Refugees’ Trajectories in Switzerland: Legislation’s Impact on Labour Market Integration

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Abstract

Life course trajectories of refugee populations in European countries highly depend on the various statuses and residence permits that are assigned to them. Taking the case study of Switzerland, this article aims at showing the impact of the legal framework on refugees’ chances of professional integration. The longitudinal follow-up of the individuals is made possible by the data matching of several population registers. From a descriptive point of view, sequence analysis tools allow to visualize refugees’ trajectories from their arrival in the country – both in terms of residence permits and of labour market participation. Survival analysis models complement this study by showing that there is a match between the administrative hierarchy and the economic hierarchy, the access to more stable permits increasing significantly the chances to enter the labour market. As a consequence, those who remain for many years with the most precarious permits (asylum seekers and provisionally admitted persons) go through a process of cumulative disadvantage.

Keywords

Refugees, residence permit, labour market integration, legislation, Switzerland

Résumé

Les parcours de vie des populations réfugiées dans les pays européens dépendent fortement des différents statuts et permis de séjour qui leur sont attribués. Prenant le cas de la Suisse, cet article vise à montrer l’impact du cadre legal sur les chances d’intégration professionnelle des réfugiés. Le suivi longitudinal des individus est rendu possible par l’appariement de plusieurs registres de population. D’un point de vue descriptif, des outils d’analyse de sequences permettent de visualiser les trajectoires des réfugiés à partir de leur arrivée dans le pays – tant en terme de permis de séjour que de participation au marché du travail. Des modèles de survie complètent cette étude en montrant qu’il existe un parallèle entre hiérarchie administrative et hiérarchie économique, l’accès à des permis de séjour stables accroissant significativement les chances d’accès à l’emploi. Il en résulte un cumul des désavantages pour ceux qui restent durant de longues années avec les permis les plus précaires (requérants d’asile et personnes admises à titre provisoire).

Mots-clés

Réfugiés, permis de séjour, intégration professionnelle, législation, Suisse

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Introduction

Legislation shapes individuals’ life trajectories. This is particularly true for refugees\(^2\) who come to Europe to find shelter, since their administrative status and residence permit determine their rights and opportunities to integrate into the host society. Taking the case study of Switzerland – one of the European countries with the highest number of refugees per citizen –, I address the issue of the impact of residence permits on refugees’ chances to enter the labour market. To do so, I draw a parallel between the Swiss legislation and its actual effects on refugees’ life course from the moment they arrive in the country.

Hence, two types of trajectories stand at the heart of this paper: trajectories of residence permits, and trajectories of professional integration – a dimension that has long been (and still is) considered as a key indicator of a broader integration process (Gordon, 1964).\(^3\) So far, researchers have shown a great interest in studying sequences of professional integration: for example, Kogan (2004) analysed employment careers of immigrants vs. natives in Germany and in the UK, and Herman and Rea (2014) focused on socio-economic careers of recognized refugees in Belgium. By contrast, quantitative studies on refugees’ status and/or residence permit trajectories appear to be scarce, an exception being the work by Torstensson et al. (1997) on Turkish and on Somali asylum seekers in Sweden and in Switzerland. This scarcity is mainly due to the lack of data enabling a longitudinal follow-up of the refugee population in the long run. Yet, I argue that this issue has to be tackled with quantitative tools. This would broaden the results highlighted by several qualitative studies that have already pointed out the importance of the “legal capital” in refugee’s chances of integration (see Etzold, 2017, Berhtoud, 2012 and ODAE romand, 2015 for the cases of Germany and of Switzerland). Moreover, concrete implications for public policies are at stake: any revision of the laws regarding refugees’ statuses and residence permits can have immediate consequences on the individuals’ life and their chances to integrate into the society. The cross-sectional analyses conducted by Spadarotto et al. (2014)\(^4\) on behalf of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) precisely shows that the Swiss authorities have an interest in understanding underlying mechanisms of refugees’ professional integration.

