Recruitment through migrant social networks from Latvia to the United Kingdom: Motivations, processes and developments

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Abstract

A burgeoning body of literature exists in relation to the role of social networks in connecting migrant workers with employment opportunities, particularly in lower wage jobs. This evidence points to social networks being an attractive recruitment channel from the perspective of both migrants seeking employment and employers seeking employees. This analysis presents a wide breadth of original material, which examines recruitment through social networks from the perspective of both migrants and employers. This includes data drawn from an extensive mixed methods approach involving a novel online survey of Latvian migrants in the UK and face-to-face interviews with British low-wage employers. This study seeks to offer important and timely contributions to debates about the relationship between migrant social networks and low-wage employment and the implications of these recruitment mechanisms.

Keywords: Latvian labour migrants; low wage employment; migrant social networks; mixed methods; UK employers.

Introduction

An established and burgeoning body of literature exists in relation to the link between recruitment through social networks and the labour market experiences and outcomes of migrant workers (for example see Ryan et al., 2008; Rainer and Siedler, 2009; Behtoui, 2008). The migration literature in particular is resplendent with research that demonstrates the role of webs of families and friends in generating and maintaining migration flows through the trans-

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fer of information about employment opportunities (Boyd, 1989; Goss and Lindquist, 1995). In relation to employment and recruitment processes, a member of a social network has been conceptualised as a personal (as opposed to formal) contact with "some individual known personally to the respondent, with whom he originally became acquainted in some context unrelated to a search for job information" (Granovetter, 1995, 11). These migrant social networks can be regarded as serving a route into employment for migrants in two main ways: as a means through which information about jobs is communicated (Goss and Lindquist, 1995) and a path into employment for those lacking other routes of entry into the labour market, for example, as a result of language barriers, lack of knowledge of the local labour market, or a failure of employers to acknowledge skills and qualifications (Sumption, 2009). Research into the implications of recruitment through these mechanisms has produced some conflicting messages. For example Rainer and Siedler (2009) associate social networks with positive employment and wage outcomes for migrants, whilst Chua (2011) contests that social networks are mainly only an effective job search method for less qualified workers. Ponzo and Scoppa (2010) also associate recruitment through social networks with low qualified workers and low paying jobs, but find that these mechanisms produce a negative impact on wages.

A large proportion of the studies conducted into recruitment and employment processes involving migrant social networks have involved the analysis of secondary datasets to examine the labour market outcomes of migrant workers. The approach taken in this investigation is rather different in terms of its focus and the methodological approach used. Rather than attempting to empirically calculate the employment effects of social networks through statistical modelling, the analysis aims to shed light on why social networks are a common migrant labour channel, how these channels operate and how they have evolved over time. This approach stands out from many existing studies in that the perspectives of both employers and migrants are considered. Material drawn from 61 interviews with employers in the UK and over 1,000 questionnaire responses from labour migrants from Latvia in the UK, using an innovative online survey method involving social media, form the basis of the findings presented in this paper.

Migrant recruitment, low wage employment and social networks:
A review of existing evidence

Informal social networks have long been recognised as a prominent means through which employers and migrant labour are brought together in the labour market (Yucel, 1987; Anderson, 1974; Pellizzari, 2004). Recruitment through social networks can be seen as beneficial from the perspective of both employers and potential employees for a number of reasons. Employment related information spreads widely and quickly through social networks (Behtoui, 2008). The process of recruiting staff incurs costs to firms in terms

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of time and financial resources since jobs have to be advertised and potential recruits screened. Encouraging existing employees to suggest their relatives or acquaintances for vacancies eliminates these search and screening costs. These processes also benefit employers by providing better job "matching": information gained from existing employees provides potential employees with a level of understanding of the nature of the job that they are applying for, resulting in more suitable matches between the characteristics of the job and the qualities and expectations of the worker. Workers recruited through existing employees also "learn the ropes" and assimilate relatively quickly and easily owing to their existing contacts in their new workplace (Coverdill, 1998). Firms encourage recommendations from "good" employees since productive employees are likely to suggest workers with similar traits and abilities. This is due to what is known as the "homophily principle" (Lin, 1999), which refers to members of a network sharing similar attributes. Thus recruitment through the networks of "good workers" can serve to reproduce and maintain a "good" workforce.

