covered, limiting the generalizability of results to some degree, just like surveys in the country of destination may underestimate the incidence of circular migration. Contemporary migration, however, often takes the form of repeated migration (Maroukis and Gema 2013).

In this article we have shown that having social responsibilities and being risk-taking – approached through age and sex – are good predictors of choosing unauthorized migration. Seen this way, the article contributes to understanding unauthorized migrants – a group of migrants often elusive to scholars and policymakers. Future research should pay more attention to how the outlined mechanisms interact with contextual factors like the economic situation, border control, or possible period effects beyond those addressed in this article. We expect that these external factors have a substantive effect on the rate of unauthorized migration, but not necessary on the underlying mechanisms. By taking into consideration the role of risk taking, recent developments in our understanding of migration decisions can be refined, which will ultimately lead to a better understanding of population dynamics given that in many countries the impact of migration on population growth or indeed decline appears to be a significant source of uncertainty.

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Table 1: The Incidence of Unauthorized Migration by Responsibilities, Sex, and Age

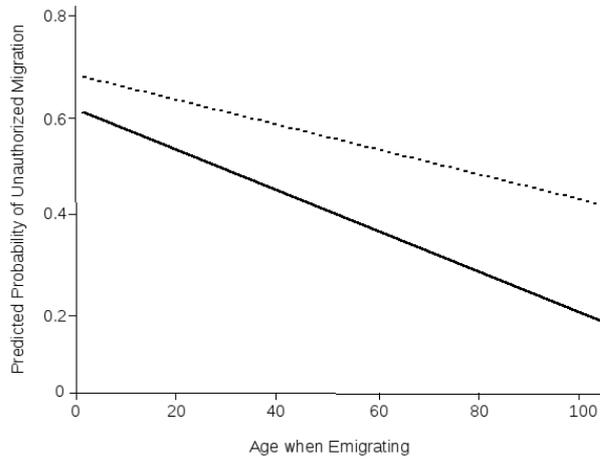|	No Responsibilities	Responsibilities	Sex (Women)	Sex (Men)	Median Age
Authorized migration	38%	55%	73%	36%	28 years
Unauthorized migration	62%	45%	27%	64%	26 years
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Notes: all differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.01$, N=1,878.

Table 2: Unauthorized Migration: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
No Responsibilities (reference)				
Responsibilities	0.916	0.913	0.940	0.927
Age	0.982	0.982	0.980	0.981
Women (reference)				
Men	4.165	4.156	4.174	4.065
Preparations	0.402	0.396	0.405	0.405
Financial situation	1.855	1.861	1.860	1.843
Education		1.009		
Migration period			1.115	
Reasons to migrate (push-pull)				1.138
-2LL	153,167	153,153	153,103	152,766
N	1,878	1,878	1,878	1,878

Notes: Outcome variable: unauthorized migration. Given are the odds ratios. All coefficients are significant at p<0.01.

Fig. 1: Interaction Effect Between Age (Risk Taking) and Social Responsibilities

Notes: dotted line = no responsibilities, solid line = with social responsibilities. Outcome variable: unauthorized migration; other variables and specifications as in model 2 in Table 2 above.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Unauthorized Migration: Non-Linear Terms for Age and Years of Education

	Model A1	Model A2	Model A3	Model A4
No Responsibilities (reference)				
Responsibilities	0.775	0.784	0.764	0.902
Age	1.084	1.076	1.099	0.980
Age²	0.999	0.999	0.999	
Women (reference)				
Men	3.771	3.669	3.742	3.931
Preparations	0.384	0.422	0.408	0.419
Financial situation	1.810	1.771	1.777	1.830
Education		1.270	0.963	1.476
Education²		0.985		0.979
-2LL	151146	150245	150933	151672
N	1878	1878	1878	1878

Notes: Outcome variable: unauthorized migration. Given are the odds ratios from logistic regression analysis. All coefficients are significant at p<0.01.

Table A2: Unauthorized Migration: Network Variables

	Model A5	Model A6
No Responsibilities (reference)		
Responsibilities	0.952	1.219
Age	0.985	0.985
Women (reference)		
Men	2.946	3.614
Preparations	0.379	0.379
Financial situation	1.817	1.806
Join family	0.277	0.270
Join friends	1.801	1.811
Responsibilities * Sex		0.741
-2LL	148,720	148,647
N	1878	1878

Notes: Outcome variable: unauthorized migration. Given are the odds ratios from logistic regression analysis. All coefficients are significant at p<0.01.

Table A3: Unauthorized Migration: Interaction between Sex and Responsibilities

	Model A7	Model A8	Model A9	Model A10
No Responsibilities (reference)				
Responsibilities	0.902	0.892	0.912	0.928
Age	0.982	0.982	0.980	0.981
Women (reference)				
Men	4.112	4.075	4.099	4.070
Responsibilities * sex (interaction)	[1.018]	[1.028]	[1.026]	[0.996]
Preparations	0.402	0.396	0.405	0.405
Financial situation	1.855	1.862	1.861	1.843
Education		1.009		
Migration period			1.138	
Reasons to migrate (push-pull)				1.138
-2LL	153,167	153,153	153,102	152,766
N	1,878	1,878	1,878	1,878

Notes: Outcome variable: unauthorized migration. Given are the odds ratios from logistic regression analysis. All coefficients are significant at p<0.01, except for the interaction term between responsibilities and sex (p>0.05 in all models, given in square brackets).