

# Tensions during the implementation of integration policy in Switzerland: The challenges surrounding “fast and sustainable” integration

Ihssane OTMANI<sup>1</sup>

IDHEAP, University of Lausanne

## Abstract

*This article explores the tensions arising from implementing integration policy in Switzerland. Relying mainly on the experiences and perceptions of 23 street-level bureaucrats (SLB) and 29 refugees in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland, it identifies the dynamics at work during the process of integration, in particular how the focus on quick labor market integration of refugees, shapes both refugees’ integration trajectories and SLBs understanding of their role and function. The article closely examines the tensions experienced on both sides; among others, these spring from expecting “fast” integration. It finds that SLBs strive to ensure “fast and sustainable integration” by promoting rapid access to vocational training and employment. This approach often causes friction between SLBs, who recognize the shortcomings of this approach without seriously challenging it, and refugees, who either adapt to the expectations of “fast and sustainable integration” or rely on their own resources to gain support for their more ambitious projects.*

*Keywords: Integration, refugees, street-level bureaucrats, aspirations, labor market*

## Introduction

In most cases, forced migration seriously disrupts a person’s career and life development and often requires profoundly redefining one’s objectives in all areas of life. One important aspect of the integration experiences of refugees in the global north is that they are confronted with a myriad of policies that determine which integration trajectories are favored and which are not (Otmani 2023). This dense policy landscape includes standard policies (e.g., education, social policy), as well as more specific ones (e.g., asylum and integration policy). In the global north,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ihssane Otmani (ihssane.otmani@unil.ch) is a researcher at the Institut de hautes études en administration publique (IDHEAP) at the University of Lausanne.



integration policy includes implementing programs aimed at promoting access to the labor market (e.g., Arendt 2020; Konle-Seidl 2018; Valenta/Bunar 2010). Moreover, these programs usually follow the same logic of “promoting and demanding” fast labor market integration (e.g., Arendt 2020; Hinger/Schweitzer 2020; Konle-Seidl 2018).

In Switzerland, the Swiss Integration Agenda (SIA) has established various integration measures and programs for refugees that adopt a similar logic. Program implementation involves tasking street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) with “managing” integration and supporting refugees in this process (SEM 2021). While these programs and SLBs support may offer refugees a foundation to navigate the host society (e.g., Bevelander/Pendakur 2014; Valenta/Bunar 2010), implementing integration policy may create tensions between SLBs and refugees for two main reasons. First, refugees are a heterogeneous group with highly diverse backgrounds and aspirations. Research on refugee aspirations shows that refugees have high occupational and educational aspirations (see e.g., Morrice et al. 2020; Hebbani/Khawaja 2019; Dryden-Peterson 2017). Many have high aspirations for tertiary education (Morrice et al. 2020; Schneider 2018; Shakya et al. 2010) or to maintain a professional status similar to that in their country of origin (e.g., Pietka-Nykaza 2015).

This is expected to add layers of complexity to the work of SLBs in charge of implementing integration policy and create different tensions during this process as the tools and resources available to SLBs may often prevent them from responding to clients’ individual needs and aspirations. Second, SLBs may face moral dilemmas during policy implementation due to their role and responsibilities clashing with their clients’ expectations. While government policy is often perceived as ambiguous by those subject to implementation and those overseeing it (Das 2004), it potentially gives SLBs greater leeway and hence an important say in policy implementation (e.g., Lipsky 1980; Davidovitz/Cohen 2020). However, the extent of this power remains highly debatable. When it comes to implementing integration policy, that power may remain limited because of the highly politicized environment characterizing social work with refugees. Accordingly, this complicates the work of SLBs, who must often adopt coping strategies (Zacka 2017).

This article investigates the possible tensions experienced by both SLBs and refugees during the implementation of integration policy, the dynamics underlying these tensions, and how actors cope with and position themselves towards these tensions. The main conclusion is that implementing integration policy is fraught with tension. The expectation to integrate fast but also sustainably can be challenging and paradoxical for SLBs and refugees, limits the latter’s aspirations and ambitious projects.

### **Tensions during the process of refugee integration**

Integration is often described as a two-way process involving a host society and migrants or refugees. However, the term is criticized for its normative nature and tendency to put the onus to integrate on migrants or refugees (e.g., Mozetič 2022; Phillimore 2021; Favell 2019; Schinkel 2018; Scandone 2018; Dahinden, 2016; Mulvey 2015). While refugee agency and various characteristics such as previous qualifications, language skills, and social networks play an important role in shaping integration experiences (e.g., Borselli/Van Meijl 2021; Udayar et al 2021;

Auer 2017; Williams 2006), this article emphasizes that structural aspects or what Phillimore (2021) calls “opportunity structures” require more attention—not to diminish the role played by refugee agency in integration trajectories but to balance the current debate on integration. Consequently, this article pursues two goals: to explore refugees’ and street-level bureaucrats’ perspectives and experiences to reveal how the state defines and expects integration to take place; and to better understand how the involved actors position themselves towards state expectations.