From the migrant worker perspective, social networks can been viewed as offering quick, detailed and reliable information about employment opportunities and routes into employment. An apt illustration of this is Ryan et al's. (2008) investigation of how recent Polish migrants in London accessed, formed and used social networks. With regards to employment opportunities, their research suggests that social networks act as a route into work for those lacking alternative modes of entry into the labour market. This particularly applies to new arrivals and those lacking English language skills, who are relatively dependent on co-ethnics for information about local labour market opportunities. This contribution represents one of a surprisingly limited body of evidence concerning migrants' job search activities and the outcomes of these strategies (Giulietti et al., 2013). Migrant social networks are not drawn on equally by employers and employees across the labour market. Previous research has indicated that social networks are particularly important for less educated workers, or are a necessary route into employment for migrants lacking alternatives (Battu et al., 2011; Boheimand and Taylor, 2001; Giulietti et al., 2013). Most existing work on this topic is based on secondary quantitative datasets, by taking a more qualitatively minded approach this analysis seeks to give greater consideration to the process of recruitment through social networks, from the perspective of low-wage employers and East-Central European migrants in the UK. Additionally social networks among past and current migrants play a significant role in the creating and maintaining powerful perceptions and understandings of migrant destinations (Hedberg, 2004; Olofsson and Malmberg, 2010; Apsite–Berina, 2013).

Since the accession of the A8 countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia) to the European Union on 1st May 2004 citizens from these countries have had the right to participate in the British labour market. Given the significant disparities in wage levels, it is not surprising that large numbers of A8 migrants have come to work

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in the UK. In a short space of time East-Central Europe has become one of the principal source regions of migrants to Britain, and nationals from these states now constitute some of the largest foreign-born populations in the country (McCollum, 2013).

East-Central European migration to the UK since 2004 has been exceptional due to the sheer volume of arrivals over a relatively short space of time and the geographically dispersed pattern of this immigration (Burrell, 2009). From a labour market perspective, the existing body of research has pointed to employers having positive perceptions of East-Central Europeans (Atfield et al., 2011; Scott, 2012) and of these workers disproportionately occupying low paid and temporary forms of employment (Chiswick et al., 2008).

An important aspect of flexible labour markets is the extent to which labour migrants fulfil the role of flexible and contingent labour. Research has shown that migrants generally have less positive labour market outcomes than non-migrants and display a relatively high propensity to be in temporary and low-paid employment (Dustmann et al., 2003; Demireva, 2011). The decision to migrate and remain abroad is not solely made on economic considerations, but also on the existence and strength of the social networks that facilitate transnational migration (Faist and Ozveren, 2004; Krisjane et al., 2013). It has been established that in the communist era, Eastern Europeans in general used informal networks to obtain much of what they needed, compensating for inadequacies in the goods and services that were officially provided (Wedel, 1986; White and Ryan, 2008; Krisjane et al., 2013).

A number of possible explanations can be put forward to explain labour market disadvantage amongst migrants. Labour migrants tend to be young, often lack language skills and have qualifications that are not recognised in the host economy. Thus human capital models can aid understanding of migrants' labour market outcomes (Shields and Wheatley Price, 2001). Reliance upon social networks may also contribute to migrants' labour market marginalisation: a new arrival who finds employment through a social network is likely to attain a similar job as the constituents of that network (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Another important factor is direct and indirect discrimination in recruitment practices. Employers may recruit based on national stereotyping, with the suitability of workers for particular roles being determined categorically rather than on individual merit (Lucas and Mansfield, 2010). This leads to ethnically ordered hiring queues whereby employers devise an implicit hierarchy of nationalities according to their desirability as employees (Scott, 2012). Finally, in the short term at least, migrants' "dual frame of reference" (Piore, 1979) means that they are accepting of wages and employment conditions that are considered unfavourable in their host society because they are still favourable to those in their countries of origin.

