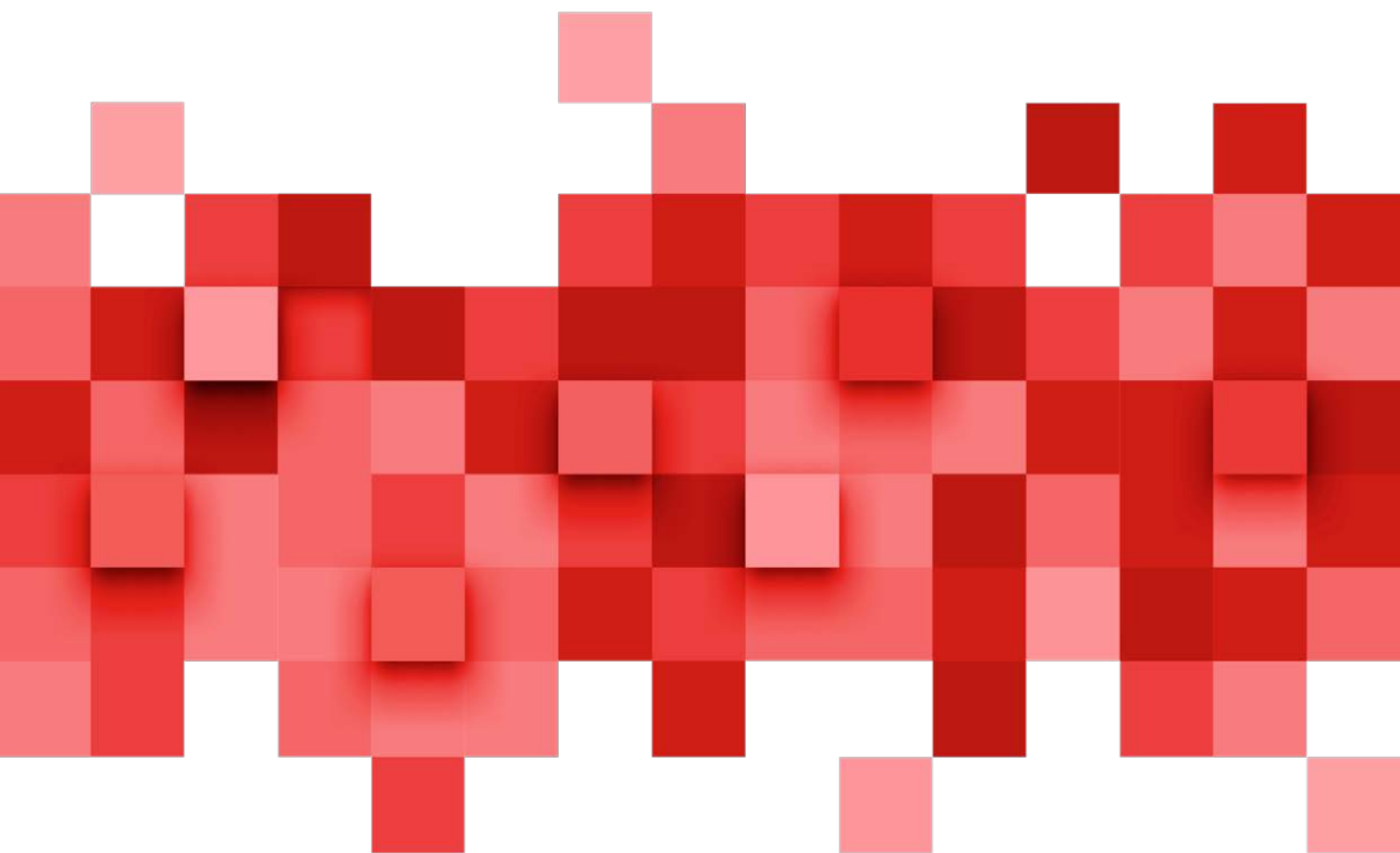


# forwork

Fostering Opportunities of Refugee Workers



Co-funded by the European  
Union Programme  
EaSI 2014-2020



## FORWORK Italy

Impact evaluation report – Executive summary

November 2021

Report by Fondazione Rodolfo Debenedetti

with the collaboration of ANPAL, APL, Exar Solutions and Inforcoop

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Coordinator of the FORWORK consortium:



Partners of the project:



Affiliated entities:

Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Ministry of the Interior, Prefettura di Torino and Regione Piemonte

# Executive summary

FORWORK aims at developing, implementing, and evaluating an innovative path to effective labor market integration of asylum seekers hosted in Italian emergency reception centers (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, CAS). The project was implemented by a consortium coordinated by ANPAL and funded by the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, under the EaSI program. The Rodolfo Debenedetti Foundation was responsible for the impact evaluation.

## Motivation and target population

During the last decade, massive migration flows from Africa and Asia led to a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers hosted in Italian CAS. Even though asylum seekers are legally entitled to work while their application for international protection is being processed, those hosted in CAS typically face poor employment opportunities and receive little assistance towards integration into the Italian labor market.

FORWORK targeted asylum seekers hosted in CAS in Piedmont, a large region in Northern Italy. In 2018, Piedmont hosted 11,755 asylum seekers – 9% of all asylum seekers in Italy in that year. 83% of the asylum seekers in Piedmont’s reception centers were hosted in CAS, a fraction in line with national figures. One distinctive feature of the organizational model of Piedmont is the so called “diffused reception”, which prioritizes the development of smaller centers spread across the region. This characteristic makes Piedmont a particularly suitable location for the development and evaluation of FORWORK.

## The FORWORK components

FORWORK combined individual support by a job mentor with several (optional) additional activities, such as placement services, a pathway to recognition of prior learning (RDA – *Reconnaissance des Aquis*), language, and civic education courses, and short vocational training classes. Several professional figures contributed to the unfolding of the activities: job mentors, job coaches, cultural-linguistic facilitators, and teachers (Table 1).

Since most activities were intentionally designed to have a direct interaction of these professional figures with beneficiaries, they were partly re-designed after the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. While group activities were postponed, one-to-one activities switched to online mode whenever possible.

**Table 1: Professionals involved in the program and activities delivered**

<b>Professional profile</b>	<b>Service delivered</b>
Job mentor	Individual support and skills assessment
Job coach	Placement services
Cultural-linguistic facilitator	Translation/support in meetings and interview situations
RDA facilitator	Recognition of prior learning
Teacher	Language and civic education courses; vocational training

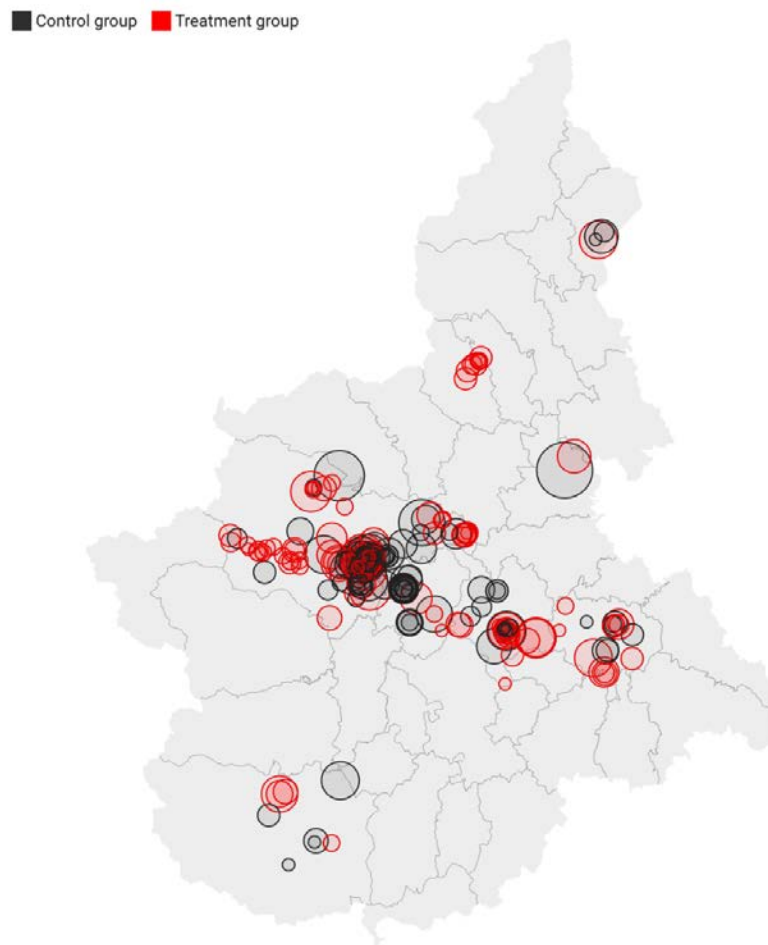
## **Evaluation design of the effects of FORWORK**