In Western Europe, including Switzerland, integration policy is implemented via integration programs, which follow a similar logic. Similar in kind, these programs include language courses and introductory courses to life in the host society and focus on quick labor market integration to relieve the welfare state (Konle-Seidl 2018; Valenta/Bunar 2010). Research has found that these programs positively influence the employment rate of refugees (Bevelander/Pendakur 2014; Valenta/Bunar 2010). Nevertheless, they are often criticized for being restrictive and for focusing almost exclusively on fast labor market integration (e.g., Arendt 2020; Hinger/Schweitzer 2020; Konle-Seidl 2018), thus limiting refugees to precarious work, which often leads to long-term dependency on the welfare state (Arendt 2020).

While integration programs in Western countries tend to focus on quick labor market integration, research on refugee aspirations has consistently shown that refugees have high educational and occupational aspirations (see e.g., Dryden-Peterson 2017; Shakya et al. 2010). Many refugees develop strong aspirations for higher education as they perceive education as the gateway to securing viable employment and hence to achieving a better socioeconomic status (see e.g., Schneider 2018; Dryden-Peterson 2017; Morrice et al 2020). Other studies have highlighted the entrepreneurial aspirations of refugees and their high motivation to create their own business (see e.g., Hebbani/Khawaja 2019). Research has also shown how strongly refugees, especially highly skilled ones, seek to reproduce a social status similar to that in their country of origin. Strategies include maintaining their original profession as far as possible, both in general (Mozetič 2020) and in specific fields (Pietka-Nykaza 2015). These aspirations may create tensions during the implementation of integration policy due to the expectation and/or the requirement to follow a predefined integration path (i.e., to quickly find work), whereas many refugees may aspire to pursue more ambitious goals, such as starting a business or going to university.

As street level bureaucrats (SLBs) are at the forefront of policy implementation and responsible for translating policy requirements to policy takers (Lipsky 1980), in this case with translating integration policy to refugees, we may expect that tensions resulting from the expectation to integrate fast will affect not just refugee aspirations but also how social workers view and carry their function.

While the discretionary power of social workers and the extent to which their perceptions and moral dilemmas affect implementing integration policy remains debatable, research on SLBs in general and on social work with refugees and migrants in particular acknowledges the existence of such power. Indeed, the face-to-face interaction they have with their clients (Lipsky 1980; Berkowitz 1987; Derthick 1990), combined with varying refugee circumstances and characteristics, means that policy rules and requirements are translated differently (Lipsky 1980;

Maynard-Moody/Musheno 2003). In the context of integration policy implementation, and using the leeway at their disposal, SLBs may adapt the requirements of integration programs to their clients' needs or search for other alternatives if offerings do not align with refugees' aspirations and potential.

However, research has also shown that this power remains limited due to various factors. In fact, organizational conditions (Cohen 2018; Cohen/Hertz 2020), such as the degree of power delegation (May/Winter 2009), the resources allocated to them (e.g., Lipsky 1980; Winter 2002) workloads and client mix all influences the discretion of SLBs. Moreover, for work with migrants, other factors such as cultural differences (Nash et al. 2006; Nash 2005; Potocky-Tripodi 2002; Khan 2000), rising nationalism and anti-refugee sentiments may either enhance their political awareness or increase their "political fatigue", further challenging the extent of their discretion and increasing their moral dilemmas (Birger et al 2020; Berthold/Libal 2019).

Consequently, operating in such demanding environments might make SLBs adopt one of three 'pathological' positions (Zacka 2017) as a way of coping with their moral dilemmas. First, acting as an *enforcer*, an SLB adheres strictly to the applicable regulations and laws, making control and correction their main client strategy. This approach leaves little room for refugees' wishes and aspirations, potentially creating considerable tensions between SLBs and refugees. Also, as control and correction require more resources to implement policies, SLBs would face increased pressure. At the other end of the spectrum, the second strategy is *indifference*. That is, SLBs distance themselves as much as possible from their clients' needs and demands, resulting in investing as few resources as possible (e.g., time and information) to accommodate their clients' aspirations and ambitions. As a result, SLBs will either delegate some of their responsibilities to other entities (e.g., civil society organizations) or let refugees to figure out for themselves how to implement their aspirations and future plans. This *indifferent* position might create tensions between refugees and SLBs as the former feel unheard or not taken seriously. Third, their enhanced political awareness and moral dilemmas might lead SLBs to become *caregivers*. This translates into going the extra mile to cater to their clients' needs, and thus to using their discretionary power to adapt policy requirements as much as possible to refugee aspirations. Nevertheless, studies have shown that caregiving does not necessarily benefit refugees. In fact, Zacka (2017) warns against adopting this position because it reinforces clients' victim stance: Caregiving maintains a parent-child dynamic, and thus increases the power dependency of refugees (Birger and Nadan 2021).

This article explores these tensions in terms of SLB and refugee perceptions. Most studies on the frustrations and challenges faced by both refugees and SLBs tend to examine these groups separately, focusing either on refugees, mostly highly skilled ones (e.g., Mozetič 2022), or on SLBs (e.g, Birger et al 2020). Most attention has been paid to the obstacles facing asylum seekers and the frustrations arising from legal status and asylum procedure (e.g., Hynie 2018; Van Heelsum 2017). The main contribution of this article is that it explores the tensions experienced by refugees and SLBs by combining their perceptions and experiences. This twofold approach enables better understanding of the mechanisms underlying refugee integration, in particular how the focus of policy on fast integration shapes refugees' educational and professional choices, on the one hand, and influences how SLBs perform their role and responsibilities, on the other.