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Methodological approach

This analysis seeks to address the following research questions in relation to East-Central European, Latvian in particular, labour migration to the UK;

1. What factors are responsible for employers and migrants drawing on social networks for recruitment?
2. How do these processes operate?
3. How have these mechanisms evolved in the decade since East-Central European labour migrants were granted unrestricted access to the UK labour market?

A mixed methods approach was adapted in order to address these research questions.

UK employers and labour providers

A total of 61 in-depth interviews were conducted with users (employers) and providers (recruitment agencies) of East-Central European migrant labour. The objective of this element of the research was to try and understand the motivations and processes of recruitment through migrant social networks from the perspective of recruiters and employers. The interviews were carried out between January and October 2010 across four UK case study sites. The research concentrated on the food production and processing and hospitality sectors, which were judged to be key parts of the labour market associated with A8 workers (McCollum, 2013). The case study sites included rural and urban areas of England and Scotland (West Sussex/Hampshire, Southampton, Angus/Fife and Glasgow) which have received substantial numbers of East-Central European migrants since 2004.

The labour providers ranged from individuals who ran their own recruitment businesses to large nationwide and multinational recruitment agencies. The position held by most of the interviewees was overall director of the firm (in the case of small and medium sized organisations) or local/regional managers in the case of large organisations. Some supplied labour specifically to the food production and processing ("gangmasters") or hospitality sectors or were general labour providers who supplied workers to a range of sectors. The labour users ranged from large multinational organisations to smaller employers. Most of the hospitality employers were hotel or restaurant chains and most interviewees were general or personnel managers. The food production and processing interviews focused on farms and vegetable and meat processing companies. Most of those interviewed held the job title of operations or human resource managers within their firm. Overall 26 per cent of the organisations that were contacted agreed to take part in the research. Only 12 per cent explicitly refused to participate in it and the remaining 62 per cent could not be contacted in a follow up round of telephone calls. Pseudonyms have been used in the quotations which follow to protect respondents' ano-

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nymity. Further details on the methods used in this research can be found in Findlay and McCollum (2012).

Latvian migrants in the UK

Information relating to migrants' use of social networks for recruitment is based on data collected online from questionnaires and structured interviews. In both cases the research subjects were Latvians residing in the UK in 2010. Online methods are an increasingly common research approach and have the benefit of being a versatile and relatively inexpensive means of collecting a large quantity of primary data, especially over a geographically dispersed area such as the UK.

The first strand of the research involved a web based questionnaire survey of Latvian residents in the UK. This was administered through the social media website www.draugiem.lv (www.frype.com), with the questionnaire being posted on the site, with their consent, and the questions being answered online via respondents' web browsers. This website was selected as it is a social networking service that is very popular with Latvians: it is currently the largest social networking website in Latvia with approximately over a million registered users. The questionnaire contained nineteen questions in total and gathered data on the socio-demographic profile of respondents, their reasons for and reflections on their experience of migration and details of their social networks. The final dataset acquired from the online survey consisted of 1,000 respondents aged between 16 and 63, although most were under 30 years old. This study sample corresponds with the general age composition of A8/Latvian migrants in the UK at the time (Gillingham, 2010). Overall 317 males and 683 females participated in the questionnaire survey. The greater volume of female respondents may be explained by two interrelated factors. Not only are women are more active users of online social media websites (Hargittai, 2008) but they also have a greater propensity to participate in scientific research (Galea and Tracy, 2007).