Seeking asylum in Switzerland: the residence permit system

Switzerland’s legislation regarding residence permits is divided into the Asylum Act (AsylA) and the Federal Act on Foreign National (FNA). The AsylA aims at regulating the asylum procedure and legal status of refugees in Switzerland, while the FNA addresses the questions of foreigners’ stay and integration. Table 1 summarises the various statuses (and, in Switzerland, the residence permits) an individual can be given, compared to the status given

\(^2\) I use the umbrella term “refugee” to refer to all the individuals who came to Switzerland seeking for asylum no matter the outcome of the asylum procedure, and not only to those who obtained the status as defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention. Whenever needed, I specifically identify the latest as “recognized refugees”.

\(^3\) Of course, residence permits also impact other life areas such as access to family reunification, access to housing or mobility (both within and outside the host country): all these dimensions are linked and affect the refugees integration into the society.

\(^4\) Specifically, the study focuses on about 2’700 recognized refugees, provisionally admitted persons and persons granted residence permit for humanitarian reasons who arrived in Switzerland between 1997 and 2000.
by European legislation (Bader, 2018, forthcoming). In addition, I propose an indication of whether each category faces restrictions in Switzerland regarding its access to labour market, mobility and right to family reunification (based on the AsylA and the FNA). To give only a few examples, asylum seekers (N permit) face a waiting period of 3 to 6 months before being allowed to work. Then, several requirements need to be met, including approval of the authorities to whom the employer must first prove that “no suitable domestic employees or citizens of states with which an agreement on the free movement of workers has been concluded can be found for the job” (Art. 21 FNA). In addition, a special charge is taken directly from the asylum seekers wage (10% of earned income, up to 15’000 Swiss francs – Art. 86 AsylA). All of this results in troublesome administrative procedures that can discourage the employers. The authorities’ agreement is also required for provisionally admitted persons (F permit) although Article 21 FNA does not apply to them. However, they also have to pay the “special charge”\(^5\), and, although most of the F permit holders eventually settle in Switzerland (Efionayi-Mäder, Ruedin, 2014), the term “provisionally” tends to scare potential employers who are afraid to invest in someone who can be deported back at any time (UNHCR, 2014).

**Table 1: Status and residence permit according to Switzerland’s legislation and their equivalent in Europe**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equivalent in EU legislation</th>
<th>Switzerland’s legislation (AsylA and FNA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person being a subject of a pending application</td>
<td>Asylum seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person granted subsidiary protection status</td>
<td>Provisionally admitted person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No equivalent)</td>
<td>Provisionally admitted refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person granted refugee status</td>
<td>Recognized refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person granted authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons</td>
<td>Person granted residence permit for humanitarian reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person granted authorization to stay</td>
<td>Person granted residence permit (for other reasons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person granted permanent residence permit</td>
<td>Person granted settlement permit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bader (2018, forthcoming) for the statuses’ comparison between Swiss and EU legislation.

\(^5\) I provide a detailed explanation of the Swiss asylum procedure and permit changes in Bertrand (2017). However, let us point out here that B and C permits are also the main residence permits that are given to “non-refugees foreigners” who come to Switzerland for work or family reasons.

\(^6\) Note that F permit holders can also be “provisionally admitted refugees”, a status for those “who qualify for the refugee status according to the Geneva Convention but not in the sense of the Swiss AsylA” (Bader, 2018:7). See Art. 53 and 54 AsylA.

\(^7\) As of January 2018, F permit holders will no longer have to pay this “special charge”.
My research question therefore is “What is the impact of the residence permits on refugee’s integration into the labour market?” To answer, I aim to test the hypothesis that the more stable the residence permit, the better the chances of professional integration. Schematically, I expect to observe the following hierarchy among the residence permits: N<F<B<C, going from the most precarious one to the most stable one. The underlying mechanism could be both a direct consequence of differences in the access to the labour market depending on the residence permit, as well as an indirect consequence of the obstacles that N and F permit holders can experience in other domains.

If I assume that it is the residence permit that influences the professional integration – and not the other way round –, it is because for the refugees, residence permit changes depend on the asylum procedure and length of stay, and not on labour market participation. One exception to the rule is the case of people granted a B permit for humanitarian reasons, since such status means that the individual is already well integrated into Swiss society in general and the labour market in particular (Art. 84 FNA). Hence, for this group, we face a case of reverse causality (professional integration leading to the acquiring of a B permit for humanitarian reasons).