## Integration policy in Switzerland

Switzerland is a confederation, where responsibility for refugee integration policy is shared between the federal government and the cantons. Policy is implemented by various public structures, such as schools, health services, civil society actors, and vocational training institutions (SEM 2021). What follows provides an overview of permits before looking at Swiss integration policy.

### *Legal status and associated rights*

In Switzerland, and following asylum procedure, asylum seekers may receive one of three permits, each associated with different rights and obligations. First, if they are recognized as refugees under the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and Swiss law, asylum seekers are awarded refugee status and a residence permit (B refugee permit). Second, if an asylum seeker is recognized as a refugee under the Geneva Convention but is denied asylum by Switzerland for “subjective reasons subsequent to the flight” which happens when the authorities find that the applicant only became a refugee by leaving the country of provenance or by engaging in certain activities (e.g., political activism in exile) after leaving that country (Asile 2021), they are admitted provisionally and are awarded an F refugee permit<sup>2</sup> (Guidesocial 2021). Third, if an asylum seeker’s application is rejected, and if they do not qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention but cannot be deported from Switzerland, they are awarded a provisional permit (F permit)<sup>3</sup> (Guidesocial 2021).

These three types of permits are associated with different levels of rights. F refugee permit holders and F permit holders are not automatically entitled to family reunification. Additionally, F permit holders are not allowed to travel and face greater difficulties on the job market and in accessing education due to their temporary permits. Individuals with a refugee status or a B refugee permit benefit from a more stable status and have access to all rights including family reunification (Asile 2021). In order for F refugee holders and especially F permit holders<sup>4</sup> to enjoy more rights, including family reunification and fewer complications on the job market, they must become financially independent to convert their F refugee or F permits into a B work permit<sup>5</sup> (Asile 2021). This limitation may be a source of tension for many refugees holding such permits. It likely leads many of the affected refugees to lower their aspirations and expectations and to accept any kind of employment to fulfill the integration requirements and thus upgrade their permits to gain more rights.

---

<sup>2</sup> In French : Les réfugiés admis à titre provisoire (SEM 2019).

<sup>3</sup> In French : Les personnes admises à titre provisoire (SEM 2019).

<sup>4</sup> While both F refugee permit holders and F permit holders share similar challenges, the latter face more difficulties as they are not allowed to travel outside of Switzerland and receive less social aid.

<sup>5</sup> In Switzerland, B permits can be issued for various purposes, including asylum, education, work, and family reunification. Holders of F refugee permits, and F permits who find work can convert their permits into a B work permit.

---

*Switzerland's refugee integration policy*

The Swiss Confederation and cantons have developed specific programs to promote refugee integration and reduce their welfare dependency. These efforts began with programs for cantonal integration (PIC), first introduced in 2014. The Canton of Vaud actively participated in implementing these programs, which were not aimed solely at refugees but at all foreigners. Programs had three aims: to provide information for foreign nationals and protect individuals and groups against discrimination; to promote education and employment; and finally, to foster peaceful coexistence (KIP-PIC n.d.).

For several years, the Confederation and the cantons realized that many refugees were struggling to integrate socially, to find employment, and to provide for themselves (Etat de Genève 2021). Hence, in spring 2019, Swiss Integration Agenda (SIA<sup>6</sup>), a program aimed specifically at refugees (holding refugee status and temporary admission) was launched. The SIA and its annexes frequently speak of “encouraging integration,” which refers to encouraging quick, efficient, intensive, and systematic integration (SEM 2018a). Thus, the SIA understands integration as a process that begins as soon as a person enters Switzerland or files an asylum application, which remains valid until they enter professional training or pursue remunerated employment. Additionally, the SIA focuses on enabling adolescents and young adults to learn a national language more quickly and to prepare them for a professional activity (Appendix, Figure 1). The aim is to enable refugees to enter the labor market or professional training, and thus to achieve financial independence. This directly reduces welfare costs and strengthens social cohesion (SEM 2018a). The SIA also emphasizes that labor market integration needs to be sustainable or lasting (SEM 2018a). One important tool to help reach this goal is dual Vocational Education and Training (VET)<sup>7</sup>. Understood as the gateway to “sustainable integration,” dual VET provides refugees with the opportunity to learn a job in a company while studying for a Swiss vocational diploma, which is expected to provide refugees with better and lasting employment prospects.

In addition to highlighting the importance of sustainable integration, the SIA has also introduced the notions of “case by case management” and “evaluation of potential” as central tools for the professional coaching of refugees (SEM 2018b). Provided by SLBs, coaching supports refugees in finding the best-suited integration path. SIA integration offerings are geared towards admission to a vocational school or direct employment. While it does not rule out other options (e.g., tertiary education or degree recognition for highly skilled refugees), the SIA clearly aims to accelerate access to the labor market.

Overall, Swiss integration policy focuses strongly on implementing measures and programs that promote quick access to the labor market. Vocational training is perceived as an important tool and as the most privileged educational path for refugees, as tertiary education is seldom mentioned in integration policy documents. Job coaches and social workers are expected to play

---

<sup>6</sup> In French : Agenda d'Intégration Suisse (AIS)

<sup>7</sup> In Switzerland, dual vocational education and training (VET), young people (aged 14 and 15 years) pursue on-the-job training in a host company in combination with attending vocational school. As there is no maximum age limit to access this system, individuals, including refugees, can join at later stage to obtain a Federal VET Certificate (AFP) after two years or a Federal VET Diploma (CFC) after three to four years (Swissinfo 2022).

a crucial role in translating the applicable guidelines into reality and in supporting refugees follow the integration paths promoted by Swiss integration policy.