The evaluation was based on a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT), whereby the opportunity to participate to FORWORK was offered to some CAS randomly selected (“randomized”) within a larger sample of centers satisfying specific requirements. That is, these centers were located in the Labor Market Areas of the province capitals, within a 30-minute drive from Public Employment Services offices, had access to public transportation, and hosted a maximum of 30 guests. These criteria mainly aimed at identifying the most economically active areas in Piedmont in order to maximize the potential of the activities. Figure 1 displays the geographical distribution of CAS selected with these criteria, distinguishing between eligible (treatment group) and non-eligible (control group), in accordance with the procedure described above. Within the centers in the treatment group, all adults in an early phase of their application process for international protection were invited to join the project.

The evaluation sample was drawn in September 2019. Overall, it consists of 1,262 individuals, randomized into two statistically equivalent groups: an treatment group of 622 individuals, in 133 CAS and 29 managing entities; a control group of 640 individuals, in 131 CAS and 29 managing entities.

Table 2 shows that the individuals in the sample are young on average (27), male (77 percent of the total), attended 9 years of school and come in almost all cases from Asia and Africa. Just above half arrived in 2017. Thanks to randomization, all these characteristics are balanced between the two groups, as shown in the last two rows of Table 2.

**Figure 1: Geographic distribution of CAS in Piedmont, by eligibility status**



**Note.** This figure shows the geographic distribution of CAS assigned to the treatment and control group. The size of the markers is proportional to the number of asylum seekers hosted in the center.

**Table 2: Summary statistics and balance between different groups**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	n. obs	Demographics		Yrs of Educ.	Area of origin			Year of arrival		
		Age	Female		Asia	Africa	Europe	<2017	2017	>2017
All	1262	26.92	0.23	9.24	0.76	0.21	0.02	0.28	0.53	0.16
Treatment group	622	26.68	0.20	8.98	0.77	0.21	0.02	0.26	0.56	0.17
Control group	640	27.15	0.25	9.50	0.75	0.21	0.03	0.30	0.50	0.16
Difference		-0.47	-0.04	-0.52	0.02	0.00	-0.01	-0.04	0.06	0.00
Std. Diff.		-0.07	-0.10	-0.13	0.04	0.00	-0.08	-0.09	0.11	0.01

**Note.** The number of years of education and the year of arrival come from the baseline survey that was administered in 2019. Summary statistics for these two variables are computed on the subsample of individuals that completed the survey. In columns (8)-(10), the shares of the groups for the year of arrival do not sum up to one: the residual group is made of those who did not answer to the question.

## Data used for the evaluation

The impact evaluation of FORWORK is based on employment and measures of integration from three main sources of data:

1. Registries of asylum seekers hosted in CAS;
2. Administrative data on employment histories of all employees in Piedmont (*Sistema Informativo Piemonte Lavoro, SILP*), providing information on type of contract, contract duration, occupation, and sector of activity;
3. Two surveys conducted at the beginning and at the end of the project (in 2019 and in 2021) specifically for this evaluation. The two surveys allowed to collect, for each respondent, information on demographics, economic and social integration, literacy, language skills, and future plans.

