6 Living Different Dreams (I)

Aspirations and functional incorporation

6.1 Introduction

The scholarly discussion on irregular migrants and their incorporation in destination countries has been governed by the question of whether irregular migrants can achieve full incorporation. In line with the victim perspective, many scholars argue it is impossible for irregular migrants to achieve full incorporation due to their lack of legal status (see, e.g., Chavez 1991; Engbersen 1999a; Leman 1997; Van der Leun 2003b). In some conceptualisations of incorporation, participating in political life and having citizenship rights are regarded as important parameters for incorporation. In such views, lack of legal status is a direct impediment to achieving full incorporation. Other scholars use other conceptualisations and claim that irregular migrants are able to participate in many spheres of life, despite their lack of legal status. However, they do find that the lack of legal status has an indirect negative effect on incorporation. Massey et al. (1987), for example, find that illegal residence status acts as a damper on the formation of social and economic connections. This dampening effect is especially pronounced in the early stages of the migrant career. At the same time, the authors find that this dampening effect does not change the basic process of incorporation (ibid.). Although obtaining legal status is clearly an important event in the process of incorporation, and it greatly facilitates the formation of connections to the destination country, ‘it is not synonymous with incorporation itself and it is not necessarily the most important step in the process’ (ibid.: 270).

I do not aim to discuss the question of whether irregular migrants can achieve full incorporation. My focus is on the patterns of incorporation that can be distinguished among irregular migrants and how these can be understood. It is therefore much more relevant to look at the issues that are discussed under the heading incorporation and see how I can contribute to these implicit or explicit scholarly debates.

The next sections and the following chapter discuss the elements of incorporation that have come up in the literature on the incorporation of irregular migrants, such as work, housing, and social contacts and on which I have something to contribute. These topics have been categorised into two groups: functional incorporation and social incorporation. Functional
incorporation includes housing, work and other sources of income and thus refers to the way irregular migrants are able to sustain themselves. Social incorporation includes the way migrants spend their leisure time and their social contacts in the destination country. Note that this conceptualisation of incorporation is not all-encompassing. I do not intend to make statements about the incorporation of irregular migrants or about full incorporation. The aim, instead, is to contribute to the literature on the incorporation of irregular migrants. So I discuss only those elements of incorporation about which there is an implicit or explicit scholarly debate to which I can contribute. In the context of this book, incorporation should therefore be considered less an unambiguous theoretical concept forced upon the data, than as a heuristic device that provides structure and links my findings to relevant literature. This chapter discusses functional incorporation, whilst social incorporation is dealt with in the following chapter.

6.2 Housing

Many scholars write of the low quality of irregular migrants’ housing arrangements. Stories tell of cramped rooms, lack of heating, and landlords unwilling to make essential repairs (see, e.g., Adam et al. 2002; Anderson 1999; Burgers 1999a; Mahler 1995). I also encountered dwellings in which I felt uncomfortable eating the meals that were generously offered to me because of the many cockroaches running around. Yet, after reading all of these horror stories, I was surprised to also encounter nice and well-maintained apartments, in which everyone had their own bedroom.

6.2.1 Type of accommodation

There is a debate among scholars studying irregular migrants about the relation between income and the amount spent on accommodation. A correlation between the two, as there generally exists in Belgium and the Netherlands, has not been found for irregular migrants (Leerkes et al. 2004; Van Meeteren et al. 2007b). Other research seems to point in the same direction. Paspalanova (2006), for example, found that her respondents lived in cheap housing of poor quality, even though some had average incomes. She claims that irregular migrants share the priority of ‘living as cheaply as possible’ (ibid.: 119). In addition to this common priority, scholars often assume that irregular migrants’ juridical status prevents them from being able to do anything to improve their housing situation. In other words, they suggest that there is
no correlation between income and money spent on accommodation, as most irregular migrants live in cheap houses of bad quality because their vulnerable situation just does not allow them to find anything better (Burgers 1999a). Unlike the scholars referred to above, Chavez (1998) did find a relation between income and money spent on accommodation. He claims that crowded conditions are tolerated by temporary migrants, but they are not normally part of life for irregular migrants who aim to settle down. The latter do move into better housing if they can. In addition, other scholars emphasise that housing arrangements partly reflect the length of stay. Although most migrants share accommodation in the initial period, once a job is obtained, finding and moving to separate accommodation generally becomes a major objective (Leerkes et al. 2004; Roer-Strier & Olshtain-Mann 1999).

This diversity in research outcomes can be explained by bringing aspirations into the analysis. Most irregular migrants manage to arrange some form of accommodation; only one of my respondents lived on the streets when I interviewed him. A few others told me that they had lived on the streets in the past, sleeping in parks and public shelters during their initial period in illegality. The diversity in housing arrangements that I encountered was in part a reflection of the length of stay of the irregular migrant in question. Those who had lived in the destination country for some time often had been able to get a better deal than migrants who had just arrived. However, I found that the aim of obtaining better housing was not shared by all my respondents, but only by those with settlement aspirations. These migrants preferred the privacy of their own room or apartment and were willing to pay extra for it. As a result, while some settlement migrants live in shared arrangements out of economic necessity during the initial period of settlement (see also Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), those who can afford it move into more spacious and more private accommodation:

I lived with my brother for a while in the beginning but when I found work I wanted my own room. A family member read an ad indicating that there was a studio for rent ... I like it very much to have my own room so that I do not have to bother anyone (Brahim).

Investment migrants, however, do not usually wish to move to more private and consequently more expensive accommodation, even if they can afford it. They prefer to continue to live in shared arrangements in order to save money. Martina, for example, said, ‘We rented a studio with the four of us so we could share the costs, the rent and the electricity.’ In some cases, migrants live with family members or friends during their entire stay, as
they know from the outset that their stay will be only temporary. This is usually something the migrants and hosts agreed upon before the migration took place. Other investment migrants share studios and (student) apartments in which they occupy one room per person or share a room with multiple persons, usually also irregular migrants. In some cases it is not the rooms that are rented out but the beds (see also Leman 1997). These are often provided by employers, as was the case with Musa, who said, ‘My employer arranged a bed for me in a pension for € 150 per month.’

Those who live in low-quality dwellings are thus not only those who cannot afford anything better or who have just arrived, but also investment migrants for whom this is part of their strategy: it helps them to realise their aspirations. Investment migrants economise on many things, as this brings them closer to realisation of their goals. When Diego noted that I was impressed with the large share of his earnings he had managed to save, he responded, ‘Well we are a school of economics.’

Legalisation migrants are like investment migrants in that they hope the situation they are in is only temporary. They are therefore more willing to make concessions in their housing situation than settlement migrants are prepared to do. Those trying to find someone to marry usually prefer to spend money on going out rather than on accommodation. After all, going out brings attainment of their aspirations closer, because it enables them to meet potential wedding partners. In addition, they often live with family members who help them in their quest. Those who are involved in legal procedures sometimes still live in the house that was assigned to them by the Aliens Office or in one they found when they successfully passed through the first stages of the asylum procedure. In the past, asylum seekers in Belgium were allowed to live outside the asylum centre after their first positive decision. For all of my respondents, the second decision turned out negative, which transformed them into irregular migrants, but they continued to live in the same place. In many cases, their landlords did not know that their tenants had become illegal. They knew only that their tenants were in a precarious situation or that they were ‘arranging their papers’. Legalisation migrants are able to show some form of documentation to landlords, for example, their application form. As a result, they often manage to rent an apartment that is fairly decent from a landlord who is not trying to take advantage of their vulnerable situation. That is, the landlords do maintenance and ask market prices. In addition, organisations sometimes negotiate accommodation on their behalf.

However, if legalisation migrants have applied for regularisation and been denied, the police may come to their house to expel them. Some legalisation migrants therefore move and cannot afford to be picky about
where they move to. They have to settle for whatever they can get. Obviously, these tend to be dwellings in very bad condition offered by slumlords.

To my surprise, I found quite a number of legalisation migrants involved in procedures who were living with a Belgian or Dutch family. In exchange for the free room and board offered to them, these migrants engaged in light housework such as doing the laundry, cooking and cleaning. In all cases, the accounts the migrants gave of their living situation was that they had been taken in by a loving family with a heart for immigrants and were surely not being exploited as a live-in maid. Obviously, people in the latter situation would be more reluctant to talk to a researcher, as they would be in a more difficult position than the migrants I interviewed, so I do not want to make statements about the general conditions that accompany such arrangements.

All in all, there does not seem to be a relationship between income and money spent on accommodation in general, but there was a correlation for one specific category: settlement aspirations. In line with Chavez, I encountered migrants who were willing to spend more money on accommodation so they could give their children a private bedroom or a room to study. Unlike Paspalanova (2006), not all of my respondents wanted to live as cheaply as possible; only investment migrants did. Contrary to Burgers (1999a), some settlement migrants did manage to find a nice apartment.

It is interesting to try to explain why other scholars came to different conclusions. Paspalanova (2006) interviewed Eastern Europeans, who often have investment aspirations, so the explanation for her divergent results may lie in her specific sample. I probably found more diversity because my sample contains more variety in aspirations. Mahler (1995: 207) claims that accommodation is so expensive for irregular migrants that ‘in almost every case a minimum of an extended family is required to rent and maintain an apartment or house’. She further suggests that the high costs of housing tend to keep housing arrangements in flux such that they do not resemble the settling phase of migration as it is described by Chavez (1998) or Piore (1979). Not only were most of her respondents economically worse off than elsewhere, they lived in Long Island, a white middle-class suburb. According to her accounts, there was too little work available there, which meant that most irregular migrants were relatively poor, and accommodation was relatively expensive there. That is to say, it was much more expensive than in many European studies (Leerkes et al. 2007). This means, apart from irregular migrants’ aspirations, their length of stay and the economic opportunities they have, the structure of the local housing market partially explains the variety in irregular migrants’ housing situations. The next section therefore deals with the spatial distribution of irregular migrants.
6.2.2 Spatial distribution

Irregular migrants are mainly accommodated in large cities and a limited number of border and rural areas (Engbersen et al. 2002; Leerkes, Engbersen & Van San 2006; see Lianos 2001). Within cities, irregular migrants live in – often centrally located – poor immigrant districts (Leerkes et al. 2007). They end up in these neighbourhoods because housing is cheap there and because they provide proximity to work (Engbersen et al. 2006; Leerkes et al. 2007; Leman 1997). In addition, there is a large presence of regular migrants there who may be able to provide work, housing, care, health care, information, relevant documents and possible partners (Engbersen et al. 2006). According to Leerkes et al. (2007) it is not just that co-ethnics can help them; irregular migrants also prefer to live in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods where many people speak their language. Moreover, the large presence of co-ethnics renders irregular migrants inconspicuous (Leman 1997; Lianos 2001). Furthermore, after some time, ‘shadow institutions’ (Scott 1998) or ‘bastard institutions’ (Hughes 1951 1994) that cater specifically to irregular migrants begin to develop in immigrant districts (Engbersen et al. 2006; Leerkes et al. 2007). The population of irregular migrants is thus selectively incorporated into the urban landscape, and their spatial distribution is believed to reflect the preferences and interests of irregular migrants (Leerkes et al. 2007).