The second strand of the research involved 162 qualitative structured interviews with Latvian residents of the UK, which were also administered online via the www.draugiem.lv website. The aim of this element of the research was to enrich and shed light on the trends identified in the quantitative data. The interview data was obtained via the questionnaire respondents, with a sub-section of the overall sample "opting-in" through a request at the end of the survey for volunteers to participate in more in-depth discussions. The themes discussed during the online interviews related to migrants' reflections on their experiences of mobility and their interactions with fellow Latvians in Britain (modes of entry into social networks and their intensity and support). An advantage of the interviews being web-based was that it enabled a larger quantity and range of data than may otherwise have been the case with face-to-face interviews. Structured questions were sent by an e-mail to the respondents' e-mail address, who then responded at their convenience. Owing

to the practicalities inherent in travelling to, conducting and transcribing interview data, such a large sample (162) could not have been achieved so readily using conventional face-to-face interviews.

The case of Latvian/East-Central European migration to the UK

A key focus of the research was migrants from Latvia in the UK. This is of interest and pertinence because the political and economic changes that the country has undergone in recent decades have led to very particular trends in relation to migration and also potentially social networks. Prior to the fall of the USSR in 1991, mobility between Latvia and Western Europe was constrained, with initiatives such as the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme being one of the few sanctioned means through which Latvians could experience life and work in a foreign country. During this era distrust of state institutions and officials and deficiencies in officially supplied goods and services was conducive to the development of informal networks across East-Central Europe (Bukowski, 1996; White and Ryan, 2008). Networks of friends and relatives were highly regarded as a source of information, goods and services and these social ties have continued to function in this manner despite the transition beyond communism (Podgorecki, 1994; Sztompka, 1999).

Another reason for Latvia being of interest is that migration flows from this country are part of the wider mobility of a substantial number of citizens from the eight accession (A8) states that joined the EU on 1st May 2004. A8 migration is of interest because of the sizeable nature of these flows; with it being the single biggest wave of foreign in-movement ever experienced by the UK (Bauere et al., 2007). Not only is it the sheer volume of in-migration of A8 nationals to Britain over a short period of time that has been remarkable, but their spatial patterns have also been strikingly dispersed and often to areas without a previous history of immigration (Burrell, 2009). Furthermore in late 2008, a drop in GDP of 18 per cent and a major increase in unemployment led to another sustained period of migration from the Baltic States (Krisjane et al., 2013).

Informal social networks have been shown to be a prominent and growing labour channel through which Latvian and other A8 migrants seek and find employment in overseas labour markets (McCollum et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2008). The following sections describe the findings from our mixed methods approach.

Motivations for recruitment through migrant social networks

Employer perspectives

The employers and recruiters included in the research almost universally praised migrant social networks as a recruitment tool. In essence this approach was viewed as representing a fast, free, convenient and reliable means of providing "good" workers.

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"We like it that lots of friends and family work together here because they just recommend us as an employer to each other and that is great because we don't have to pay for advertising or anything… so we have got a Recommend A Friend scheme where they get a bonus if they suggest someone and that person stays here for at least six months".

Natalya, personnel assistant, food processing firm, rural England

A key attraction from the perspective of employers was that recruitment through word of mouth was regarded as cost efficient and thus represented substantial savings in relation to other potential recruitment methods such as advertising, the use of recruitment agencies and conducting direct overseas recruitment. Another perceived benefit of migrant social networks was that they produced new employees who settled into their jobs quickly and tended to have good retention levels on account of them having been informed of "what to expect" prior to starting the job by an existing employee of the company.

"It is all brothers and sisters and friends coming in and that is good because you're bringing someone in who knows people that are here already and so that helps our new starts to settle in quickly because they already know at least one other person here when they start working for us".

Andrew, owner, food processing firm, rural Scotland

Another additional perceived advantage of migrant social networks was the speed at which they facilitated recruitment.

"The very second that you tell them [migrant workers] that you're looking for someone they'll be on the phone to their contacts and within half an hour their friend or relative will be here at the restaurant asking you for the job"

Adam, manager, restaurant, urban Scotland

Critically social networks were seen as a means of reproducing a productive workforce, with "good" workers tending to recommend other "good" workers.