## **Methodology**

This study has adopted a qualitative approach. It is based on semi-structured interviews with 29 refugees living in the French-speaking Canton of Vaud, Switzerland, and with 23 street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) working in public organizations and NGOs or external integration services responsible for implementing integration policy in the Canton of Vaud. Switzerland has one of the highest immigration rates in Europe, mostly consisting of Europeans nationals (Swissinfo 2017). The Canton of Vaud reflects Swiss diversity: It is one of the largest and most diverse cantons in Switzerland. It also provides manifold career prospects. It is neither predominantly rural nor urban. Its economic sectors range from agriculture to advanced technology, which likely translates into fewer career restrictions than elsewhere. Also, Vaud is one of two Swiss cantons home to a large variety of (higher) educational institutions, which include the University of Lausanne, several universities of applied sciences (UAS), professional schools, and the Federal Institute of Technology (EPFL). This diversity also offers a wide range of educational and career prospects.

### *Field work with refugee participants and interview data analysis*

When recruiting the 29 refugee participants, it was important that their countries of origin reflected the composition of refugee arrivals in Switzerland over the past decade. Participants arrived in Switzerland between 2014 and 2018. In fact, migration streams to Switzerland and Vaud have changed in recent decades. While Switzerland has long been a destination for employment-seeking French, Germans, and Italians, during the second half of the 20th century and since the early 21st century, refugees have been arriving from other regions: Eastern Europe (e.g., Yugoslavia), Africa (e.g., Eritrea), and Asia (e.g., Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka). In the past decade, refugees have come mostly from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, and Turkey (SEM 2022). These are also the main countries of origin of the study participants (see Appendix, Figure 2 for the number of asylum applications in Switzerland since 1986).

The 29 refugee participants (see Appendix, Table 1) were recruited via NGOs and public institutions responsible for refugee policy. During recruitment, gatekeepers were diversified as much as possible to avoid limiting the sample to a single profile (e.g., nationality, education, age) and to make it more difficult to identify participants (for ethical reasons). Therefore, refugees were recruited from three NGOs, of which two were tasked by the Canton of Vaud with implementing integration policy; the third one, managed by independent volunteers, focused on promoting the social integration of refugees. Recruitment also involved two public organizations responsible for refugees during and after asylum process and for implementing integration policy. In addition to gatekeepers, snowballing and the author's personal network were also used to reach participants. To assess how their interactions with social workers and teachers had influenced their aspirations and future plans, participants had to have been living in Vaud for at least three years and have a permit that allowed them to work and study (Permit F or

Permit B). This selection criterion was important for observing how integration policy affected the aspirations and future goals of refugees who had been living in Vaud for a while, had had regular contact with their social workers, and had participated in language courses and integration programs (see Appendix, Table 1).

Throughout the interviews, great emphasis was placed on nonhierarchical interaction and transparency. Before starting the interviews and to establish familiarity, the author provided information about her own migrant background and journey in Switzerland. After participants had given their oral consent, all interviews (bar two) were audio-recorded. Interviews were conducted in English, French, and Arabic. They were transcribed in the interview language except for those conducted in Arabic, which were translated and transcribed into French by the author. Interviews were conducted between October 2020 and March 2021. They lasted between half an hour and one hour and a half, with an average duration of 45 minutes.

Participants were asked to talk about their educational and occupational aspirations and experiences in four phases: (1) Life in Switzerland (recently and in the future); (2) life during the first year in Switzerland; (3) life in the home country; (4) life in a transition country. For each phase, questions focused on how participants' training, education, and employment in Switzerland related to their aspirations. This article discusses those interview segments where refugees report their experiences with SLBs (including social workers, job coaches, and teachers). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis using Nvivo 2020. Data were categorized as follows: "Career counselling," "permit," "social workers," "future plans," "satisfaction/wellbeing." Additional rounds of coding were performed to zoom into refugees' interactions with social workers and into their experiences with their legal status and integration policy, and also served to establish how these factors shaped their aspirations and future plans. The findings are presented in the Results section.

### *Field work with SLBs and interview data analysis*

To complement the data collected from refugees, and to better understand the tensions resulting from the implementation of integration policy, it was also important to include the experiences and perceptions of SLBs directly involved with refugees. Between March and June 2021, 23 SLBs working in state and non-state organizations responsible for implementing integration policy (i.e., mandated by the Canton of Vaud) were interviewed. In total, two state and two non-state organizations were approached directly by the author (see Appendix, Table 2), who presented her research project and its purpose. Following these meetings, the organizations communicated information about the project to their social workers and those interested were later contacted to arrange an interview.

Most SLB interviewees held a degree in social work or another social science discipline (e.g., psychology, anthropology, political science). Some had a migration background, and a few had migrated themselves. Interviewees held different positions in their organization. They were either generalist social workers who were responsible for managing various aspects of refugee life including accommodation, health, education, and employment; or they were more specialized, focusing more on education and employment as job coaches (*conseiller en emploi*) and career



counsellors (*conseiller en orientation*). Interviewees are referred to as SLBs for the sake of simplicity and coherence. Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and two and a half hours, averaging one and a half hours. For additional information about SLB participants (see Appendix, Table 2).