My own results do not allow me to make statements about distribution, but they do contribute to our understanding of where irregular migrants live and why. Many of my respondents with settlement or legalisation aspirations lived in the suburbs, because they preferred to live there instead of in an immigrant district. For many women, this had to do with the proximity to work. Whereas the preference to live close to work leads many men to immigrant districts, women mostly do domestic work for middle-class families in the suburbs. When I asked Fernanda why she lived in the suburbs, she responded, ‘Because I am close to my work and because I like this neighbourhood ... the first time I lived in this area too, a bit more south, and this sector is very quiet. It is close to everything, the school of my children. So I like it for that.’

The reasons my respondents gave for their presence in the suburbs all indicate that they prefer living there, for example, due to the proximity to work, good schools for their children and the opportunities for recreation. Many respondents were happy to live close to a park where they could go for a stroll on the weekends. Most importantly, they liked the tranquillity of the suburban neighbourhoods, where they could escape the crowded
city centre and immigrant districts. Lucas, for example, commented on the neighbourhood he recently moved to:

I like the area. I think it is peaceful, there is not so much noise, not too many people, not too many problems in the street, so it is good here ... When we came to take a look at this apartment we immediately liked it because of its location ... the school is close ... and because the area is beautiful and the apartment is very spacious.

Furthermore, many preferred to live in suburban areas because they believed the immigrant districts to be dangerous, especially for children. They preferred to avoid associating with other groups of immigrants:

The majority of the foreigners, immigrants, Moroccans, Africans ... many of those people are below the cultural level or they have bad customs ... Maybe I think a little like the Belgians as well. I think they are right when they say that the immigrants give many problems ... I don't know, they do things ... they harass people and that is not good ... they bother you ... I am not all right with the Moroccans and with their cars and all the harassing that they do or bothering women ... the clashing of cultures is difficult (Fernando, Chile)

After Fernando's wife was harassed by a Moroccan man in the immigrant district where they used to live, they decided to move to Wilrijk, a quiet middle-class suburban area near Antwerp.

I found that only investment migrants and those migrants whose ethnic background is heavily represented in immigrant districts – like Turks and Moroccans – want to live in those neighbourhoods. For investment migrants, these neighbourhoods provide an infrastructure that caters to their needs. This is where contractors come in search of employees. It is from here that the buses leave to take migrants to the location of their jobs, and it is where many landlords are willing to rent accommodation to irregular migrants. Settlement and legalisation migrants whose nationality is well represented benefit from the presence of ethnic shops and like being able to speak their own language in the neighbourhood.

Engbersen et al. (2006) and Leerkes et al. (2007) likely found a preference for immigrant districts by interviewing irregular migrants whose ethnic background was well represented in the neighbourhoods they selected. Owing to the diversity in my sample, I found much more divergent housing preferences among irregular migrants. The investment migrants I inter-
viewed did want to live in immigrant districts because of the infrastructure catering to them, but the migrants who had settlement or legalisation aspirations and those who belonged to small communities preferred to live elsewhere, such as in the suburbs. Not all of them were able to realise this ambition, though; some indicated that they did not like living in the immigrant district, but it was all they could afford.

Leerkes et al. (2007) and Engbersen et al. (2006) used police data to determine the spatial distribution of irregular migrants. It is well known that women are underrepresented in police statistics. The share of women among irregular migrants is believed to have increased considerably in recent years (Jandl 2007; Jokisch & Pribilsky 2002; Raijman, Schammah-Gesser & Kemp 2003). For some nationalities, more than half of the irregular migrant population consists of women nowadays (Glytsos 2005). As migrant women with settlement and legalisation ambitions prefer to live in the suburbs, the underrepresentation of women in police data leads to an underestimation of the number of irregular migrants who live in suburban areas. In addition, the police are likely to exercise more control in immigrant districts than in the suburbs, which makes migrants who live and possibly also work in the suburbs less likely to end up in the police statistics. As a result, Engbersen et al. (2006) and Leerkes et al. (2007) probably overestimate the share of irregular migrants in immigrant neighbourhoods.

6.2.3 Differences between Belgium and the Netherlands

Aspirations appear to underlie irregular migrants’ different housing preferences. Aspirations therefore partly explain the patterns found in the types and location of their accommodation arrangements. Table 6.1 presents irregular migrants’ different housing preferences per type of aspiration.

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The variety in housing situations that I encountered can be understood from the aspirations that irregular migrants have, their (economic) opportunities, their length of stay and the structure of the housing market in the area where they live. Bringing aspirations into the explanatory frame clears up much of the confusion surrounding divergent research outcomes.

The housing market is organised differently in Belgium than in the Netherlands. Belgium has a lot more private home ownership and fewer social housing projects. Leerkes et al. (2007) therefore hypothesise that irregular migrants will be less evenly distributed across the urban landscape in Belgium than in the Netherlands. I can reflect upon what my respondents told me, but I cannot make systematic comparisons in this respect. In both countries, the migrants interviewed said that it was difficult to find a decent place to live for an affordable price. They indicated that there were always people willing to rent to irregular migrants, but they could be difficult to find. Furthermore, in both countries, migrants who did not belong to a large minority group preferred to live outside the immigrant districts. In addition, settlement migrants in both countries were willing to spend money on their accommodation and not search for the cheapest they could find. My impression of the housing situation as expressed by my respondents is that the differences between the countries are not profound. The average price did seem a bit lower in Belgium. The few respondents who had lived in both countries expressed the same view.

6.3 Employment

Irregular migrants often combine a number of different strategies to cater to their basic needs (Triandafyllidou & Kosic 2006). One of these strategies is employment, which is discussed in this section. Other sources of income are dealt with in section 6.4. I first briefly explain how irregular migrants engage in employment, before moving on to discuss the link between irregular migrants’ individual aspirations and the hours they work, the type of work they do and the exploitation they experience.

Irregular migrants can work in several ways. First, they can be employed by an employer who pays them off the books. Second, they can obtain fraudulent working papers. Third, they can be self-employed (Coutin 2002). Self-employment is quite rare among irregular migrants. This is not surprising, as both Belgian and Dutch authorities demand substantial paperwork for this employment track, which is not easily done by migrants without nationality or permanent residency rights. Irregular migrants who are self-employed usually have started a business together with one or
more legal migrants (see Staring 2000). Apart from opening a shop as a form of self-employment, migrants come up with inventive forms of self-employment. Tuyishime, from Rwanda, for example, occasionally uses his three-room apartment as a hotel:

They come for one week or two weeks and they prefer me over the hotel ... they sleep here and I cook for them. They stay here, quiet, they can go in and out whenever they want. For two weeks maybe they pay € 600 or € 1,000. That is good.

He also does other activities that can be characterised as self-employment:

I went to a garage over there and they said to me when you find Africans who have a problem with their car, send them here, if they pay well, you get 50. It is always like that. And here in Europe there are a lot of Africans who have problems with their car.

Activities such as those described by Tuyishime are never my respondents' primary source of income, but always a means to supplement their income from employment. Whereas I do consider such activities self-employment, I do not consider migrants who work for private households doing occasional chores as self-employed, because they work in an employer-employee type of relationship. Following this categorisation, I did not find self-employment to be common among irregular migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands. Instead, they usually worked off the books or by means of fraudulent papers. In the past, it was possible for irregular migrants to work legally on the formal labour market, but this only happens in very exceptional cases nowadays (Engbersen et al. 2002; Van der Leun & Kloosterman 2006; Van Meeteren et al. 2007b). I did not encounter any in this research.

6.3.1 Working hours

Most US studies find that labour force participation is high among irregular migrants (Chavez 1998; Hagan 1994; Mahler 1995; Powers et al. 1998). North European studies, on the contrary, indicate that a large share of irregular migrants are unemployed. Studies in the Netherlands, for example, find that one third of respondents had no job at all (Burgers 1998; Engbersen et al. 2002; Van der Leun & Kloosterman 1999). They report that when irregular migrants do work, they work a lot of hours, usually more than the general 40-hour working week (Ahmad 2008; Datta et al. 2007; Paspalanova 2006). This was
indeed the case among the investment migrants I interviewed. Work was crucial for them, as it allowed them to realise their aspirations. They worked long hours, six or seven days per week. To save the financial means necessary for future investments in their home country, they tried to work as much as possible during their stay in the destination country. Investment migrants like Diego and Constanza responded to the question of how much they work by saying, ‘Well, I work every day really’ or ‘I take all the opportunities I can get.’

Settlement migrants, however, do not want to work six or seven days per week, and they do not want to work these long hours per day, as they value free time.

They have offered me work as a cook. They called me a month ago for a job but I did not accept it ... you earn money but I want to live [in English instead of Spanish]. Yes because it is very difficult to have some time for yourself because in a restaurant you work from Monday to Sunday practically so there is no time for anything. I have to live as well (Ignacio, Chile).

I found that settlement migrants prefer to work in relatively stable, non-seasonal jobs (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). They choose to work in Monday-to-Friday types of arrangements so that they have the weekends off, and they preferred to work during the day so that they could be at home in the evenings. For many settlement migrants, this has to do with the fact that they live with their families, which sometimes include children. They want to spend time with family members and friends and lead a regular life. If they can afford it, they would like to be at home rather than take on extra work. As Martina, who works 30 hours per week, said:

My bosses ask me all the time, how are you with your jobs and I say ‘good, good.’ ... She said a friend of hers was looking for someone for Friday ... and I said ‘no, I am good with my hours, I don’t want to work all the time you know, no, no.’

Having a regular and continuous job is also considered an important aspect of life for settlement migrants (see Psimmenos & Kassimati 2006). But sometimes they do not manage to find this type of employment, which means they have to accept other jobs. In such cases they tend to work intermittently.

If I have some money I am not going to continue to work you know. The work is often very heavy, it kills you know ... Last time I worked for
three months I think ... but at last I just could not take it anymore. It is really heavy work you know. I have some money now you know, maybe it will last two months more (Dembah, Guinea).