**Data and method**

As mentioned above, the database I use – hereafter: the “Refugee database” – consists of matching population registers data in order to allow a longitudinal follow-up of the individuals (Steiner, Wanner, 2015; Wanner et al., 2016). Precisely, data matching between the Automatic Registration System of Persons (for N and F permit holders), the Central Register of Foreign Nationals (for B and C permit holders, as well as other permits concerning for example family members of diplomats) and the Population and Households Statistics (covering, since 2010, both the permanent and the non-permanent resident population of Switzerland) allows to follow the refugee population over time. These registers include administrative information such as citizenship, residence permit, date of birth, gender, marital status and duration of stay.

In addition to these registers, I had access to data from the Central Compensation Office (CCO), the Confederation’s agency in charge of the 1st pillar social insurances. This data provides information on each individual’s annual wage. Both sources put together are therefore a unique opportunity to investigate the economic integration process at the individual’s level. Such possibilities offered by the use of public statistics are even more important in a quantitative perspective since reaching the refugee population, e.g. in order to conduct a specific survey, would be really difficult – not to mention the very low response rate expected from individuals who can be quite suspicious towards any questionnaire that might remind them of the asylum procedure. Of course, there are drawbacks to this approach: the administrative purpose of public statistics entails the lack of some information. I can only regret the absence of indication of hourly wage (a lack that will have an impact on the professional integration indicator), educational level, number of children, health status, housing type and, last but not least, about the outcome of the asylum procedure. This last point explains why, for example, when a change from N permit to B permit is observed, I cannot be sure whether it is a consequence of the

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8 Other criteria are also considered, such as the family situation and the possibility of a return to the home country, but the economic situation plays a central role in the decision.

9 The Refugee database does not include information about the households.
recognition of the refugee status or if such a transition is due to a marriage with a Swiss citizen or with a holder of a B/C permit (even if this last scenario definitely applies to fewer individuals). Likewise, a change from F permit to B permit can also be the consequence of a marriage, although in that case it is more likely that the residence permit was granted for humanitarian reasons (Art. 84 FNA).10

Analyses follow two steps. First, I describe the refugees’ trajectories of residence permits on the one hand, and their professional integration on the other hand – relying on sequence analysis graphical tools (Gabadinho et al., 2011). Second, I study the causal relation between residence permits and chances to integrate into the labour market using discrete time survival models.

The refugee population

The refugee population includes all the individuals who came to Switzerland between 2000 and 2013, and who were still in Switzerland at least once between 2010 and 2013.11 Furthermore, as I focus on professional integration trajectories, I only selected the individuals who were aged between 18 and 49 when they arrived. This population is therefore composed of 53’562 individuals, of which 69% are men. I will refer to this population as “the 2000-2013 arrival cohorts”, as opposed to a subgroup I named “the 2000-2004 arrival cohorts” which only includes refugees who can be followed for at least ten years after their arrival to Switzerland. The “2000-2004 arrival cohorts” contains 10’248 individuals (57% of men).

Table 2 shows the frequencies of nationalities12 by sex for the 2000-2013 arrival cohorts. Main countries of origin are Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Somalia, China and Tibet13, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Nigeria which together represent more than 60% of the refugees.

Table 2: Nationalities by sex, 2000-2013 arrival cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2'499</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>837</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroun</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China and Tibet</td>
<td>1'925</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1'181</td>
<td>7.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo Kinshasa</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>5’086</td>
<td>13.85</td>
<td>3’734</td>
<td>22.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 Note that a change from a N permit to a B permit for humanitarian reasons can theoretically also occur (Art. 14 AsylA), but such case is scarce.

11 This selection criterion is entailed by the impossibility to compile databases for refugees who left Switzerland before 2010. Also note that refugees who had access to the Swiss citizenship before 2010 cannot be identified in the registers.