Interview questions focused on understanding the profile of SLBs (education, work experience in general and with refugees, motivations for working with refugees). Participants were also asked to discuss their professional challenges, including those arising from working with this particular population. Other topics included their experiences of implementing integration policy, their perceptions of their coachees' plans and aspirations, and their strategies for guiding coachees towards a particular educational and occupational path.

Interviews were analyzed thematically based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps using Nvivo 2020. Data were categorized as follows: "Perceptions of refugee aspirations," "experiences with integration policy," "perceptions of their role and mission," "career orientation factors," "realistic aspirations," and "fast integration." Additional rounds of coding were performed to identify recurring themes (see the Results section). The findings were compared to those of previous research and theories.

### *Analysis of policy documents*

In addition to in-depth interviews, key policy documents (e.g., Swiss Integration Agenda (SIA) and its annexes) and the Canton of Vaud's integration programs<sup>8</sup> were analyzed to better understand Swiss integration policy. Analysis also included reviewing integration policy in terms of refugee-specific programs and the main policy actors. Particular attention was paid to refugee integration into education and the labor market, as well as to the roles of SLBs (e.g., job coaching).

## **Results**

Before considering how participants experienced and were challenged by the principle of "fast" integration and its implementation, this section first looks at the motivations and tensions surrounding social work with refugees to establish the overall context and the conditions influencing the implementation of integration policy.

### *Motivations and tensions surrounding social work with refugees*

SLB interviewees are highly motivated to work with refugees. Interestingly, many participants were more interested in working with refugees than in social work itself. This focus often stems from a desire to know more about different cultures and to work in a multicultural environment, and from one's personal experiences with migration.

*I find it really interesting to work with this population. In fact, working with this population in particular is what interested me and not just social work....I wouldn't*

---

<sup>8</sup> In French : Programmes d'intégration cantonaux.

*be interested in working as a social worker in another organization [not working with refugees] (SLB 8)*

Although many SLBs are driven by a genuine interest in refugees' journeys, they remain clear about their mission, the requirements of implementing integration policy, and their role in this process.

*[Our mission] is integration, that people become independent as quickly as possible, whether socially or financially or ideally both....it is about giving them the tools, helping them to understand the administration, to understand the system in which they are, Swiss customs and rules (SLB 3)*

Reconciling their professional role (and its requirements), their initial motivations for doing social work with refugees, and the realities of the field creates various tensions for SLBs. The institutional and political environment in which they operate is characterized by constantly changing laws, regulations, and an increasing administrative load, especially following the introduction of the Swiss Integration Agenda (SIA). This situation leaves many SLB overwhelmed by the pressure to wear many hats and keep pace with the ever stricter reporting and monitoring requirements of the SIA.

*It's a difficult job, involving a significant mental load not always because of the migrants but rather because of the system itself, the organization or the lack of internal organization, the incessant change of practices .....so we are always learning and can never rely on very solid knowledge, which explains why we always feel that we are only just beginning... (SLB 6)*

Moreover, having to navigate different cultural norms while ensuring that their clients meet integration policy requirements challenges those working with refugees. **SLB 20** reflects on the idea of projecting Western norms, for example, the notion of *career choice* and the expectation that everyone considers it equally important. He is particularly concerned about conducting career tests in French, a language that refugees do not master, to make the most suitable *career choice* when they are not ready or totally engaged in this process.

*Should I actually explain that [career choice]? Isn't this another cultural system, another way that people have been accustomed to thinking? They are in another country, in another system. It's good that they obviously understand the system, but on the other hand I ask myself whether I should really insist on this notion of choice? Am I not imposing a kind of violence? Yes, a violence, a symbolism that I impose on people at this level. Is this a question that I should address or not? So, it raises a few ethical questions for me. I mean, I want to know if I am doing things right (SLB 20)*

Although cultural differences play a crucial role in social work with migrants, for reasons of space what follows focuses on the tensions and challenges related to the institutional framework, in particular the emphasis on fast and sustainable labor market integration and the tensions resulting from managing refugee aspirations and policy requirements.

### *Tensions between “fast” and “sustainable” integration*

To fulfill the requirements of integration policy, especially following the implementation of the SIA, SLBs approach their work similarly to a project that needs to be managed. This involves establishing a monitoring system whose indicators are aimed at optimizing available resources to achieve the ultimate outcome: that refugees regain their financial autonomy as quickly as possible. Due to the complex life course of many refugees, this general orientation of integration policy is a source of tension for many SLBs, who are often caught between the institutional (i.e., policy) framework and the realities of their clients.

*It’s complicated to talk about integration to people who come from very far away and who are still very fragile. They need to recover but we immediately start talking about integration, about professional projects. Yes, that’s mostly it. They are mourning their past. The argument of the host country is, and we are under this pressure, to put in place integration measures so that they quickly find a job... or training. And that’s what I find very, very complicated (SLB 4)*

Also, when reflecting on their implementation of integration policy, the interviewed SLBs highlight the contradictions between policy expectations and everyday reality. This contradiction stems from the expectation that refugees need to regain their financial independence and quickly become well-integrated while integration also needs to be sustainable. Many SLBs find having to fulfill these conditions highly challenging and paradoxical.