In contrast, legalisation migrants aspire to become legalised, and working informally could prevent them from achieving this goal. Both in Belgium and in the Netherlands, if an irregular migrant is caught doing informal work, he or she receives notification to leave the country, which severely reduces the chances of legalisation and simultaneously increases the chances of being deported. Therefore, legalisation migrants try to work as little as possible, as Monana from Congo said, ‘I don't look [for work], because by working in black I run the risk of getting caught’. Although both settlement migrants and legalisation migrants want to stay in the destination country, they have quite distinct job preferences that lead to different patterns of incorporation. I experienced the importance of the distinction between legalisation and settlement aspirations when it comes to work in a conversation I had with Lazzat from Uzbekistan. When we talked, he had just found out that his application for regularisation had been denied, and he was contemplating his next steps. He said, ‘I am not sure what to do. I should either file a new application for asylum or regularisation or I should start to look for a job.’

Many legalisation migrants work part-time in order to cover their basic needs and choose to spend the rest of their time searching for a marriage partner and attending language courses. This does not mean that this choice is always easy. Those who do not work may get bored and start to feel useless:

It is black work ... I do not take such risks in this life ... that is dangerous ... every day. What if the police catch me? That is not good for my application. But do I still have a life like this? If I don’t work it is good for my application but it is not good for my health ... for my life (Alexandre, Congo).

Many legalisation migrants choose to refrain from work as much as possible because it could obstruct the fulfilment of their aspirations, even though they could find a job if they wanted to. Efunsegun, from Nigeria, explains why he does not want to work:

I never worked since I came to Belgium. I have been working voluntarily always [for an NGO] ... Many undocumented people they are working in this country ... but I don’t want to associate myself with that system ... because people go to rent documents you know they use
them to work, and by the time they get caught they end up in prison. Even when I was in Nigeria I have never been to prison you know. So I don’t want to associate myself with when I have to rent a paper to work ... when the control is there I am arrested and I end up my life in prison. And the worst thing that could happen to me is that they send me back to my country. You know, what is the use of my working? The best option that I have is to wait until I have my personal permission with my passport. Then I want to look for job ... So these are the reasons why I don’t want to run that risk, not that there are no people who do it but I don’t want to do it.

Although legalisation migrants would rather not work, they are not all in a position where they can afford not to. Efunsegun lives with a Belgian family who supports him. Not all legalisation migrants are able to raise alternative sources of income, though. If they do need to work to gather or supplement their income, they work the minimum that is necessary. It is not the case that they can afford not to work and then make up a story about striving for legal papers around it. When I asked Efunsegun what he would do if he did not have this family to support him, he replied:

No, even if I was not with [this family] I never thought of doing it [informal work]. You say to somebody that you want to work and make money, this is a question of one or two of my friends they will rent a pass for me, but I will never do it you know.

Not working is thus his top priority because of the legalisation strategy he is pursuing. He is convinced he would find another way around working if he did not have the family to support him. It is likely that he would manage; after all he managed not to work for quite some time before he met the Belgian family. He is prepared to live with little. This is a sacrifice that he is willing to make in order to realise his aspirations. This does not mean that none of the legalisation migrants work, or that all unemployed irregular migrants aspire to become legalised. It only means that legalisation migrants prefer not to and consequently do it as little as possible if they can. I do not mean to say that no settlement migrants work more than 40 hours per week or that there are no investment migrants who work less than that. The point is that their aspirations lead them to have certain preferences regarding work. Some of them manage to realise the work situation that they prefer, others do not. If one wants to understand the patterns of functional incorporation of irregular migrants, one has to
consider their aspirations, as functional incorporation patterns are partially explained by aspirations. This applies not only to hours worked, but also to the type of employment they engage in and the extent to which they feel exploited. These issues are discussed in the next sections.

6.3.2 Type of work

It is commonly held – in both Europe and the US – that irregular migrant men work in economic sectors like agriculture and horticulture, construction, garment manufacturing, food processing and hotels and restaurants (Ambrosini 2001; Anderson 1999; Burgers 1998; Engbersen et al. 2002; Samers 2001), whereas women tend to work as housekeepers or as caregivers in private households (Leman 1997; Triandafyllidou & Kosic 2006). This latter is not generally regarded to be a matter of choice or preference. Rather, these are considered to be the only jobs available to irregular migrant women (Kosic & Triandafyllidou 2004; Raijman et al. 2003). Like other scholars, I found that women work almost exclusively in the domestic sector, cleaning or babysitting. They did not work in horticulture or construction as men did. However, it was not that they could not find jobs other than domestic work; these women actually preferred to work in this sector. Furthermore, whereas other researchers found domestic work to be the exclusive domain of women, I found that many men with settlement or legalisation aspirations did and preferred doing domestic work as well.

As said before, some legalisation migrants have to work some hours to be able to sustain themselves, though they would prefer not to engage in informal employment. In these cases they try to work in jobs where they have the least chance of government controls:

I can work there in the church or in the house, in somebody’s house. In someone’s house, not outside but inside. If I enter a house like I have entered yours, if someone invites me, like, for example, if you would have an acquaintance I could come there and I clean, then I am done and they give me €20. And then I come back next week for example. Then there is nobody who sees me because it is inside the house. And if somebody comes by they can say that I am a friend … I do not want to work in things like construction. I have my family here and moreover if they expel me today to Kinshasa I know that there will be people waiting for me at the airport. They will arrest me right there at the airport. So I try, even though I suffer, I try to respect the Belgian law a bit (Albert, Congo).
Private households are thus perceived as a much safer place to work than, for example, construction sites (see also Cyrus & Vogel 2006). This does not imply that only legalisation migrants want to work for private households. Migrants with other types of aspirations are also concerned with their safety. Andrei from Moldova – who has had settlement aspirations for quite some time – has always preferred to work in private households. He said, ‘I have never worked for a company. I have avoided it all the time because at big companies all the time the process of control is much bigger than in the case I work for private people.’ Settlement and legalisation migrants thus prefer to work for private households, as domestic workers, handymen, gardeners or babysitters.

Settlement and legalisation migrants usually fear expulsion more than investment migrants do. They are generally more settled, so they have more to lose by being expelled. Many former asylum seekers stress the fear of expulsion (see Koser 1998). This has to do with the situation in the countries they are from, but also with the fact that asylum seekers’ fingerprints are registered in a database. This means that the police can easily determine their identity, which makes expulsion easier than it is for other irregular migrants who can hide their identity (Broeders 2009).

But these are not the only reasons why legalisation and settlement migrants prefer to work for private households. Black (2003), for example, points out that many irregular migrants try to stay clear of any form of illegal activity as illegal migration has already become criminalised (see Penninx, Berger & Kraal 2006). Migrants prefer doing jobs like informal domestic work, thinking this is more socially acceptable than an informal job in, for example, construction. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the mere fact of being settled makes migrants fear expulsion, and this fear is usually even fiercer in cases where children are involved. For Albert, this probably weighs heavier than the risk he runs in Congo. Although he said he was afraid to be arrested in Congo, he later indicated that he would go back to Congo if he obtained papers to visit his family there. I frequently noted such inconsistencies in the stories of the risks people would run if they were to be expelled. The reasons for not wanting to go back are therefore not easily singled out, and a combination of factors is at play. But whatever the reasons may be, they make these migrants avoid work as much as possible, and they make low-risk jobs especially attractive.

Furthermore, settlement and legalisation migrants prefer to work for private households because this way, they usually work for several employers. As a result, if one employer does not treat them well or if an employer fires them, they do not lose their entire income. And if they get a new job
offer, they can more easily take a chance and try it out, as enough other jobs remain if it does not work out. They are therefore in a less vulnerable position than those who depend on one employer. Moreover, work for private households provides legalisation migrants the possibility of working part-time. Such opportunities are generally unavailable in horticulture, construction and restaurants.

Settlement and legalisation migrants also said they prefer to work for Belgian and Dutch private households because they paid the best and exploited irregular migrants least. Private Dutch or Belgian households pay between €7 and €15 per hour. My respondents agree that it is best to work for Belgians or Dutch people and not for other immigrants, including their own kind. Diego, for example, said, ‘Honestly, foreigners don’t pay well. To work for our own people always complicates things.’ According to Constanza, from Bolivia,

It is better to work for a Belgian. Because of the way they treat you. Those for whom you really don’t want to work are Spanish and Italian people … For example, sometimes we talk among friends, female and male, and we ask, ‘How is your boss, where is he or she from’, and normally Spanish and Italian people are people who are very, very difficult to deal with. Because they don’t think they have someone who helps them with the work, they think they have a slave who has to work for them. And it is not like that. They don’t respect the hours that you work, they don’t respect many things. But normally Belgians do, it is better to work for Belgians. Obviously, with them the problem is the language. But it is preferable to struggle with the language than to struggle with hours.

Marouane said he preferred to work for Belgians because they paid €50 per day, while a Moroccan or a Turkish employer paid only half. Valentina said,

I only work for Belgians … If this person is not Belgian, they don’t pay you and, well Belgians are the best, they are honest people and the majority shows much consideration. They treat the persons who work for them as a normal person, you understand. The Belgians here do that.

These results run contrary to what is generally assumed. Many scholars find that migrants who can turn to co-ethnics in search of a job are better off than those who cannot (Burgers & Engbersen 1999; Leerkes et al. 2004; Van der Leun 2003b). Engbersen et al. (2002), for example, find that Turkish
and Chinese migrants have the highest employment rates because they can work for co-ethnic businesses. They further write that as Somali migrants lack ethnic entrepreneurship, they have to go outside their own community to find work, which, according to the authors, leads to many problems. In fact, many of my respondents preferred not to work for co-ethnics because they believed them to pay the least and to not always treat their employees correctly. My respondents therefore consciously turned to employment possibilities outside of their own communities. It seems that although the presence of co-ethnics may help irregular migrants in finding some kind of employment, working for Belgian or Dutch individual households guarantees the least exploitative conditions.

While settlement and especially legalisation migrants are particularly attracted to individual households for work, investment migrants usually do the jobs that natives reject. These are the low-status jobs found in economic sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, restaurants and construction. After all, in both the Netherlands and Belgium, organisations in these sectors often require (seasonal) labour market flexibility and cheap labour due to competitive pressures (Kaizen & Nonneman 2007). Like most temporary migrants, investment migrants tend to accept jobs that other migrants and natives refuse owing to their exploitative character. Investment migrants are happy to work long hours. The jobs are unstable, and often seasonal, but this insecurity does not bother investment migrants as it does others, as their engagement is only temporary anyway.