"We get our staff by people that already work here just recommending us to people that they know, and that is good because if a great worker recommends one of their friends then they usually turn out to be really good as well".

Barbara, HR assistant, food processing firm, rural Scotland

Migrant perspectives

As explained above for employers, the benefits of recruiting through social networks are apparent. However which factors may explain migrants' eagerness to seek employment through their acquaintances? The findings from the online survey suggest that friends and relatives are the predominant route into employment for Latvian migrants in the UK. Three quarters (74%) of the 1,000 respondents cited friends and relatives as their main source of infor-

mation on employment opportunities in Britain. In contrast recruitment agencies and direct responses to employer advertisements formed only a minority of routes into work (10 per cent and 8 per cent respectively).

The qualitative data points towards labour migrants using social networks to find work either because it was seen as preferable to alternative ways of seeking employment or because of a lack of perceived alternative routes into employment. In the former case, seeking advice from friends and family was regarded as a quick and trustworthy way of gaining information about job opportunities. This was not just a "one-off" strategy to try and gain employment prior to or upon arrival in Britain: due to the insecure and low-paid nature of many migrants' jobs, workers were frequently changing employers and thus were continually receptive to information regarding employment opportunities.

"Initially we contacted the agency, but they were not able to offer anything. So in the end we started to look for opportunities ourselves and with the help of other Latvians (my husband's brother was here in the UK already) who helped with the information and pointing to the right institutions we found work in food processing sector. We would not be able to get anywhere without our connections. It is very hard to find employment if you don't have the right connections".

Female, factory worker, 24

As the above quotation hints at, informal networks were commonly regarded as the most effective means of securing employment by labour migrants. In many cases migrants described being actively "sought out" by friends or family. This was attributed to a genuine desire on the part of workers to share information about job opportunities amongst their network. It was also put down to workers wanting to gain favour with their employers by providing them with a source of good workers and thus facilitating their recruitment process.

"I have worked here for five years in the same company already and I know that if you have somebody (good friend or relative or just someone who asks for help) you just keep asking your manager if they need somebody new. When the manager said yes then I phoned my friend to get here as soon as possible".

Female, flower factory, 45

Finally, those seeing themselves as lacking alternative ways of finding employment often turned to co-ethnics for support in finding employment.

"When I first got here I was cheated by the recruitment agency contact… but by accident I met another Latvian woman, who helped me to find some accommodation and a small employment for one month in order to survive. In the following month with intense searching and particularly with the help of the Latvian woman and her English language ability I was able to find employment"

Female, housekeeper, 60

Co-ethnic social networks proved to be very important for those occupying low-skilled and low-paid jobs. However these networks can generate negative outcomes. This is because they are reliant on a high level of trust, both on the part of employers seeking labour, employees recommending co-ethnics and workers seeking employment. This research found that it tended to be the "middlemen" linking employers and potential employees who reflected most critically on the process of recruiting through informal social networks.

"I am not helping to find employment anymore because the previous experience has been very bitter and has shown how ungrateful and greedy Latvians are. Unfortunately I am very disappointed in my co-ethnics and I am almost not keeping any contacts with other Latvians who live here. Just some very distant acquaintances"

Female, housewife, 30

Employers reported far fewer problems with informal recruitment methods; citing the "pressure" on existing employees to recommend "good" workers.

"We have had one or two people come over and it is so and so's father-in-law and they have been absolute duffers and we have had to say "look your father-in-law is absolutely useless, we can't employ him". And the guy is going "yeah I know he's useless, sorry". So they will put pressure from within for the people coming over to perform well, because it embarrasses them and puts pressure on them as well".

Martin, managing director, sawmill, rural Scotland

The process of recruiting through migrant social networks

Employer perspectives In line with the laudation of migrant social networks as a convenient means of recruiting "good" workers, a common narrative amongst the employers interviewed was that these processes were self-sustaining and thus required very little initiation or management on their part. Most recruitment through migrant social networks thus took the form of businesses letting their workers know that they were seeking staff and encouraging their existing workers to recruit and select the staff.