*We know that in Switzerland, given that we are required to integrate people as quickly but also as sustainably as possible, it’s a bit contradictory ....we need to find a middle ground between speed and sustainability (SLB 6)*

Although many SLB interviewees realize that fast *and* sustainable integration is paradoxical, they still prefer to adhere to state expectations and end up becoming enforcers or indifferent (Zacka 2017). This is often due to the lack of resources: Many SLBs are required to manage between 20 and 60 cases on average, sometimes even more, which complicates distancing oneself from the policy framework. It is true that SLB are not passive agents and have a certain leeway to negotiate the prevailing framework. However, pursuing this route is costly and depends greatly on clients’ (i.e., refugees’) willingness to negotiate their individual cases. Additionally, the SIA clearly states that promoting access to dual vocational training (VET) enables finding a middle ground between fast and sustainable integration. Considered to be one of the key measures of refugee integration, VET leads to a Swiss (i.e., state-recognized) qualification, thus ensuring faster and more sustainable access to the labor market. Most SLBs find this orientation convincing, and often cite the permeability of the Swiss educational system as a solid basis for pursuing more ambitious aspirations at a later stage.

Although this emphasis on VET enables many refugees to earn a Swiss qualification and hence access the labor market more quickly, it often frustrates highly qualified refugees or those with different aspirations as their interactions with their SLBs suggest that their options are limited.

*I think that [an organization in charge of refugee integration] integrating faster or going to work faster is not about the quality of integration or the quality of work,*

*that's not the goal... For example, if I tell them I would like to work as carpenter or something like this, they will say ok, you can do that right away ... So there is nothing about my story, my experiences, my studies in Turkey; it's not... they think that education in Turkey is not good, that migrants' education is not good. (Nijaz, 32, Turkey)*

When it comes to pursuing higher education and other ambitious projects, the initiative has to come from refugees themselves. This requires the necessary negotiation skills to convince their SLB of their project and also finding information themselves. Facing this type of refugee, SLB often become indifferent (Zacka 2017), either by making refugees look for information themselves or by externalizing this task to other organizations.

*You have to somehow know yourself, because you know .... there is like a 30-minute conversation with them..... I mean [an organization in charge of refugee integration], so, basically, they will orient you, but they place you in a certain category. So, basically, if you have something in your mind, you have to orient them; it is like this, I mean.... if you want to do something different, you have to orient them. So....after I wrote them to see if they can support my university application, they realized that I am trying to do something and assigned a "real" social worker, and we started talking about things (Omer, 41, Turkey)*

Not all refugees have the life experience and the negotiation skills to defend their case and hence renounce their ambitions to follow the predefined path, at least for the time being.

*When I first came to Switzerland, I was thinking that it is like Iran: Once you finish high school, you go to university. I tried to speak to my teachers about going to university, but they told me that it is difficult and that I don't have the skills to go there. I tried several times, but it didn't work (Nadia, 19, Afghanistan)*

In sum, SLBs follow the SIA and focus on fast labor market integration, which should also be "sustainable," by promoting access to VET. This situation creates tensions for and between SLBs and refugees. SLBs navigate this challenge either by becoming indifferent (when refugee profiles do not meet the requirements; see Omer's case) or by enforcing the requirements (to manage client aspirations; see Nadia's case).

### *Promoting "realistic" aspirations*

Not only SLBs endeavor to meet the requirement of "fast" integration but so do many refugees. They strive to find work (and become financially independent) as quickly as possible. For many, attaining this goal is imperative for upgrading their legal status from a temporary F permit to a more stable B work permit, which grants them more freedom of movement and enables family reunification.

*My dream is to study for a trade job and do an apprenticeship. But in Switzerland, I must have a B permit [i.e., residence permit] and be financially independent. If I find a job now, I will receive the permit in two years . However, if I finish CFC [standard vocational training degree] and then work I will get the B permit after five years. This*

*means that I have been here for five years, so it will be ten years in total [before he received the B permit]. It is hard for me, it feels like prison really, because at the moment I can't travel. (Samir, 19, Afghanistan)*

Hence, it is no surprise that SLB often describe their clients' aspirations as realistic. Realistic in the sense that refugees usually understand the system and what is expected of them, namely, finding work and fitting into the various programs and measures put in place for this purpose. Their understanding evolves gradually during the asylum procedure and their interactions with different institutions, which spell out the difficulties of pursuing more ambitious projects. Many interviewees were advised to accept low-skilled occupations (i.e., elderly carework, warehouses) as staff shortages in such sectors offer more job opportunities. Although "realism" is not their first choice, many interviews pursue this route to quickly achieve financial independence and upgrade their legal status (see Samir's case).

Nevertheless, this perception of realistic aspirations as expressed by **SLB 18** might also point to the distance that many SLBs tend to create between themselves, and their clients' needs and demands. Distancing enables them to cope with the highly changing and complex environment in which they are operating (Zacka 2017). Maintaining distance makes it easier to meet financially oriented needs (i.e., income security), and hence better corresponds to the main narrative of integration policy than more resource-intensive dreams and aspirations.