## Implementation of FORWORK

Beneficiaries of FORWORK activities, participated to the program over about 20 months, from December 2019 through July 2021. Recruitment and implemented activities slowed down after March 2020 due to the pandemic, but they were never completely interrupted<sup>1</sup>.

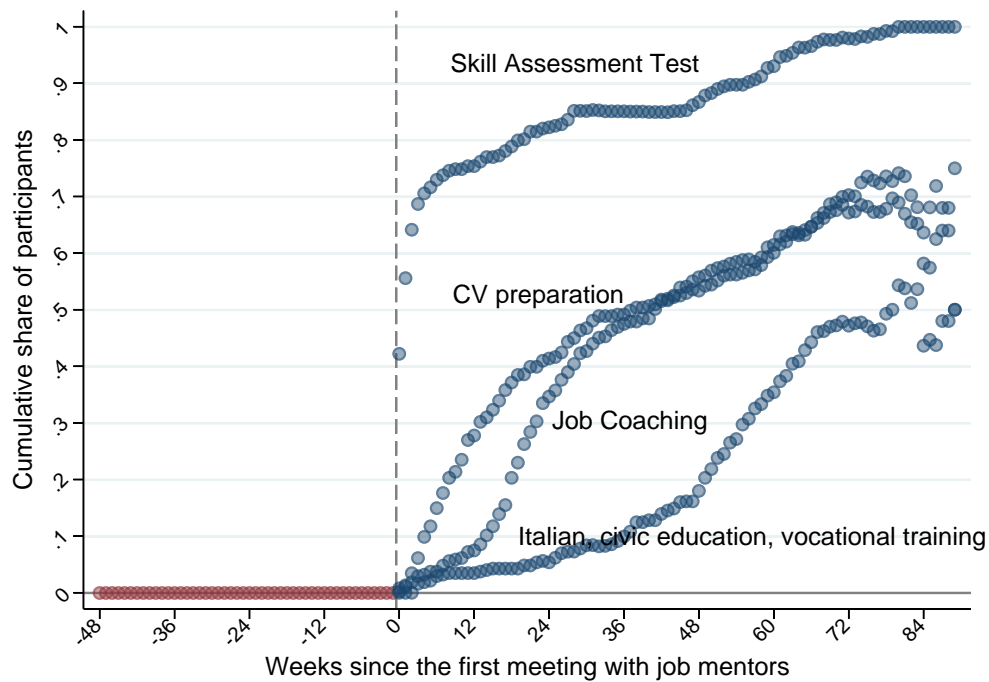
The average take-up rate of the program was 66%. In particular, 408 asylum seekers out of the 622 individuals in the treatment group received some individual support from a job mentor – an average of over 11 hours per person – although only some of the 408 individuals participated in other activities planned under FORWORK. 58% of actual participants (38% of the treatment group) benefitted from placement services, which – among the various occupational results ascertained – lead to the recruitment of 85 beneficiaries of the internships funded by the Italian Ministry of Labor. Only one-fourth of participants (16% of the treatment group) enrolled in language, civic education, and vocational training courses, mainly due to delays caused by the pandemic.

Participation to FORWORK was higher among female than males. Being employed before the start of the activities turned out to be negatively correlated with the decision to participate, suggesting that FORWORK was perceived as an opportunity mainly by those individuals facing relatively worse labor market opportunities (typically, females and unemployed people).

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<sup>1</sup> More precisely, FORWORK participants were selected in two waves, in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Participants in wave 1 were recruited in September 2019 according to the criteria needed for the counterfactual evaluation of the effects of FORWORK, as described in previous paragraphs. All the results presented in this report refer exclusively to this first group, the evaluation sample. Participants of the second group were involved since January 2020. This second wave (of 184 participants) did not enter the impact evaluation of the program. In order to avoid contamination of the experimental sample, additional participants were recruited only in CAS centres randomized to FORWORK, following the same eligibility criteria of the evaluation sample. Conversely, all non-eligible CAS were excluded from this second recruitment drive. All FORWORK participants in the two waves were offered the same services. The total number of FORWORK participants was 592.