"To be honest I'll just say to the guys "look we are looking for someone else" and they'll do everything else. I don't even ask them anything about who they've suggested because they're always good. So our recruitment system is pretty blunt i.e. they just come".

Michael, owner, construction firm, rural Scotland

In the context of economic recession and high levels of "good" (mostly migrant) workers being available, the recruitment process was widely regarded as a fairly straightforward and effortless process. Encouraging migrant social networks meant that businesses recruited through good workers "finding them" as opposed to the other way round. The data gathered from Latvian

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migrants in Britain sheds some light on how migrants go about recruiting, and are recruited, through their social networks.

Migrant perspectives

As is evident above, the role of recruitment is often carried out by the existing workforce of low-wage employers. For migrants, help finding employment is often part of a wider range of support that is transferred through social networks, including practical help with accommodation and finances.

"When I first came I received help from my acquaintance, an old friend from my hometown… he booked the flight tickets, hosted me in his house and helped me to start working through the agency in the UK".
Female, waitress, 23

The process through which recruitment occurred was described by the migrants in similar terms to those used by employers.

"I knew that they [employer] needed new people so I helped my friend's wife fill in the application form on the internet and then told my manger in the hotel her name and then the manager invited her in for an interview and after that she got hired".
Female, housekeeping, 22

Whilst often motivated by trust and altruistic motives, as has been mentioned, recruitment through social networks was sometimes described in negative terms by those who were recruited in this way and those who attempted to help others find recruitment. Requests for payment for help finding work was the most commonly mentioned downside to informal recruitment mentioned by the migrants.

"I was recruited to this job by my childhood friend's sister, but despite us being acquaintances she still charged me for the recruitment services that she provided".
Female, cleaning supervisor, 27

A perceived lack of appreciation was also a common compliant amongst those who had helped their co-ethnics find employment.

"Yes, we [partner and I] have helped many people, mainly previous colleagues from Latvia and other acquaintances… it has mostly been walking around agencies and looking for positions with them, however in most cases the result was ingratitude for our efforts so I don't think that I would ever do it again".
Female, warehouse worker, 21

The evolution of low-wage employers recruiting through migrant social networks

East-Central European migrants have had unrestricted access to the UK labour market since May 2004 and the channels that shape these labour migration flows are not static but are in a state of constant evolution (McCollum et

al., 2013; Findlay and McCollum, 2013). The interviews with UK employers and recruiters point to migrant social networks being initially of only minor importance at the time of the 2004 accession. This might be attributed to the flows at this point often consisting of what could be termed "pioneer" migrants who move largely independently of interpersonal or organisational ties (Poros, 2001). The 2004 accession was also portrayed as a catalyst for the rapid growth of a migration "industry" geared towards connecting labour migrants with the ample employment opportunities that existed in the then flourishing British labour market (Garapich, 2008). At this point recruitment agencies and direct overseas recruitment by employers were seen as more significant facilitators of labour migration than migrant social networks.

"At first we used a big recruitment agency to get our foreign workers and we even went across to Eastern Europe to recruit ourselves. But pretty quickly we didn't need to do that anymore because it just became self-sustaining because it was all brothers and sisters and friends coming in… and that has eliminated our recruitment costs".

Lily, owner, food processing firm, rural Scotland

However as the above quotation suggests, as the numbers of East-Central European migrants in Britain began to grow in the years following the 2004 accession, the more it became possible for employers and migrants to utilise these networks for recruitment purposes. This was partly because so many East-Central European migrants were in the UK and seeking employment opportunities, allowing employers to easily engage with "local" migrant labour via their existing employees.

"At first we used to do a lot of interviewing in the countries and brought people over to the UK. But we only did that for about a year because we found that there were plenty here, that we didn't actually need to go there anymore because we could hire them locally through word of mouth".