12 If a refugee became a Swiss citizen, I still refer to his/her nationality of origin.

13 No distinction between Chinese and Tibetan people is made in the registers since 2000.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>1.33</th>
<th>574</th>
<th>3.41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>487</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2'212</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1'048</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>1'804</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Africa</td>
<td>4'214</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asia/Oceania</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Europe</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>2'272</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2'804</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>1'033</td>
<td>6.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1'967</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>1'614</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1'928</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1'025</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Stateless</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36'730</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16'832</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trajectories among the residence permits**

I start by describing the refugees’ trajectories of residence permits. To do so, I resort to sequence analysis tools that allow me to compute the sequences for each individual and to graphically represent them. Since the information pertaining the refugees’ residence permit is available only at the end of each year, the granularity is annual. Several states can be listed, four of them consisting of the most common cases: the N, F, B and C permits. Others statuses are labelled “OTH” for other types of permits, “CH” for Swiss nationality, “UD” for undocumented workers and “ABR” when the person lives abroad.

Figure 1 shows the trajectories of the 2000-2004 arrival cohorts from the end of the first year of their arrival in Switzerland (t1) until their tenth year in the country (t10). Here, sequences are sorted so the refugees are grouped together according to the last permit they hold. Four colours prevail: light orange for asylum-seekers (N permit), dark orange for provisional admission (F permit), light green for B permit holders and dark green for C permit holders. Among them, orange colours dominate, which means that the first 10 years of presence in Switzerland are mostly spent with the most precarious residence permits. In fact, nearly a third (31%) of the 10’248 refugees observed still holds a precarious permit after 10 years – mostly a F permit, while 350 individuals remain with an asylum seeker permit in t10. In time, the proportion of precarious permits decreases to be replaced by more stable permits: 44% end up

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14 In this case, such status means that an individual is not registered as living in Switzerland although he/she contributes to the social insurance (a contribution that is taken from the person’s income) during the year under observation.
with a B permit in t10, and 25% with a C permit. At this point, it should be remembered that here only the refugees who stayed in the country for at least 10 years are examined¹⁵, while those who were deported back to their country of origin or to another country in the meantime are not included in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Longitudinal follow-up, individuals’ trajectories according to their residence permit (or status), 2000-2004 arrival cohorts**

At this point, some observations should be made: I mentioned earlier that the information about the outcome of the asylum procedure is not available in the data. Nonetheless, hypotheses can be made when looking at figure 1. In fact, until 2014, the recognized refugees were allowed a C permit 5 years after they applied for asylum (Art. 60 AsylA). For the others, the 5-years delay starts to run only after they obtain a B permit (Art. 34 FNA).¹⁶ As a result, I strongly suspect that among the individuals who hold a C permit in t10, many of them are recognized refugees. And, following the same idea, I also suppose that most of the individuals who hold a B permit in t10 obtained this B permit for humanitarian reasons – hypothesis supported by the fact that many of them experience several years with a provisional admission (F permit). Again, these hypotheses cannot be verified, not to forget that some changes in the residence permits can be due to marriages with a Swiss citizen or with a holder of a B/C permit. Still, as we will see, this link between the status (recognized refugees vs. persons granted B permit for humanitarian reasons) and the residence permit in t10 (C permit vs. B permit) is of great importance to understand the mechanisms we will observe later.

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¹⁵ At least 11 years for the 2000 arrival cohort since these individuals had to still be in Switzerland at the end of 2010 or afterwards.

¹⁶ Since February 1, 2014, Art. 34 FNA applies for everyone. The C permit is therefore no longer made accessible faster for recognized refugees.
**Indicator of professional integration**

The only information available to measure the refugee’s professional integration is their annual wage. Hence the question: “What is the minimum wage one should earn to be considered integrated in the labour market?” I therefore needed to set a threshold above which I assume that the person is professionally integrated. The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) approach for the at-risk-of-poverty level is to fix the threshold at 50% of the median of equivalised disposable income of households (OFS, 2016). Indeed, it is a poverty indicator, measured at the households’ level. I propose to extend this approach to create a professional integration indicator, measured at the individuals’ level, by taking the threshold of 50% of the annual median wage in Switzerland. This median wage is calculated amongst all men living in Switzerland whom I take as a reference group. I do so in order to reduce the bias induced by the fact that the hourly wage is unknown, as in Switzerland full-time work is much more common for men than it is for women (Bläuer Herrmann, Murier, 2016). Indeed, the threshold varies over time, from 32’402 Swiss francs in 2000 to 35’631 Swiss francs in 2013 – which respectively correspond to a monthly wage of 2’700 and 2’969 Swiss francs. Although somewhat imperfect, this indicator still represents a solution for approaching professional integration of refugees through registers data.