**Figure 2: Timing of implementation, by type of activity**



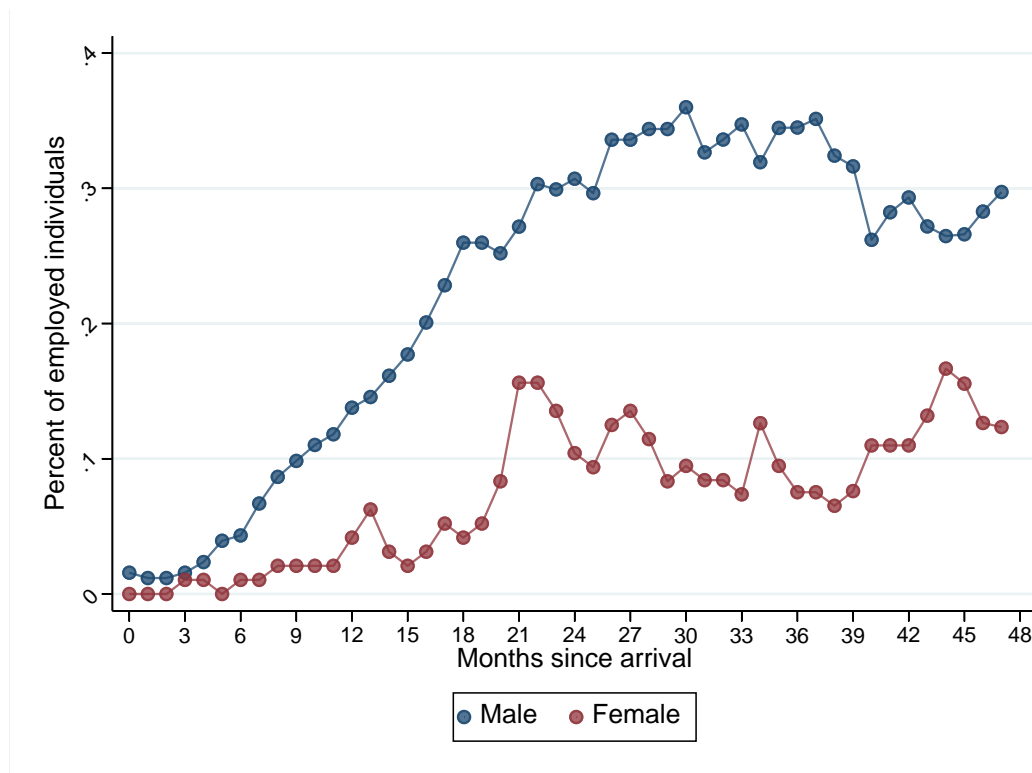
**Note.** This figure shows the timing of tasks (skill assessment test, curriculum preparation, job coaching, and training) since the time week of the first meeting with job mentors. The horizontal axis is indexed to the number of weeks to and from the first meeting with the job mentor. The vertical axis shows the percent of participants who started each task by a certain week.

### Baseline employment

Data from the baseline survey (administered before the start of the program) show that 35% of respondents declared being employed at the time of interview, and this percentage was much higher among men (44%) than among women (11%). About 9% of respondents (1 out of 4 employed) had been working without a regular contract at the time of the interview.

According to administrative data on individuals in the control group, the employment rate of asylum seekers steadily increased over the first two years since the arrival in Italy, to reach 30% for men and 10% for women after that time.

**Figure 3: Baseline employment rate since arrival in Italy, by gender**



**Note.** The figure shows the share of employed individuals by gender by a certain month since arriving in Italy. It focuses on asylum seekers in the control group, that is, who were not offered the opportunity to participate to FORWORK. Information on employment status is taken from SILP data.