Piore (1979) and Massey (1986) remark that work is purely a means to an end for temporary migrants. They are consequently the closest thing in real life to the *homo economicus* of economic theory: they are target earners seeking to maximise short-term income before returning home. Recall Diego (Chile) who said, ‘we are a school of economics’. Investment migrants usually take what they can get, and if the work ends, they try to find something new fast. The labour they perform is usually the kind that requires long hours of hard work, which is not what settlement or legalisation migrants want, because it is too hard to do for long and too disruptive of their lives. Moreover, jobs in these sectors are risky, as they are heavily controlled. This constitutes less of a problem for investment migrants, as they have usually not migrated from far away and can easily travel back and forth. Newspapers report on the police expelling Eastern Europeans, only to have them arrive back on the job the next week (Paspalanova 2006).

But these are not the only reasons why investment migrants tend to do the type of work that natives or other migrants reject. They are also more likely to accept the prevailing low wages (see Carter 2005). These wages are
below the official minimum and below what settlement and legalisation migrants usually demand, but they are higher than what investment migrants are used to in their countries of origin. From their frame of reference they consequently feel that they are being paid well. They value the wages in terms of what they can buy with them in their countries of origin, as their earnings will be spent there. Settlement or legalisation migrants, on the other hand, are not prepared to work for such low wages. Vincente, from Guatemala, explains why investment migrants work for low wages and why he is not willing to do so:

Because for them in their country a euro is worth a lot, so they have the capacity to earn less and to go and invest that in their country so it is more convenient for them to be here and even though they earn less, the money multiplies there. We to the contrary do not have other possibilities ... what we earn here is what we invest here, in this place itself. And this is the difference, because everything is very expensive here so we can't say all right we are going to earn € 6 per hour because I have to live from that and that is not possible with this amount. What happens is that they earn this because in their country this money is worth a lot, it is worth four times more than what it is here. So well, they charge less.

All in all, investment migrants work in the sectors that are traditionally associated with the informal labour of irregular migrants: horticulture, construction, personal services and restaurants. They usually have few problems with the working conditions there. Settlement and legalisation migrants, on the contrary, prefer not to work under such conditions, which attracts them to private households. Sometimes they do not manage to find anything else, and so they are forced to work in sectors where mostly investment migrants work and in which they feel exploited. They do normally manage to find work there, as the demand for workers is high. Most respondents say that if you want work it is not difficult to find, but it depends on the conditions and the pay you are willing to accept.

People who say they can't find work in Holland, [on the] first day I say, good you don't have it, [on the] next day I give him advice. [On the] next day, [if] he says 'I don't have it', I say 'sorry you are an idiot, be gone, ... I am a thousand percent, not hundred but thousand percent sure that if a person really likes to have work in the Netherlands, he has it in maximum three days (Andrei, Moldovia).
To find work I just go to an employment agency. Here in The Hague there are many employment agencies. There used to be a lot of them, now there are fewer. Or you go to coffeehouses or to restaurants to ask for a job, to find work. It is not a problem, you can find work everywhere (Üsko, Turkey).

Marouane, from Morocco, said, ‘[I]t is very easy [to find a job] but they don’t pay well ... [Brussels] is the easiest city in Europe, for finding a job.’ The problem is thus not so much to find work, but to find a job that fits the aspirations of the migrant in question. And in this case, investment migrants have an advantage as they are less demanding.

**Recent changes**

Things appear to be changing, which is why the issue of finding work may become more difficult. Employers have started to prefer employing investment migrants and newly legal migrants over the other two categories of irregular migrants. They have several reasons to do so. First, investment migrants are willing to work for lower wages. Second, many investment migrants have set up systems in which they take over each other’s jobs when they leave (see also Paspalanova 2006). This implies that employers are never short of workers and do not have recruitment problems, as the migrants themselves arrange for a constant supply of hard workers. Settlement or legalisation migrants are much more demanding: they want holidays and time off to rest from the heavy work, and they are not as easily replaced. Third, the arrival of regular migrants from new EU countries makes irregular migrants less attractive as employees. Many respondents indicate that the competitive pressure from migrants from new EU countries makes it more difficult for them to find work. Dembah, from Guinea, said, ‘Yeah I had an employer and actually I could always depend on him. If I needed money he would say ok come. In the past he really helped me out but now, when I say I need work because I really need money he says, yes at this moment I do not have anything for you because I have hired employees from Poland. I say what? Poland.’ The Polish workers Dembah is referring to have several advantages over him. First, they are temporary workers, and therefore they are committed to work hard for a certain period. Second, as Poles are now also citizens of the European Union, they are allowed to work legally. In practice, many do not work legally, but under semi-formal arrangements. Many employers prefer such hybrid forms of informal employment, such as full-time work declared as part-time work, because their workers appear to work legally in case they are checked (Ruhs & Anderson 2009). Irregular
migrants are losing their competitive edge, because they cannot work under semi-formal arrangements (Iskander 2000). This means that Dembah is now less attractive to his employer. He demands more pay than investment migrants do. He can only work informally, and he only wants to work when he needs money. When he has enough, he quits and leaves it to the employer to find a replacement. Due to the developments outlined, it is becoming more difficult for settlement and legalisation migrants to work in jobs that investment migrants generally do.

Other scholars point to similar trends. According to Van der Leun and Kloosterman (2006), the arrival of new groups of immigrants in combination with recent policy changes has caused the labour of irregular migrants to go ‘further underground’ (Van der Leun & Kloosterman 2006: 59; see Djajic 1999). They also claim that labour conditions have deteriorated, as indicated by diminished wages and the increased use of subcontractors. They note a sectoral shift as well, with migrants now more likely to work in restaurants and catering services and in the domain of personal services. ‘[I]llegal labour appears to move to sectors or segments where undocumented workers can or will less easily be detected: autochthonous private households and ethnic businesses’ (Van der Leun & Kloosterman 2006: 66). These findings are in line with the developments I signalled earlier. However, Van der Leun and Kloosterman (2006) suggest that these developments are negative. Indeed, the increasing use of subcontractors weakens the employment position of irregular migrants. Furthermore, if informal work increasingly takes place within ethnic businesses, then this is probably not a sign of improving conditions for irregular migrants. Yet, I am not so sure that the sectoral shift to ‘autochthonous private households’ should be interpreted as negative. After all, my respondents with settlement and legalisation aspirations actually preferred to work for private households. Furthermore, as indicated before, a shift to the sector of personal services usually implies multiple employers, which means that irregular migrants become less dependent on the whims of one employer. In addition, they are paid better and have better working conditions if they work in Belgian or Dutch households.

A consequence of this sectoral shift to private households is that it is becoming more difficult for settlement and legalisation migrant men to find work than for women. Although some men also do cleaning work for private households, this sector is still dominated by women. This is likely to continue, as domestic work is traditionally labelled as women’s labour. Men therefore usually work for Dutch or Belgian households as handymen, a job for which specific skills are required (see chapter 9). These jobs
are therefore not easily accessed. Many respondents indicated that it was easier for women to find work than for men. According to Marouane, from Morocco, ‘The women they work a lot, it is very easy for them to find work in the black ... I know a girl who is without papers, she works three jobs per day. Three jobs, yes. She earns € 2,000 a month.’ Women not only find a job more easily, the jobs they find are also those that are relatively well-paid and steady. When I asked Ignacio if he would recommend people from Chile to migrate to Belgium he responded, ‘When it is a man I recommend he does not come, if it is a woman, then good, come, because women have more work than men. But for a man no.’ If more migrants give a similar advice to potential migrants, female irregular migration flows are likely to continue to increase in the coming years.

6.3.3 Exploitation

According to Samers (2001), both social scientists and the media tend to focus on sensationalist stories of irregular migrants and their unscrupulous employers. Indeed, many scholars focus on the vulnerable situation that irregular migrants find themselves in vis-à-vis their employers (see, e.g., Adam et al. 2002; Anderson 2001; Anderson 1999; Devillé 2008; Kosic & Triandafyllidou 2004). Because of their lack of a legal status, irregular migrants are assumed to work under difficult conditions for low salaries and that they are powerless to do anything about it. Many of my respondents confirmed this situation: their position was very vulnerable and it was difficult for them to fight any injustice done to them. At the same time, only a few of my respondents indicated they had been maltreated themselves. The cases where this had happened were sometimes shocking and understandably food for sensationalist stories. Vincente, from Guatemala, for example, explained how his own family members had taken advantage of him:

When I came here, I started to work on the second day. But I had bad luck ... I worked for almost a year and I was never paid. With my own family ... it was my brother-in-law ... it is a little difficult to explain but I lived in his house. And he said I will pay you, for example, € 80 or € 70 for a day of work, 10 for the food, 15 for the food, and the rest is for you. And because I was living in his house and everything, I said well, I am going to work hard and I believed them, I believed that they would carry out their word, but they did not, in the end they never paid me anything.
Like Vincente, persons who have been maltreated usually say that this was a one-time event at the start of their migrant career which taught them to be more cautious. Obviously, Vicente’s experience made him extremely aware of his vulnerable situation. Dembah, who is from Guinea, could talk for hours about his precarious situation and how employers take advantage of his vulnerability, yet his personal experiences in this respect were limited:

[T]hose Arabs they profit from me because they know about my situation. Sometimes if you go work for them you really have to be [hits with his fist on the table] otherwise you won’t get your money ... for example, I used to have some acquaintances with an employment agency that let me work for three weeks and then they did not pay me ... but when I said [hits with hand on the table] I want my money, he paid it straight away.

When I asked him how often this had happened to him he said, ‘Well just this one time with this Turk.’ Usually I received an answer like the one Antonia, from Ecuador, gave me:

Thank God it never happened to me that they did not pay me. Because I have heard about people who don’t pay, it happens to many people when they come ... I had bad experiences with one man but since I left him, everybody pays me and they are very nice.

Tarek, from Algeria, said, ‘It has never happened that they did not pay me. They always give you your money. If you work you can even ask for an advance.’ Arshan, from Iran, told me that he once worked a whole night for only one euro per hour. He said that ever since this happened he makes sure he negotiates his salary before he starts the work and he has not encountered such problems since.

Although there are a lot of stories about maltreatment in the literature, most of my respondents indicated they had not suffered from it, and when they had it was only at the start of their stay. Most migrants find ways to guard themselves against misbehaviour by employers. Constanza, from Bolivia, for example, said, ‘[O]nly the new people [are abused] because the other people already know many things so they don’t let themselves be abused.’ She further explained that irregular migrants talk amongst one another about the reputation of employers to make sure they do not work for abusive employers. For new employers there is obviously no such information. Constanza explained how employers are tested in such cases:
You have to try the first month and evaluate if it is a good person or if they are going to pay you well or if it is punctual … the bosses make us go through a test, a trial to see if you know how to clean, how to cook, how to iron, etcetera etcetera. After you have gone through all these tests you also have the right to ask them when they are going to pay you, the data, and how, and also to know your rights … you find this security to be able to talk like this, this freedom to really say ok I want you to pay me every first of the month, I want to have a holiday, I want to have a subscription for public transport, many details.