**Trajectories of professional integration**

Figure 2 shows the trajectories of men and women of the 2000-2004 arrival cohorts according to the professional integration indicator. Dark blue is used every year the individual is considered integrated in the labour market. Again, sequences are ordered by status from the end of the trajectory. What immediately stands out is the gap between men and women, as, after 10 years of stay in Switzerland, 53% of men are professionally integrated while it is only the case for 19% of women. Another prevailing fact is time’s considerable impact in the integration process, as after every additional year spent in Switzerland more refugees are incorporated into the labour market. Finally, figure 2 indicates that while some individuals tend to go back-and-forth between the states, the main trend is to remain professionally integrated for many years once the threshold is reached. It should be pointed out that this does not mean refugees remain in the same job from one year to the next, but only that they manage to keep their annual wage above the threshold of 50% of the median wage – even when a change of job occurs.
Impact of the residence permit on the chances to integrate into the labour market

A first way of addressing my research question is to compute the professional integration rates by residence permit in t10. By doing so, I partially put aside the complexity of the residence permit trajectories, each individual being defined only by the permit they hold 10 years after arriving in Switzerland. Figures 3 and 4 respectively show the results for men and women.
Figure 3: Relative frequencies of the professional integration indicator per year according to the residence permit in t10, men, 2000-2004 arrival cohorts

Figure 4: Relative frequencies of the professional integration indicator per year according to the residence permit in t10, women, 2000-2004 arrival cohorts
9% of men who are still in the asylum procedure (N permit) after 10 years spent in Switzerland are considered integrated in the labour market. Holders of provisional admission (F permit) are in turn 29%, while B and C permit holders are respectively 73% and 47% to be considered as professionally integrated. Similar trends can be observed among women, though with much lower professional integration rates: barely 0.4% of women holding a N permit after 10 years in Switzerland are professionally integrated, while the rate is 0.6% for the F permit holders. Relatively higher rates are found among the B permit holders (31% of women integrated into the labour market) and the C permit holders (17%).

These results of B and C permit holders are unexpected, since I hypothesized that the C permit would lead to better chances of integration. However, I argue that this apparent gap between B and C permit holders hides, in fact, the gap between recognized refugees and persons granted B permit for humanitarian reasons that I mentioned above. This would explain why individuals who hold a B permit in t10 appear much more integrated into the labour market, as there is a strong selection effect at stake in this case. What is more, this interpretation is consistent with the results obtained by Spadarotto et al. (2014).

All in all, these descriptive results already show the impact of the residence permit on labour market integration. Moreover, the wide gap in the professional integration rate between those who still hold a precarious permit (N/F) after 10 years spent in Switzerland and those who obtained more stable permits (B/C) in the meantime reflects the cumulative disadvantage process that the former suffer in the long run.

To understand the impact of the residence permit on the chances to integrate into the labour market I now turn towards multivariate regression models. Specifically, I use discrete time survival models to grasp the residence permit effect on the chances to enter the labour market (i.e. to experience a first professional integration) “all things being equal”, that is controlling for possible confounding variables such as nationality or length of stay. Due to the discrepancies observed above, models are separated for men and women.

Survival analysis allows me to model the probability that a given event – here “a first professional integration”, according to the indicator of 50% of the median wage – occurs over time. Individuals do not need an equal observation period, hence my inclusion in this analysis of the 53'562 refugees of the “2000-2013 arrival cohorts”. Independent variables included in the model are residence permit, length of stay, age, civil status, nationality and canton of

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17 For men who obtained the Swiss nationality, the rate is of 68% after 10 years, when it is 40% for the others categories taken together. However, due to the small numbers in both groups (n=28 and n=30), I prefer to avoid commenting these results. The same goes for women who obtained the Swiss nationality (n=14, rate=57% in t10) and the other categories (n=8, rate=0% in t10).