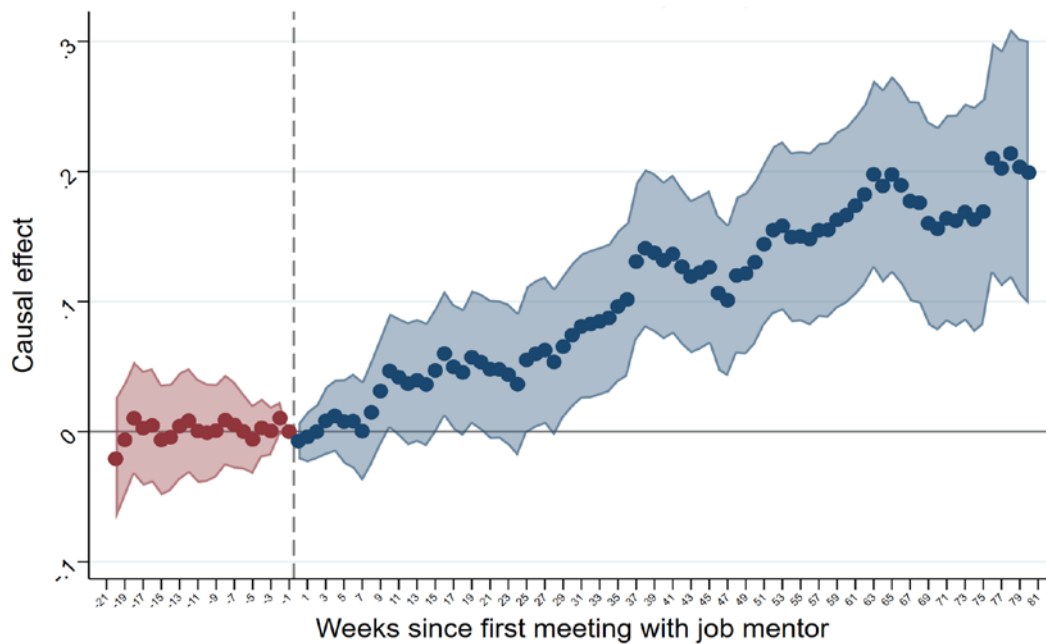
### Effects of FORWORK on labor market integration

The results highlight how FORWORK increased the employment rate of participants. Administrative data indicates that the causal effect of FORWORK is positive and increasing over time, reaching a value of 20 percentage points after one year and a half since the first meeting with a job mentor (Figure 4).

A picture that is coherent with the results obtained using administrative data emerges from the survey: the employment rate of participants is increased by 15 percentage points (+37 percent, in relative terms) over the baseline employment of the control group. We detect a similar increase in earnings (+35 percent), though in this case the estimate is less precise. The effects on employment are larger in magnitude for male than for female participants (+17 and +13 percentage points, respectively), but the relative effect over the baseline employment (that is, the one observed absent the program) is larger for females than for males. Finally, we do not observe any significant effect on informal employment.