A problem with determining the extent to which irregular migrants are exploited is that exploitation is experienced differently. Other scholars also report difficulties in determining exploitation (see, e.g., Triandafyllidou & Kosic 2006). Düvell and Jordan (2006: 61) found many differences in perceptions of exploitation, but were not able to explain them: ‘Some emphasised their success. Others would not even complain about low wages or obvious exploitation … Others critically reflected on the humiliating conditions and their rank in the social hierarchy and admitted to themselves that they had moved downwards socially.’ Anderson (1999: 49) remarked that some of his respondents ‘looked back on their employment, despite harshness of conditions, low pay and the attendant uncertainties more positively than one would expect’. He further writes, ‘The perception of a job as lowly or exploitative at the objective level may not be felt by an undocumented person in the same way subjectively’ (ibid.: 44). One therefore cannot compare subjective experiences and then make objective statements about them. What can be done is to attempt to understand where these different perceptions come from by bringing aspirations into the analysis.

I noted that divergent perceptions of objectively similar circumstances have a lot to do with aspirations. For example, investment migrants hardly ever experience exploitation, whereas legalisation migrants usually immediately emphasise the exploitative conditions under which they work. Houssine, from Morocco, for example,aspires to become legalised:

I work two days a week in the black [off the books] and I earn € 50 per day. Everybody profits from the people without papers. And you know why? Because he knows that if you give € 50 to someone without papers he is happy with it … Black work is not good. Why? Because with black work it is the boss who profits. He profits a lot. And why does he profit? Because you work without papers.
Houssine works an eight-hour shift in a restaurant for the €50 he earns per day. Investment migrants usually work for much less without complaint. Furthermore, Houssine indicated that he was always paid on time and that his employers treated him well. Yet he kept stressing that his employer profited from him. It seemed to be the unequal relationship that bothered him and made him feel exploited more than the actual treatment he received. In the same vein, settlement and legalisation migrants who have to work in jobs that investment migrants typically do report high levels of dissatisfaction and perceptions of exploitation. Legalisation migrants especially complain of exploitation, as this is bound up with their aspirations. Recall legalisation migrant Dnari, from Sierra Leone, who said, ‘I didn’t go to Europe and stop here to do illegal work, that is no use.’ Whereas settlement migrants come to Europe to work informally, legalisation migrants do not want to work informally. Settlement migrants may be dissatisfied with their job because it does not allow them to live a regular life or because it does not pay well, but for legalisation migrants their rejection of informal labour is much more fundamental. Exactly the same job is thus experienced differently by migrants with different aspirations.

6.3.4 Differences between Belgium and the Netherlands

The previous sections suggest that the types of jobs irregular migrants do can be explained by both irregular migrants’ aspirations as well as the opportunities they have. The aspirations of investment migrants prompt them to choose to work as much as they can, taking sometimes exploitative conditions for granted, whereas the aspirations of settlement and legalisation migrants lead them to prefer work within private households. However, their opportunity structures mean that not all irregular migrants manage to get the jobs they want. Many investment migrants work for co-ethnics as a result of their opportunity structure, as these are the only people they associate with. Other scholars have found that irregular migrant workers are specialised by nationality as well (Glytsos 2005). This was also sometimes the case among my respondents. However, I found that although many irregular migrants work for co-ethnics, this does not stem from preference. If they have a choice, many actually choose not to work for co-ethnics. But some just do not have the opportunities to work for people other than their own.

Table 6.2 summarises the main findings regarding employment patterns and aspirations.
One may wonder if there are major differences between the employment patterns of irregular migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands. After all, the informal sector is relatively larger in Belgium than it is in the Netherlands. Obviously, the scope of this book does not allow for systematic comparisons. Yet what I can do is reflect upon my respondents’ perceptions. Even if these experiences do not reflect the objective situation, most irregular migrants do act upon these perceptions. This means that their perceptions do affect employment patterns.

Kamel, from Morocco, for example, moved to Belgium as a result of rumours. He said, ‘I [came to Belgium] because I heard ... that there was a lot more work in Belgium than in the Netherlands.’ Brahim, also from Morocco, had a similar experience: ‘I lived in the Netherlands for almost nine years before I came to Belgium ... I heard that it was easier to find work in Belgium and that they are less strict with the illegals.’ When Halil was still in Turkey he called several friends in Europe to inquire about the employment situation in the countries these friends lived in: ‘I called friends in Germany and the Netherlands. My friends there told me that it was difficult to find work. My friend in Belgium was the only one who said he surely had work for me.’ Another Moroccan, Hassan, who lived in the Netherlands in the past and now lives in Belgium said, ‘[T]here is no work in the Netherlands. In Belgium it is all a bit easier.’ And Nabil, from Morocco, said, ‘I have lived in the Netherlands for twelve years. I left because it gradually became more difficult for me to find a job ... In Belgium there was more work than in the Netherlands. I mostly worked in construction here.’ Armine, also from Morocco, said, ‘I left the Netherlands because I was unemployed at a certain moment and I could not find a job anymore ... There is no black work there

### Table 6.2 Employment patterns per type of aspiration

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<td>Work hours</td>
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<td>Type of work</td>
<td>‘Typical’ irregular migrant sectors</td>
<td>In native private households</td>
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<td>Perception of exploitation</td>
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<td>Certain types of work</td>
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anymore. It has become less in Belgium as well but there is still more here than in the Netherlands."

The respondents quoted above lived in Belgium when they were interviewed, but they had lived in the Netherlands before. I did not encounter any migrants in the Netherlands who had previously lived in Belgium. Nevertheless, like the respondents in Belgium, my respondents in the Netherlands all believed that it was easier to find a job in Belgium than in the Netherlands. Andrei, from Moldovia, for example, said, ‘[I]n Belgium it is much easier [to find employment]. I have met so many people who stayed, for example, one year in Germany, two years in Belgium and one year here, who say Belgium is much easier.’ Some irregular migrants appear to be quite mobile and move across European borders in search of employment. According to Mohammed, from Morocco, many irregular migrants have left the Netherlands: ‘[T]here used to be a lot [of irregular migrants] here but many have gone to Spain. They get resident papers there, work; many people have gone ... many Moroccan people I know have gone to Spain.’

Although I cannot determine to what extent the statements made by my respondents reflect reality, it is clear that irregular migrants act upon rumours and their perceptions of the situation, and these perceptions all point in the same direction. I can therefore conclude that Belgium is regarded as a country with more favourable conditions for work than the Netherlands. Irregular migrants who are in search of work – investment and settlement migrants – are therefore more likely to be found in Belgium than in the Netherlands.

6.4 Other sources of income and assistance

Besides engaging in informal employment, irregular migrants can obtain resources from the social networks in which they are embedded or by means of criminal activities (Van der Leun & Kloosterman 2006). Scholars in the Netherlands and Belgium have carefully studied the involvement of irregular migrants in crime (see, e.g., De Boom, Engbersen & Leerkes 2006; Engbersen & Van der Leun 2001, 1998, 1995; Engbersen & Van der Leun 2001, 1998, 1995; Engbersen et al. 2007; Leerkes 2009, 2007; Leerkes & Bernasco 2007; Leerkes et al. 2004; Van der Leun 1999, 2003a; Van Meeteren et al. 2008). As the focus of the current research was not on criminal activities, I do not elaborate on this topic here. The current research did look at the resources irregular migrants derive from their social networks, in other words, from the gift and barter economy (Van der Leun & Kloosterman 2006). Earlier in this book, I offered a theoretical critique of current research
practice involving the study of social networks and the social capital embedded in these networks. I now return to some of the points mentioned there. Doing so demonstrates the downsides of current research practice, as well as the insights gained by an approach that takes aspirations as a central focus.

In addition to criminal activities and resources from the gift and barter economy, some irregular migrants receive resources from governmental organisations. This flies in the face of the findings of some other research (Chavez et al. 1997; Mahler 1995; Massey et al. 1987; Paspalanova 2006; Van der Leun 2003b; Van der Leun & Kloosterman 1999; Van Nieuwenhuyze 2009). According to Van der Leun (2003b: 40) irregular migrants are unable to access the formal support that (governmental) organisations provide; only the less-regulated informal support provided by organisations is within their reach. However, I found that in Belgium, state-sponsored support is substantial for some individuals. Because in practice it proved difficult to disentangle formal and informal support from organisations, both forms are discussed together later in this chapter, even though informal aid from organisations may technically be categorised as part of the gift and barter economy. The next section deals with the gift and barter economy, followed by a section on support provided by organisations.

6.4.1 The gift and barter economy

Irregular migrants mobilise support from the social networks in which they are embedded. This support is often referred to as social capital. Not all social capital supplied by networks is support. Social networks can supply other resources as well. Briggs (1998) conceptualises two types of social capital available in social networks: social leverage and social support. Social leverage helps people to ‘get ahead’, whereas social support helps people to ‘get by’ or cope (Briggs 1998: 178). Social leverage can help people to realise their aspirations, while social support ensures that migrants’ basic needs are met. I conceptualised functional incorporation as relating to the way irregular migrants sustain themselves. This section therefore deals with the social support migrants derive from the social networks they are embedded in, leaving the role of social leverage in the realisation of aspirations to be discussed later in this book.

What is striking in the analysis of the support my respondents receive is that many investment and settlement migrants needed little support to sustain themselves and they received little of it. These migrants generated most of their resources from employment and needed support only if they were temporarily unemployed or in case of unforeseen circumstances. Whereas
they did rely on their social network for information about where they could receive health care and how to find jobs, they were largely self-sustaining, only occasionally needing to supplement their income from labour. When I asked Martina, from Bolivia, who helps her if she does not have money or work, she replied, ‘I have always had work, and health. The first six months have been critical ... I had some reserves; I made sure I did not spend much.’ As Martina indicated, investment and settlement migrants mostly need support when they arrive and do not yet have a job. Once they have obtained employment they only occasionally need additional income sources.

In contrast, legalisation migrants structurally need a lot of support because they wish to refrain from work as much as possible. In fact, they prefer to generate resources from support rather than through informal labour. Instead of searching for a job, they look for monetary gifts with which they can pay the rent and buy food. Settlement and investment migrants sometimes live on gifts during the initial period of their stay, but after a while their caregivers expect them to be able to sustain themselves independently. When they find jobs and move into independent accommodation, they do still occasionally receive material help, like furniture or clothes, but they usually no longer receive substantial monetary gifts. This is partly because they do not need it, but caregivers also appear to refuse to give investment and settlement migrants money on a structural basis. They receive only small sums, on the order of € 10 (see also Staring 2001). In case of special circumstances, such as when an irregular migrant is very ill and in need of expensive treatment, he or she may receive a larger sum especially for this purpose. If there are no special circumstances and settlement and investment migrants need larger sums to sustain themselves, they have to borrow.