18 This result – the longer the time spent with a N/F permit, the lower the chances to be integrated in the labour market in t10 – stands when controlling for structural variables (nationality, marital status, age and canton of residence) in logistic regression models, as I demonstrated in Bertrand (2017).

19 Precisely, due to data structure, I use discrete time survival models. Logistic regression can be run on a person-period data file to express the risk that the event occurs depending on various explanatory factors (either fixed or time-varying), and given the fact that it did not occurred before. I stress out that, although the word “risk” is usually used in survival analysis, I prefer to employ the word “chance” as it suits more to the occurrence of a positive event (professional integration).
residence. Table 3 shows the results of the residence permit variable for men and women, while controlling for the other variables. Appendix 1 displays the full model.

Table 3: Odds ratios of the residence permit variables to explain the occurrence of the event “first professional integration”, discrete time survival models (2000-2013 arrival cohorts)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Residence permit (ref. = N)</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.481***</td>
<td>0.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1.630***</td>
<td>2.019***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.858***</td>
<td>1.403**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>1.579</td>
<td>1.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTH/UD/missing</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>2.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (person-year)</td>
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<td>89'145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlled for: Length of stay, age, civil status, nationality, canton of residence
Statistical significance: *p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Results of the residence permit variable must be interpreted carefully and in a particular way due to its inherent chronology: not only is it of ordinal nature (as permits can be ranked from the most precarious to the most stable), but also the obtaining of a “better” permit is most of the time an irreversible event (e.g. a refugee who obtained a C permit in t will not find himself with a N permit in t+1). In the survival analysis framework this has consequences since, once the “first professional integration” event has occurred, concerned individuals are no longer part of the at-risk population. Indeed, some asylum seekers manage – despite their precarious status – to enter the job market. However, even if these persons subsequently get a F, B or C permit, they will not be included in the odds ratio calculation of these categories as they would no longer be at risk of experiencing the event. The same reasoning applies at each “level” of the residence permit, since individuals who find it the hardest to enter the labour market are censored. Thus, to take an example from table 3, we should not interpret the odds ratio of the male C permits holders as a sign that their chances to integrate into the labour market are multiplied by 1.9 compared to those of the asylum seekers (N permit). In fact, we should read it as the chances to integrate with a C permit for the individuals who did not experience the event with a former permit, compared to the chances an asylum seeker at risk during the same time period would have had. Therefore, each of the odds ratio must be understood as the residence permit effect on the professional integration chances considering that integration did not occur with a former (hence more precarious) permit.

Among men, the odds ratios of F, B and C permits gradually increase.\(^{20}\) This gradation not only follows my hypothesis concerning the hierarchy of N, F, B and C permits for their chances of professional integration, but most of all means that for the individuals who find it the hardest to enter the labour market, the most vulnerable persons, accessing a more stable permit makes

\(^{20}\) The results for F, B and C permits are significant compared to the reference category (N permit) but also from one another (as I checked by permuting the reference category). As mentioned earlier, I won’t comment the OTH/UD/missing category as it covers many situations and concerns only few cases. As for those who obtained the Swiss nationality, the small number of cases probably explains why the results are non significant both for men and women. The reason is that most naturalised individuals experienced the event (and therefore were censored) before being granted citizenship.
their task easier to complete. To use an analogy, we can compare residence permits as a “net” with an increasingly tighter mesh: the transition to a more stable permit allows to increase the probability of professional integration of refugees who have so far fallen through the cracks.