*It's quite concrete... uh it's more like "I want to do this job." We rarely have people who say "I dream of doing this job, it's the dream of my life and so on"... what we often hear is "I want to work to change my permit and then have a stable situation." It is rather the economic situation that defines the objective than an idealized dream job and so on (SLB 18)*

For many refugees, having more ambitious aspirations often translates into clashing with institutional requirements and those in charge of implementation. Nadia's case shows that this confrontation is more complicated when refugees lack the necessary tools and support to challenge the prevailing narrative.

*I never in my life thought about working in sales. One day my teacher asked me would you like to try the job of a salesperson in retail? I answered no, never. Then almost everyone in my class went to work in a retail store except me. My teacher asked me again, I persisted. I said no because I always thought that the job of a salesperson is nothing. In my country, it is like this. If you are a salesperson, it means you have nothing, you don't have a job. What I want is to do is work in the health sector. I tried to find an internship as a pharmacy assistant or something similar several times, but it never worked. (Nadia, 19, Afghanistan)*

The persistence of Nadia's teacher reflects many SLBs' paternalistic and caregiving stance. They adopt this role because they believe that they better understand the system and can guide their clients towards what is best for them. In their perception, this role also enables them to protect their clients from further disappointment and rejection. This is true especially when dealing with younger refugees, who tend to be more idealistic than older ones. Moreover, SLBs employ different strategies that amount to "awareness raising." This involves explaining "reality" to

their clients by providing the necessary information about the Swiss education system and the labor market in addition to highlighting the possibility of pursuing more ambitious plans at a later stage. In many cases, this strategy also entails not questioning those plans directly, but making refugees realize themselves which plans are easier to implement (e.g., through short-term internships).

*When I say realistic and achievable [project or aspiration], I mean...we have the dream and the reality. Clients [refugees] should not say “I want [to pursue] this project” and we tell them “Okay” without weighing up the pros and cons .....to afterwards become disillusioned (“but that’s not what I expected at all”) and we have to start all over from scratch. This is very bad for people’s emotional welfare (SLB 15)*

The complex experiences arising from forced migration, statutory constraints (i.e., restricted legal status), and institutional requirements create tensions for both refugees and SLBs. The latter resort to various coping strategies to tackle the complexities of their role, which often involves fostering “realistic” aspirations and preparing refugees to adhere to the requirement of integration policy.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland, integration policy is designed to achieve “fast and sustainable” integration. Thus, refugees need to become financially independent as quickly as possible, but also maintain their independence. In this respect, SLBs play an important role in translating the main requirements of integration policy by promoting VET access and by managing refugee plans and aspirations to ensure they are “realistic” and implementable. While “fast and sustainable” integration has its merits, its implementation creates tensions for SLBs and refugees. First, it is important to recognize that introducing the idea of sustainability into Swiss integration policy is a positive step as integration policies in the global north mostly aim to promote quick labor market integration (e.g., Arendt 2020; Hinger and Schweitzer 2020; Konle-Seidl 2018) as the ultimate goal of integration. Nevertheless, the concept of sustainable integration remains brittle: It is often challenged by the realities of the field and by refugee heterogeneity, which has increased following the recent arrival of more skilled refugees from Turkey and Ukraine. Moreover, expecting fast and “sustainable” integration is paradoxical. Implementing sustainable integration, to provide refugees with access to educational and occupational options better aligned with their aspirations and potential, requires time. In the case of refugees holding temporary permits (F permit), implementing more sustainable integration (i.e., in line with their aspirations and potential) is contingent on overcoming many structural obstacles. This takes time, which many refugees lack, as they are pressured by the state and their personal circumstances to become financially independent as soon as possible.

During the first few years in the host country, refugees often continue to struggle with the aftermaths of forced migration (e.g., unstable family situation, impaired physical and mental health). This predicament complicates projecting oneself into the future and implementing future plans aligned with the requirements of “fast and sustainable” integration. Still, many refugees are motivated to fit into the narrative of “fast integration” and find work quickly to stabilize

their situation. This is often the case when their legal status imposes limited rights (F permit). More qualified and ambitious refugees often mention the exclusionary and limiting nature of “fast and sustainable” integration. Indeed, they find it problematic that refugees are treated like a homogeneous group that is expected to integrate “fast” and follow predefined paths that limit their choices and may not necessarily align with their previous qualifications and current aspirations. Current integration offerings are strongly focused on encouraging refugees to attend vocational schools or become employed fast. Compared to many other countries, vocational education has a good image in Switzerland, not least because it provides sustainable and quicker access to a Swiss diploma and work. Nevertheless, interviews with refugees show that most of them are undergoing training for unattractive or low-skilled employment: Male refugees often work in warehouses, while female ones provide elderly care. Having to fit into predefined integration paths creates tensions in highly aspirational refugees. While some decide to rely on their social and cultural capital to negotiate and gain support for their ambitious plans, many prefer to fit into the mold designed for them: They adapt their aspirations to what is expected of them, as fighting (yet) another battle is unlikely preferable, at least for the time being.

Regarding SLBs: The realities of their job (i.e., increased administrative workload, the pressure to monitor and report their daily activities) leaves them with little time to do social work. They spend a lot of time ensuring that the objectives of integration policy are followed and quantified, which leaves less time to properly engage with people’s stories. SLB tools are geared more towards promoting quick labor market integration and access to the VET system. Dealing with clients with other, nonnormative ambitions makes SLBs realize that their resources to support alternative projects are limited. Accordingly, SLBs often resort to one of Zacka’s coping strategies (enforcement, indifference, caregiving) (Zacka 2017). However, SLBs are not passive agents in policy implementation: They can decide whether to explore and support more ambitious projects, even if this is more challenging and costly.