William, director, recruitment agency, urban Scotland

The transition from a booming to slack labour market around 2008 was also cited as contributing to an increase in recruitment through social networks as employers had fewer resources for other more costly recruitment methods. Additionally more East-Central Europeans (living locally and in sending countries) were seeking employment opportunities as a consequence of these turbulent labour market conditions.

"Economically things are bad in some of the Eastern European countries and because of their connections here it is actually quite easy for them to come here and be supported by a friend or relative for a month or so until they find work and in the majority of cases that tactic works pretty well for them... and it works for us too because we've got a reputation for being able to engage with them… so networking is important, Glasgow appears big but it is a small world really".

Christophe, consultant, recruitment agency, urban Scotland

Conclusions

This analysis finds that recruitment through social networks is a common means through which employers and migrant labour connect with each other in low-wage sectors of the UK labour market. Employers regard it as a fast, inexpensive, convenient and reliable means of getting "good workers". Labour migrants, especially recent arrivals and those lacking sufficient language skills, draw on their networks as they are perceived to represent the fastest and in some case only means of connecting with employment opportunities. These processes operate by employers delegating responsibility for the hiring of workers to existing staff members, with the reasoning being that good workers can source other "people like them" (the homophily principle).

The research uncovers evidence of recruitment through migrant social networks becoming increasingly embedded in the recruitment practices of low-wage employers. On the one hand this can be interpreted as a positive development. From an employer's perspective, recruiting staff can be a costly and time consuming process and labour costs are often a firm's greatest outlay. Engaging existing "good" employees and using them to effectively reproduce a "good" workforce reduces costs and thus boosts the efficiency of businesses. This mechanism of recruitment can also be regarded as benefitting migrants. Information regarding labour market opportunities is transmitted rapidly throughout social networks. This means that migrants can be informed of and connect with available jobs much more effectively and quickly than other approaches, such as replying to newspaper advertisements for example. Having an acquaintance already in a firm can be beneficial as they can vouch for the person and help support them once they begin work. Social networks are particularly valuable for migrants lacking alternative routes into employment, such as new arrivals and those lacking formal qualifications or English language skills.

From a more critical perspective, social networks can also be seen as exclusionary. If recruitment to firms is carried out exclusively through the networks of existing employees then it excludes individuals that are not part of those networks from employment opportunities. This can result in a lack of ethnic or national diversity within businesses, with large segments of the workforce coming from one country, or even a particular part of it. Such a process therefore excludes other migrants and non-migrants from employment opportunities. Another potential downside of recruitment through social networks is that it tends to be concentrated at the lower end of the labour market, where attitude or work ethic is more highly valued than particular skills or qualifications. If migrants are concentrated in low paying jobs and new arrivals are recruited into these jobs by their friends and families then the relative labour market disadvantage of migrants is effectively reproducing itself. Many low-paying jobs are insecure and offer limited opportunities for progression, thus being recruited into these jobs may hinder the likelihood of upward occupational mobility and may result in underemployment amongst migrant workers.

The findings uncovered in this analysis are somewhat intuitive and perhaps confirm what might be expected regarding the nature of the recruitment of migrant labour into low-wage employment. However they are nonetheless of value in that they confirm that social networks are popular means through which employers seeking "good workers" and "good workers" seeking employers connect with each other. In the case of the sizeable inflows of East-Central European migrant workers that the UK has experienced since 2004, recruitment via social networks has been identified as an increasingly prominent labour channel as the extent of these communities (and thus of their social networks) has grown. The approach taken in this research can be described as innovative in that it has examined the *process* of recruitment through social networks and has done this from both the perspective of employers and migrants. Startlingly little research has been carried out into how the recruitment of migrant labour through social networks actually operates, and research on labour migration in general has rarely incorporated both employer and migrant perspectives. The research also utilised an emerging research design, that of data collection through online social media. This is an approach which looks set to become more common as Information Communication Technologies continue to evolve. Further research is needed into the processes and implications of recruitment through migrant social networks in order to develop conceptual understandings in this increasingly prevalent and constantly developing migrant labour channel.

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