Among women, other trends are observed. For them, the F permit does not seem to improve the chances to integrate into the labour market compared to the N permit. However, holders of B permit distinguish themselves significantly. An hypothesis to explain the apparent lag between N/F and B permits among women is that the professional integration indicator fails, by definition, to take into account undeclared work. Yet, it is possible that women holders of N/F permit find themselves in such a situation, for example if they cumulate multiple small jobs in the domestic economy sector – especially if the employers try to avoid the administrative burden encountered when hiring N/F permit holders. In turn, it is much easier to officially employ someone once the B permit is obtained. Therefore, I assume that if undeclared work among N/F permit holders could have been taken into account, a smaller difference would have been observed among women between N, F and B permit holders. More surprising is probably the result for the C permit holders, as it appears that they have less chances than the B permit holders to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, let me restate that we should consider the at-risk population: among the C permit holders, only those who did not experience the event with a former permit remain at this point – constituting a selected population. Moreover, the fact that individuals who are not in the labour force “by choice” (for example to stay at home and look after children) cannot be distinguished from individuals who are unemployed but looking for a job perhaps explains why results are more ambiguous for women.

Apart from the impact of the residence permit, the analyses show the importance of other factors on the chances to enter the labour market (see appendix 1). The length of stay is indeed a key determinant of the integration process. Descriptive statistics already showed that women are far less professionally integrated. Multivariate analysis stresses out that being married (which can be a proxy for having to take care of children) is a factor of exclusion for women, while, for men, marriage increases the chances to integrate the labour market. Finally, nationality appears as a major determinant of professional integration, although further analyses would be needed to explain whether inequalities are due to discrepancies of social network, educational level, or if they are the result of employers’ discrimination towards some communities.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, this paper shows that residence permits and chances to integrate into the labour market are closely tied, a more stable permit generally increasing the chances to enter the labour market. In other words, the administrative hierarchy matches the economic hierarchy. As a consequence, individuals who live many years with the asylum seekers status (N permit) or as provisionally admitted persons (F permit) go through a cumulative disadvantage process.

Of course, the residence permit alone does not explain all the inequalities in the access to the labour market. Nevertheless, since it is a factor of vulnerability that is shaped by the legislation, practical implications are at stake in terms of public policies for improving the professional integration of the refugee population. Simplifying the criteria for granting the more stable permits as well as improving the rights of the more precarious ones (in particular on the subjects of labour market, family reunification, housing and mobility) would indeed have a positive
impact. Yet, apart from some efforts made on professional integration, the latest legislative changes have shown that Switzerland is rather taking the opposite direction (Bertrand 2017). An example of the ongoing public policies lies in the will of the Swiss authorities to shorten the asylum procedure. Although such a measure can seem like an improvement, the State Secretariat for Migration is in fact giving the priority to cases leading to a negative decision (mainly Dublin cases and dismissed applicants), while the requests of people who have a high probability to obtain some form of protection (refugee status or provisional admission) come after. For them, this leads to long years of waiting with the N permit. And on that matter, according to the Federal Council, “obstacles to the [asylum seekers’] labour market integration must be maintained until the asylum decision” (Conseil fédéral, 2016:35).

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the economic vulnerability of the refugee population – compared to other immigrant groups and to the natives – has been assessed by many researchers (see Ott 2013 for an extensive literature review on this “refugee gap”). This paper shows that within the refugee group, the host countries’ legislation creates an additional hierarchy, based on the residence permits, that further widens the inequalities.

Acknowledgement

This research would not have been possible without the data gathered for the project “Intégration structurelle et déqualification de la population réfugiée en Suisse” (Wanner et al., 2016), a study funded by the SEM. I warmly thank all those who took care of data extraction and matching, in particular Philippe Wanner, Ilka Steiner and Andreas Perret (NCCR On the Move), Christoph Freymond (FSO), Alex Pavlovic (CCO) and Pierre Fontaine (SECO). I am also very grateful towards Gilbert Ritschard and Philippe Wanner for supervising my PhD dissertation on which this article is based, and towards Marie-Hélène Giostra and Mark D’Arcy for proofreading this text.

References


22 Terms translated by me.


**Appendix 1: Explanatory factors of the occurrence of the event “first professional integration”, discrete time survival models, odds ratios (2000-2013 arrival cohorts)**

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<th></th>
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<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Residence permit (ref. = N)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>1.481***</td>
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Observations (person-year): 132'742 89'145
Log Likelihood: -27'888.8 -8'276.3
Akaike Inf. Crit.: 55'939.7 16'714.6

Statistical significance: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001