Having established that different types of irregular migrants have different needs, the question is how do they get support, and from whom. Most scholars look within ethnic communities as a source of support. As pointed out earlier in this book, many scholars equate social networks with ethnic networks, or ethnic community networks, meaning that they look for sources of assistance within the ethnic community of the migrant in question, overlooking other possibilities. Their focus is on community structures in specific localities. Whereas others consider the ethnic community to be the most important source of support for irregular migrants, I found that this is certainly not the case for irregular migrants in general, but only for specific categories of migrants. My results indicate that migrants with different aspirations draw support from different sources. The most important sources are family relations, ‘ethnic community’ relations, relations with natives and support from organisations.
**Family support**

If respondents have family in the host country they receive help from them, regardless of the type of aspirations they have. Family receives them, provides a roof over their head, food on the table, and sometimes even gives the newcomers pocket money until they are able to find a job and sustain themselves independently. Support from family is generally all-encompassing and unconditional in the initial period. However, family members seldom want to provide all-encompassing support forever. After a while, migrants have to be able to settle down on their own, return with enough savings or become legalised so they can live independently. Once migrants live independently, they can always turn to family in case of a temporary setback, but they cannot expect to be fully taken care of forever.

My family here helps me. They do the little that they can. They help me but they cannot sustain me, they also have their own obligations and they also don't earn much … But yes, if I have a problem I go to one of them and they help me. But it is like this that they can’t sustain me and my two sons, that they can’t do (Catalina, Colombia).

Of all three categories, legalisation migrants who are involved in procedures receive the least family support. This is not because their family refuses to help them, but because they seldom have family residing in the country. When they do, these family members usually do try to support them until they receive papers.

All in all, people who can generate support from family members are relatively better off because family relationships allow for all-encompassing support. The closer the family relation the more valuable and the more easily obtained the support tends to be. Tarek, from Algeria, said, ‘Help starts with the family ... support starts with those who are closest to you, if you have a brother or sister you start with them.’ However, the support migrants receive from their family members should not be seen as support from the ethnic community. That they receive support from family does not mean they associate with, let alone receive help from, their co-ethnics.

We have cousins and aunts here. The aunts are married to Belgians, and they have children here and they are already Belgians. And from this family we get support ... Normally with the Latinos here in Belgium I don’t have a lot of contact (Fernando, Chile).
**Systems of social solidarity**

Those who do not have family support have to turn to others for help. For investment and settlement migrants these are usually friends or acquaintances, often with a similar ethnic background. In order to receive help from what others scholars denote as ‘the ethnic community’, they must invest in social relationships within these communities. For a tightly-knit community to develop in which solidarity is exchanged, migrants need to invest in the community and contribute to it. This way, they can create social security structures that serve as insurance against temporary setbacks. Tarek, from Algeria, explained how such social security systems work:

A hundred euros is a lot of money. But it is not between us. We look at these things from a different perspective. Who needs the €100 most, you or me. The need is the priority. If somebody else has priority then you give it. That is how it works among us … if I have €50 and I do not have anything else … and he asks €50 from me, then I ask him if €45 is all right because I prefer to leave a few euros for myself. And I do that because I know that I won't gain anything bad with it … because I know that if I give him €40 or €50, then he will help others too if they need it … he himself will act the same way, that is, how do you say it, the social financing, and the cooperation that is the social solidarity.

These social solidarity systems are open only to people who contribute to them. As a result, legalisation migrants, whose aspirations mean that they usually receive more than they contribute, have limited access to such systems. In addition, only people who are what my respondents call ‘serious’ have access. Marouane, from Morocco, explained these systems as follows: ‘[W]hen you are not serious … he will say he does not have anything, even though he has money. If you are not serious they won’t give you [anything]. If you are serious, you can have whatever you want.’ According to Tuyishime, from Rwanda, ‘Serious means if you are correct … Masja, if you give me €50, I will give it back on Friday. When it is Friday I give it. That is correct.’ When I asked Marouane what serious means and how you can determine if someone is serious he said,

There is no measure for it, it is like this, if you search for someone, you say to your friends that you need someone to live with you, but only if he is honest, so he will search for someone that he knows who is honest so he can say, this person here is serious, I vouch for him. Like that … [M]e I am also serious but I can’t tell you that I am serious.
Marouane explains that other people have to vouch for a migrant’s honesty to get access to social solidarity systems. These thus function based on trust. This means that in order to partake in social solidarity systems a migrant needs other participants who can vouch for them, and they need to pay the money back as promised. Otherwise they will be excluded from the system, as they will no longer be considered ‘serious’.

Furthermore, irregular migrants who depend on social solidarity systems must continue to invest in them. If a migrant does not, and they need help one day, they will be refused. This means that if an irregular migrant has money, and someone else needs help, he or she is obliged to lend or give the person in need money. If a migrant has money, but chooses to keep it when someone else is in need, they will be refused support if they need it one day. This is why it is unattractive for investment migrants to partake in such systems. After all, when they have money they do not want to invest it in a social solidarity system. They want to save it, as this brings them closer to the attainment of their aspirations. They are therefore more inclined to think about themselves than to help other people. Sofia, an investment migrant from Bolivia, says that the people around her are all ‘egoists who think only about themselves’. Piore (1979) also stresses the radical individualism of temporary migrants. Lending money to others does not get them closer to the realisation of their aspirations, but it instead drives their attainment further away. So investment migrants who have insufficient income from work and no family to support them encounter difficulties in obtaining social support. They fully depend on the commercial infrastructure that caters to irregular migrants. In this circuit, however, migrants do not last long as support is not unconditional. Some investment migrants who depend on it therefore become settlement migrants after a while.

Irregular migrants who fail to invest in social solidarity systems do not get access to these when they need help. They therefore run the risk of ending up in the streets. I met an irregular migrant who was denied access when he needed it because he previously kept all the money he earned to himself. I met him at a shelter where he came every day to eat soup and take a shower. He explained to me how he ended up there:

I have worked a lot, like I told you almost five years; I put it all in the casino ... if I had € 1,000, I played the whole day in the casino, try this, play that and then the money was gone ... [A]ll the illegal people I know who come here are addicted to gambling too. They have all worked here for years but have destroyed their lives because of
gambling ... now people think that I am a junky ... nobody trusts me to help me for money and all that (Adil, Morocco).

This trust that Adil speaks of is very important. As a gambling addict, Adil was not ‘serious’ like the other migrants who partake in social solidarity systems. When he borrowed money he did not always pay it back as promised, and he did not lend money to others. Migrants who contribute to social solidarity systems have to trust that the people they give money to will pay them back or that they will help others in need if they can. In other words, they have to know that they not only take from the system but also occasionally give and that they keep their word. That is why there is a lot of talk and gossip about people who partake in such systems. It has to be clear who can be trusted and who has failed to live up to their promise.

Who makes up these social solidarity systems then? Tarek is from Algeria, but he says the system he partakes in is comprised not only of Algerians but also includes other North Africans, like Moroccans, Tunisians and Egyptians. One might be inclined to put a ‘North African’ or ‘Arabic speaking’ label on it. But it is not that straightforward. Albert, from Congo, explained that although Africans help each other, you cannot speak of an African community:

[F]or us Africans, those who are here ... in Europe ... there is solidarity among us, but it depends from person to person. Like you, you are European, but you would never say that all Europeans have solidarity. You would never say that among all Belgians or Dutch people there is solidarity. There are always people ... that you do not want to help.

To Albert, no ethnic community of Africans exists. Not only are many ethnic groups too large in numbers to form a single community, communities are not necessarily formed on the basis of shared ethnic background. They can be based on social boundaries like class as well (see Al-Ali 2002; Baumann 1996). Fernando, for example, does not want to have anything to do with the Chileans who migrated decades before he did, because they are culturally different:

I have more contacts with Belgians, or with people from outside [Chile] ... During the time Pinochet ruled the country, many people left abroad and during this time all kinds of people arrived here, also people who were not very well prepared culturally, who had not studied, nothing ... It is a very big change for people who don’t have
much education. So they arrived in a country where they did not know the language or the customs.

Fernando has a university degree and does not want to associate with settled Chilean migrants because they are not well educated and because ‘they do not bring good things’. He does associate with some South Americans, but only those who have a similar level of education. Moreover, he associates only with people from Argentina and Chile and not from other South American countries as, according to Fernando, these countries are less well developed economically and culturally. Warsi, from Bangladesh, who has a bachelor’s degree, likewise has problems associating with other Bengali migrants, as he feels they are of a lower class:

We have class. From top to bottom we have class and this is a big difference ... our characters are very different because of the difference in class ... [T]he people who come [here] they are really not rich, they are in the middle class ... [M]y positioning, I could be something in Bangladesh but a lot of them, they are here, they have nothing to do in Bangladesh. Even I can be a teacher there ... The people who did not go to college or university, what can they do? ... They don't have any chance there. I have a chance [there] ... So that is the difference ... You know that I don't have any friends. I don't honestly, not a Bengali here ... I don't think the same way, I think differently. [Between our lives] there is a big difference.

It is not only the migrants of a higher class who indicate that they have such problems. Tuyishime had problems with other migrants from Rwanda because he is low class:

In the beginning I lived together with other Rwandans. But there was a problem with us living together, their mentality was not the same as mine. In Rwanda, me I worked with my hands, while this man here had worked as an official, and it is not the same mentality, so [we could not] live together.

Hence, ethnic communities like ‘the African’, ‘the Latin American’ or ‘the Bengali’ do not exist. While some irregular migrants do not feel they belong to a community at all, others have a sense of community based on social markers that are meaningful to them and do not necessarily include ethnicity. These communities of solidarity are not always only comprised of people
with the same ethnic background, but they sometimes transcend ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, if an individual has a certain ethnic background, she or he does not necessarily belong to a social solidarity system.

Many of these communities are made up of a mix of both regular and irregular migrants. However, regular migrants often stop participating after a while, as they know they put more in than they get out. This is especially true for migrants whose ‘community’ consists of relatively few regular migrants. Many irregular migrants complain of their regular compatriots whose solidarity ends once they receive papers.

Those with papers don’t help us ... We ourselves, those without papers, we help ourselves. You have to give those who need it a helping hand. But the persons who have papers, no, they know what life without papers is like ... because at one point they did not have papers either, but well, that is life ... [W]hen it is family yes there is help but when it is someone else no ... [They] change here once they have papers ... some change slowly and others change radically. But they all change (Ignacio, Chile).