**Figure 4: Effect on employment rates, administrative data**

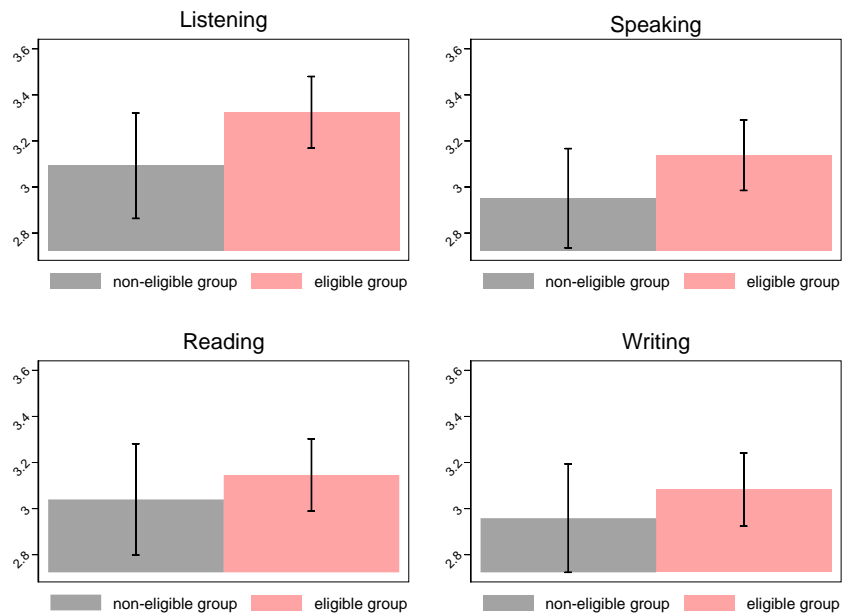


**Note.** This figure shows how participation in FORWORK affected employment probabilities since the first meeting with a job mentor, an activity common to all beneficiaries and which we consider the beginning of the treatment. The horizontal axis is indexed to the number of weeks to and from the first meeting with the job mentor. The vertical axis shows the difference in employment rates between FORWORK participants and individuals in the control group. Employment is defined throughout any paid relationships with an employer (e.g., open-ended contracts, term contracts, or internships). Estimation was carried out using a two-way fixed effects regression.

### Effects of FORWORK on social integration

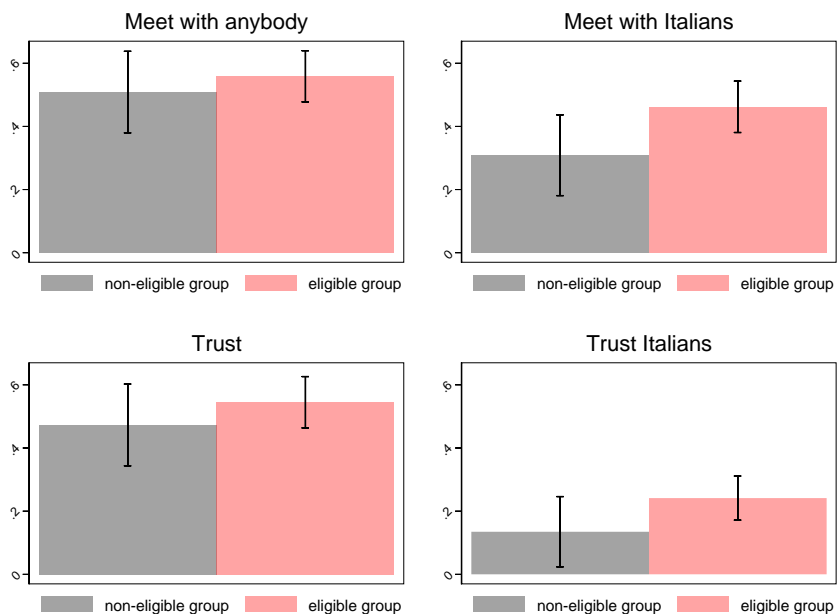
FORWORK had a positive effect on proficiency in Italian language. Figure 5 shows how the program improved understanding and speaking, while there are no significant effects on reading and writing, consistently with the fact that program activities involved mostly oral interactions rather than written ones. FORWORK also affected the social networks of participants: although the program did not change the overall number of acquaintances or the level of trust in them, FORWORK participants declare to know, meet, and trust a larger number of Italians compared to the control group (Figure 6), with potential positive effects in terms of integration.

**Figure 5: Effects on knowledge of Italian language, survey data**



**Note.** The figure shows the average outcomes (and associated confidence intervals) across asylum seekers participating to the program and in the control group. All estimates are obtained through instrumental variable methods.

**Figure 6: Effects on social integration, survey data**



**Note.** The figure shows the average outcomes (and associated confidence intervals) across asylum seekers participating to the program and in the control group. All estimates are obtained through instrumental variable methods.