It has become clear that migrants with a common ethnic background do not necessarily form a cohesive community from which irregular migrants can draw support. Communities that are meaningful to respondents and in which there is an exchange in solidarity do exist, but these may have different social boundaries than ethnicity, or they may have social markers in addition to ethnicity. Therefore, what or who makes up a community cannot be established by a researcher beforehand. At the same time, these systems of social solidarity can be very important additional sources of income for settlement migrants, while they are less of a resource for irregular migrants with investment or legalisation aspirations.

Native citizens

In addition to support from family or from social solidarity systems, irregular migrants can draw resources from a third source located outside these communities. Many legalisation migrants who are involved in procedures manage to receive support from native Dutch or Belgian citizens. This is not because they have no other choice or as some form of last resort, as is sometimes assumed (see, e.g., Engbersen et al. 2002). Quite to the contrary, I found that many legalisation migrants prefer not to ask for help within their own community, but instead turn to others for support.
The problem with Africans is that they help you today, but tomorrow they will talk about it to other persons... Many of our friends do not know that we live with difficulties and that we do not get money from social services anymore... I prefer to explain my suffering to people I do not know. This person can be white, that is better... But if I speak to someone who knows me about my problem, and he is African, he can help me but I am afraid that he will talk about me... And this old [Belgian] lady that I spoke to you about earlier, she helps me sometimes, but if she were African, oh, then I do not think that our relationship would continue. No (Albert, Congo).

As explained before, social solidarity systems need a lot of talk and gossip circulating in order to secure the necessary trust. Albert obviously does not like that, which is usual among irregular migrants who belong to the higher classes in their country of origin. His social status in his country of origin makes him ashamed to have to turn to people of a lower social class for help, especially because he – as a legalisation migrant – cannot contribute himself, but only demand resources. He therefore chose to turn to Belgians for support.

Warsi, from Bangladesh, also reached out to people outside of his own community and found a Belgian woman who supports him. I found several legalisation migrants like Warsi, who lived with Belgians or Dutch people and were fully supported by them. Because I interacted with these migrants over several months, I met some of the persons they were living with. One of them was Marlies. She started helping irregular migrants 20 years ago. Some of the individuals she supported are now very successful regular migrants. She explained that she wants to help irregular migrants get through the period in which they do not have papers until they are legalised. She is able to provide substantial support during this period because she assumes that it is only temporary. However, by the time I met her she had sheltered, fed and clothed Warsi for eight years. Many family members of irregular migrants do not provide substantial support for that long. Understandably, she expressed doubts about her arrangements with Warsi:

I am fed up with it... He is too old. He will be spending the rest of his life washing dishes if he gets papers. Lately I think that he should go back. It seems that his girlfriend in Bangladesh is making good money and also his brothers all have university degrees. But he says he does not want his family to support him, and this is what hurts, because he does not want to accept their support but he has no problem accepting mine. And this I don’t understand. ... There are many things that I
don’t understand. I have many doubts but I give him the benefit of the doubt. He is a good man in his heart and I made the promise to him that I would help him, and I am keeping that promise.

Marlies’s support enables Warsi to refrain from work as he desires. For most legalisation migrants, the support they get from people outside of their own community is less all-encompassing. Other legalisation migrants with procedures have to seek resources from multiple sources every day while they wait for the outcome of their procedures.

While migrants who have applied for legalisation reach out to Dutch or Belgian natives for support, migrants in the other categories do not. Only a few settlement migrants very infrequently receive support from Belgians or Dutch people. In these cases, it is usually their employers who give them furniture or clothes. Monetary assistance is extremely rare. Investment and settlement migrants and legalisation migrants who try to get married depend on family members for substantial support. If they do not have family members residing in the host country, settlement migrants usually manage to draw resources from social solidarity systems, whereas investment and legalisation migrants have problems accessing these. The latter categories depend on the commercial infrastructure for irregular migrants in such cases. Next to these resources stemming from their personal networks, there is another source that irregular migrants can mobilise: support from organisations.

6.4.2 Formal and informal support from organisations

Research usually finds that irregular migrants receive limited or no resources from governmental organisations (Mahler 1995; Massey et al. 1987; Paspalanova 2006; Van der Leun 2003b; Van der Leun & Kloosterman 1999; Van Nieuwenhuyze 2009). Only informal help provided by organisations is believed to be within their reach. Moreover, the informal support they receive is considered to be insignificant compared to the resources irregular migrants generate from the informal economy. However, although the total amount of informal support provided by organisations is limited, I found that it can be of crucial importance to some migrants. While most irregular migrants receive no support from organisations, for those who do it is vital. Here again, my analysis revealed that in order to understand variation in the amount and type of support that irregular migrants receive, it is important to take aspirations into account.
Investment migrants practically never receive support from organisations. They often even refrain from using formal medical care systems, arranging for medical assistance on their own instead. They may either consult a doctor who caters specifically to irregular migrants or simply pay for medical services they receive. Turkish migrant Mehmet, who works for a removal company, said, ‘I have problems with my back. I have been to a physiotherapist, a Moroccan. He showed me how I should lift things from now on and he massaged my back. I paid him € 50 for it.’ When I asked Diego, from Chile, what he does when he falls ill, he responded, ‘Well it has not happened yet, well a couple of times but nothing heavy ... With this you have to be a little intelligent.’ When I subsequently asked if he knew that he was entitled to urgent medical care he said, ‘Yes, that is what they say. Many people tell me to get this paper ... I don't do it because I have an aversion to it.’ Paspalanova (2006) also found that temporary migrants do not use state support, and Leman (1997) notes that temporary migrants do not expect the destination state to come to their assistance in case of difficulties or illnesses. Migrants with investment aspirations have come to make money and return; they do not want to depend on state support.

In contrast, legalisation migrants who are involved in procedures receive a lot of support from organisations and for a long period of time. In Belgium, failed asylum seekers who have filed a final appeal are entitled to government support. In practice, this means they are allowed to continue to live at the asylum centre, receive full room and board and a limited amount of pocket money. Some of my respondents lived in such a situation and could fully support themselves that way. In other cases, failed asylum seekers who have filed an appeal continued to live in the house they lived in during their asylum procedure while they receive welfare benefits:

When we just arrived [five years ago] we asked for asylum, political asylum but the answer was immediately negative because our country [Ecuador] is considered a country without political refugees. So it was almost directly that our asylum was denied ... until now they have not cut off the help, we still have the help from the [social services] because we are now in the final stage with the [name of the court] (Benjamin, Ecuador).

In Belgium, the benefits irregular migrants get are equivalent to what Belgian citizens receive if they have no other means to sustain themselves. However, most respondents indicate that they supplement their welfare benefits, usually by means of material support like food and clothes. If
irregular migrants receive welfare benefits, they usually perceive these to be too little to live on. At the same time, it is usually the most substantial support irregular migrants are able to generate.

Apart from support provided to irregular migrants directly by government organisations, there are some semi-governmental initiatives which support irregular migrants. A few organisations select irregular migrants to whom they supply accommodation and financial help that more or less equals the official welfare benefit. These organisations receive government funding which enables them to provide this assistance. This type of help is not open to every irregular migrant. Evelien, a woman who works at such an organisation, described the criteria she uses to select irregular migrants for this type of support:

We have a very strict selection procedure ... we ask many details about their history with procedures, their health, their length of stay, all together ... for example, people with Belgian children, they have high chances of becoming regularised, very ill people, those have been so far in a very precarious legal position and can't just end up in the streets, and then people with a long length of stay, those too, may be combined with health problems. Those three factors play a decisive role ... By very ill people I mean very serious applications like in the case of children who have had cancer for the last three years and the father has cancer, people with AIDS in very advanced stages, a lot of cancer really and a lot of HIV. But with HIV we already have to select strictly, the length of stay decides who we choose then.

The bulk of irregular migrants do not have access to this type of support. At the same time, like direct government support, it is the most substantial form of organisational support some irregular migrants are entitled to.

Some organisations provide not only governmental or semi-governmental support, but they also supply informal help to irregular migrants. For some, the informal support they receive from organisations is their most important resource. Alexandre, from Congo, said, 'Without all these organisations I don't think that life would be possible. My life here without papers would not be possible.' Although for some migrants the informal support they receive from organisations is their most important source of income, only a very few irregular migrants receive enough support to fully sustain themselves with these means only.

Furthermore, organisations adopt different criteria for the provision of different types of support, which renders distinct forms of support
unequally accessible. For irregular migrants to be eligible for financial support, they usually need to have what social workers call ‘a perspective’. A migrant is considered to have a perspective if he or she is likely to become legalised, if he or she wants to return to the country of origin, or if he or she wants to go to some other country. Martijn, a social worker from an organisation, explains:

We investigate if there is a perspective and if there is then we also investigate if we can help financially to realise this perspective. So we have a budget with which we can pay the rent for a number of families or the electricity bill. It never happens that we take all of their costs at our expense but we can pay the rent. And this way we can help a little while they wait for legalisation. And this way we have helped some families who have received papers after two or three years.

This means that only legalisation migrants who are involved in procedures are able to generate this type of support. Most organisations do not want to help people lead a life as an irregular migrant. That is why settlement and investment migrants have problems receiving financial support from organisations:

We do not want to help people to install themselves in illegality because we think we do not help people with that ... So if there is no perspective we will help people to, for example, get urgent medical care, but financial aid for us is connected to the perspective of people. If people choose to live here illegally, if they think that life here in illegality is better than a legal life in their own country then this is probably true, those people are better judges of that than we are ... but we are not going to support them financially in that (Martijn).

Because most organisations use the perspective of migrants as a criterion for the provision of financial help, settlement and investment migrants do not get it. What they can occasionally get is material support from organisations. However, this is usually only provided at the beginning of their stay and certainly not structurally.

In the beginning when we did not have work we signed up at [an organisation]. Every Tuesday we went there and they gave us food. They gave us food, they gave us clothes for the children, and also [another organisation] gave social help. To one we went on Monday and Thurs-
day and to the other on Tuesday, and they gave us food for the whole week, cornflakes, milk, chicken. Because of these organisations we had no problems in the beginning because we always had food to eat. But after a year they said that we were now here long enough to know how to depend on ourselves, and that there are many people who also have needs and who have just arrived (Isidora, Ecuador).

Organisations do not usually provide material help to irregular migrants in a structural way, which is why settlement and investment migrants are supported by them only intermittently, usually at the beginning of their stay. While organisations do not structurally provide material help to settlement and investment migrants, they do always provide them with advice, for example, about how to get medical care.

They can’t help me with these things, with money and things like that, they can’t help me with that. They can write letters for you or help you to investigate something, that’s all ... I was in the hospital the other day and they wrote letters for me, for the payments you know, because hospital bills are pretty heavy (Kwami, Suriname).

Only a few ‘restaurants’ are open to investment and settlement migrants as a form of emergency care. Food packages are only handed out temporarily, usually to migrants who have just arrived.

As indicated before, a share of respondents with legalisation aspirations try to find someone to marry. While some of them may think they have a good chance of realising this ambition, organisations do not consider this to be ‘a perspective’ on the basis of which they are willing to provide support. Organisations therefore mostly treat legalisation migrants who are not involved in procedures as settlement or investment migrants. Vera, who works for an organisation, said, ‘If they want to stay here 20 years until they find a husband that is their decision ... But then they have to be able to manage on their own, and then they should not be here every day.’

Even though the informal support provided by organisations to legalisation migrants with a perspective is limited, support accumulates because migrants tend to shop around. Most legalisation migrants involved in procedures receive help from multiple organisations for food, clothes and cheap shopping.

I have a card from [organisation A], they help me a little ... [Organisation B], they also give a package of food once every two weeks ... And
with [organisation A] I also have this card for clothes ... and this shop [at organisation C] is very good ... Now, for example, I have bought this schoolbag for ten cents, which is nothing. That is very good ... once per month [organisation A] pays € 10 for us [to shop at organisation C].

According to Düvell (2006c), those who turn to organisations are irregular migrants who do not have social capital. However, I found that irregular migrants who turn to organisations do not necessarily go there because they have no social network from which they could potentially draw resources. Legalisation migrants often combine support from various sources, as is illustrated best by Alexandre, from Congo:

[Organisation A] gives me something every now and then and through them I find some cleaning work in people's home sometimes ... Once per month [this organisation] gives me free food, and at [organisation B] I can get free food twice a month ... [Organisation B] also gives me clothes sometimes ... I have friends with whom I have worked, and they said all right, I pay every month for the subscription of your television. And another said, all right for the diapers of your baby I give you this much every month. And another said, all right, for the subscription of your phone I will pay every month. Friends. Moreover, there was another person that I knew and her brother said all right I will give you € 15 every month ... And for the gas there is a Belgian lady who pays. But I pay the rent. [Organisation A] sometimes pays it, once every few months but not every month.

Nawang, from Nepal, also combines support from organisations with help from his personal network of friends: ‘My friends pay for the rent, I just sleep ... But for the eating, you know you have [this organisation], I went every week there, they give me food ... they are helping me to buy food.’ Like Alexandre, Nawang manages to secure his basic needs through his personal network and by means of support from an organisation. In other words, he combines the social capital from his personal network with the support he receives from an organisation. In addition, Nawang has savings from his time as a settlement migrant, and he manages to live on this combination of resources. Although he has a modest existence, he accepts it, as he knows it is only temporary, until he receives papers or returns to his country. He proudly said to me, ‘Before I was drinking, spending € 50, € 60 sometimes € 100 per day, but now € 200 for a month and I don’t drink anything.’
Finally, there is another type of support that organisations provide. Some of my respondents receive help from the organisations they work for voluntarily. As with formal, financial and material support these were usually legalisation migrants involved in procedures. Efunsegun, from Nigeria, said, ‘My organisation that I am doing voluntary work for sometimes they help me with money too, so yeah so, they are helping me as well.’ In return for the work they do, migrants such as Efunsegun sometimes receive support. In addition, volunteer work provides irregular migrants with a temporary sense of purpose.

All in all, it appears that only legalisation migrants involved in procedures are able to access support from governmental or semi-governmental organisations. Only this category of migrants receives significant financial or material help from informal support organisations. Organisations do provide information and advice to investment and settlement migrants, but they are expected to be able to live independently after a while and therefore do not receive long-term material or financial support.

The finding that aspirations are crucial in the ability to access support from organisations runs counter to the commonly held belief that as migrants accumulate time and experience, they become better acquainted with the host country’s institutions (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Length of stay may be interpreted as having something to do with such support, because many legalisation migrants have a long length of stay, especially compared to investment migrants. However, my analysis revealed that it is not length of stay that shapes these patterns, but specific aspirations. For settlement migrants, their length of stay is actually negatively correlated with their chances of accessing support from organisations. These findings are summarised in table 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 6.3 Other sources of income per type of aspiration</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Investment</strong></td>
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<td>Procedures</td>
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<td><strong>Other sources of income</strong></td>
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<td>Gift and barter economy</td>
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One might wonder whether there are major differences between Belgium and the Netherlands in the extent to which irregular migrants manage to access support from organisations. Apart from the formal support that irregular migrants receive from governmental or semi-governmental initiatives, support seemed similarly accessible in both Belgium and the Netherlands. In both countries, a migrant’s perspective is the determining factor in whether they receive financial or long-term support. Emergency aid and incidental support are provided and accessed to about the same extent in both countries. The major difference is that in Belgium, organisations tend to provide this support more openly and are not afraid to talk about it, whereas organisations in the Netherlands tend to remain more secretive about it.

6.5 Changing aspirations

I have argued and demonstrated that aspirations underlie specific patterns of functional incorporation. However, this relation is not necessarily always one-directional. Although I did not systematically study what prompts irregular migrants to change their aspirations, I did sometimes observe how events that changed the functional incorporation of irregular migrants resulted in changing aspirations.

Employment, for example, constitutes an important instigator of change for investment migrants. Chavez (1998) claims that in some cases, having obtained a steady job becomes a major reason for temporary migrants to settle down instead of going back. I found the reverse to be true as well: investment migrants who fail to find a good job are forced to stay longer than they intended and end up settling down. Recall Martina, from Bolivia, who said, ‘Six months without work, and then after eight months of work I still did not have the same amount of money that I arrived with. So I stayed] a year more, and then another year more.’

Not having employment or not being able to work can also inspire migrants to change their settlement aspirations into legalisation aspirations.

Look, I have been here for seven years. I have always worked but now I cannot work anymore because I am sick ... my neck is broken, this is the problem. And from the neck comes the problem with the arm and shoulder ... I make something between 1,000 and 1,500 every month. But because I don’t have insurance, I pay cash for my physiotherapist. This means I work to have money for the physiotherapist. I give him
all my money, and the physiotherapist says you should not work otherwise you don’t solve your problem. So I am in a vicious circle you understand (Andrei, Moldova).

For others, an unexpected event in their employment career more or less forced them to change their aspirations. As with Andrei, Nawang’s settlement aspirations transformed into legalisation aspirations because he could not work anymore. I knew him for a while before I interviewed him. When we first met, this Nepali migrant was working full-time in a restaurant. However, circumstances forced him to stop working. He explained, ‘There was a really big control. There were more than 20 policemen there ... [T]hey arrested me and I was there for five hours with the police station. Only five hours, I was lucky.’ I subsequently asked him if he had been able to find another job. He replied,

No I don’t want to work because already they arrested me this first time and at that time they said to me this is your first time ... that is why I let you go, if you do it a second time I send you back to your country if I find you doing illegal work. So I don’t want to work. I don’t want to go back to Nepal ... [I]f I want to work I can find work, sure, because I know all the restaurants and the catering people. I can work, they said ok you come at night, you come in the morning, early in the morning you work, just make a sauce for us, they are telling me like that ... I told them no, I am fighting for the paper now. Now my way is to get the paper now ... [S]o my way is this, I go this way, so I don’t work black.

Nawang, from Nepal, said he had savings that would last him about a year. If he does not receive papers within the year, he will reconsider his actions. Nawang’s story is a good illustration of the influence of changes in the work situation on aspirations, and in turn, the effect of aspirations on the work situation. It thus shows how functional incorporation and aspirations mutually influence each other.

6.6 Aspirations and functional incorporation

This chapter examined some elements of the functional incorporation of irregular migrants in Belgium and the Netherlands. I demonstrated how bringing aspirations into the analysis can improve our understanding of
specific patterns of functional incorporation. Next to such issues as length of stay and the opportunity structure, aspirations underlie patterns of incorporation of irregular migrants in receiving societies. Distinct aspirations shape specific patterns of housing, employment, and other sources of income, as can be seen in table 6.4.

Table 6.4  Functional incorporation per type of aspiration

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<th>Investment</th>
<th>Settlement</th>
<th>Legalisation</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
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<td><strong>Functional incorporation</strong></td>
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<td>Type</td>
<td>Cheap and crowded</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>With family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Immigrant district</td>
<td>If group is represented: immigrant district. Otherwise: suburb</td>
<td>If group is represented: immigrant district. Otherwise: suburb</td>
<td>If group is represented: immigrant district. Otherwise: suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hours</td>
<td>As many as possible</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>As little as possible</td>
<td>As little as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of work</td>
<td>‘Typical’ irregular migrant sectors</td>
<td>In native private households</td>
<td>In native private households</td>
<td>In private households or ethnic businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of exploitation</td>
<td>No perception of exploitation</td>
<td>Certain types of work</td>
<td>Fundamental</td>
<td>Fundamental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other sources of income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift and barter economy</td>
<td>Commercial networks</td>
<td>Social solidarity systems</td>
<td>Native citizens</td>
<td>Family, friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Occasional material support</td>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of this chapter was to describe the patterns of functional incorporation of irregular migrants and to provide understanding of how these patterns are shaped. The findings should not be interpreted as a description and understanding of the functional incorporation of irregular migrants. I have dealt only with issues that are relevant in the light of the typology I have constructed and that can be linked to debates in the literature or divergent research outcomes. As a result, this chapter sheds light on some of the basic processes of functional incorporation of irregular migrants by contextualising migrant experiences and does not provide answers to
questions concerning the functional incorporation of irregular migrants in general.

The qualitative nature of my endeavour does not allow me to draw conclusions about the frequency of the patterns found. However, the strength of the analysis presented in this chapter lies not in the description or quantification of patterns of functional incorporation, but in the understanding provided of how these patterns are shaped. It thus sheds new light on existing findings. Following the grounded theory approach, this typology has been constructed ‘not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviour’ (Glaser & Strauss [1967] 2006: 30). Table 6.4 therefore presents ideal-type relations.

The results suggest that overemphasising structure in the analysis obscures understanding of the fact that migrants act differently under similar circumstances because they have different aspirations. Incorporating aspirations into the analysis increases our insight and brings clarity to scholarly debates and divergent research outcomes. Whereas I provided a theoretical critique of current research practice earlier in this book, I have now empirically demonstrated its downsides as well the benefits that can be gained from an approach that focuses on aspirations.