Finally, the main challenge of implementing integration policy is that it is not solely the task of those organizations in charge of implementation but of society as a whole. Therefore, mobilizing important stakeholders such as higher education institutions and employers seems crucial, especially when the latter shun responsibility and expect refugees to fulfill similar requirements as international students for example regardless of their complicated life circumstances.

### **Acknowledgments**

I immensely thank Giuliano Bonoli for his precious comments and guidance which were of tremendous help in the processes of data collection, data analysis and writing of this paper. I am also grateful to the comments and constant support I received from the members of the GOVPET project namely, Justin J.W. Powell, Patrick Emmenegger, Marius R. Busemeyer, Cathie Jo Martin, Lina Seitzl and Annatina Aerne. I am also grateful to the members of the NCCR on the move for their feedback and comments on the paper. Financial support by the Swiss state secretariat for Research and Innovation (SERI) via the GOVPET leading house is gratefully acknowledged.

## Declaration of conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Swiss state secretariat for Research and Innovation as part of the leading House GOVPET.

## References

- Arendt, Jacob Nielsen (2020). Labour market effects of a work-first policy for refugees. *Journal of Population Economics*, 1-28. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-020-00808-z>)
- Asile.ch (2021). *Procédure, statut et permis*. Accessed on March 2022 on <https://asile.ch/procedure-da-sile-permis-et-droits/permis/>.
- Auer, Daniel (2017). Language roulette—the effect of random placement on refugees’ labour market integration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(3), 341-362. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1304208>)
- Berkowitz, Edward (1987). *Disabled Policy: Americas Programs for the Handicapped*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Berthold, S. Megan and Kathryn R. Libal (2019). Supporting refugees and asylum seekers in an era of backlash. Refugees and asylum seekers. *Interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives*, 1-14. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798216006565.ch-001>)
- Bevelander, Pieter and Ravi Pendakur (2014). The labour market integration of refugee and family reunion immigrants: A comparison of outcomes in Canada and Sweden. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(5), 689-709. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.849569>)
- Birger, Lior and Yochay Nadan (2021). Social workers and refugee service users (re) constructing their relationships in a hostile political climate. *Journal of Social Work*. 22(2), 402-421 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173211009739>)
- Birger, Lior, Yochay Nadan and Mimi Ajzenstadt (2020). Politicisation processes in everyday practice with refugees: The experiences of Israeli and German social workers. *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(6), 1019-1031. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1793107>)
- Borselli, Marco and Toon van Meijl (2021). Linking migration aspirations to integration prospects: the experience of Syrian refugees in Sweden. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34(1): 579-595. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa043>)
- Cohen, Nissim (2018). How Culture Affects Street-Level Bureaucrats’ Bending the Rules in the Context of Informal Payments for Health Care: The Israeli Case. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 48 (2): 175–187. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016665919>)
- Cohen, Nissim and Uri Hertz (2020). Street-Level Bureaucrats' Social Value Orientation On and Off Duty. *Public Administration Review*, 80 (3): 442–453 (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13190>)



- Dahinden, Janine. (2016). A plea for the 'de-migranticization' of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(13), 2207-2225. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1124129>)
- Das, Veena (2004). *The Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility*. Anthropology in the Margins of the State, 225–52.
- Davidovitz, Maayan and Nissim Cohen (2020). Playing defence: The impact of trust on the coping mechanisms of street-level bureaucrats. *Public Management Review*, 1-22. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1817532>)
- Derthick, Martha (1990). *Agency under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Dryden-Peterson, Sarah (2017). Refugee education: Education for an unknowable future. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(1), 14-24. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2016.1255935>)
- Etat de Genève (GE) (2021). *L'Agenda Intégration Suisse*. Accessed on June 28, 2021, on <https://www.ge.ch/dossier/geneve-soutient-integration-etrangers/agenda-integration-suisse/agenda-integration-suisse-ais>.
- Favell, Adrian. (2019). Integration: twelve propositions after Schinkel. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7(1), 1-10. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0125-7>)
- Guide social. (2021). Droit d'asile et statut de réfugiés. Accessed on March 2022, on <https://www.guidesocial.ch/recherche/fiche/generatpdfAll/90>.
- Hebbani, Aparna and Nigar G. Khawaja (2019). Employment aspirations of former refugees settled in Australia: A mixed methods study. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(3), 907-924. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0635-4>)
- Hinger, Sophie and Reinhard Schweitzer (2020). *Politics of (dis) integration*. Springer Nature. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25089-8>)
- Hynie, Michaela (2018). Refugee integration: Research and policy. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 24 (3): 265. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000326>)
- Khan, Parves (2000). Asylum-seekers in the UK: implications for social service involvement. *Social Work & Social Sciences Review*, 8(2), 116-129.
- KIP-PIC (Kantonale Integrationsprogramme – Programmes d'Intégration cantonales). *L'intégration, une tâche commune*. Accessed on 03.2022, on <https://www.kip-pic.ch/fr/pic/>.
- Konle-Seidl, Regina (2018). *Integration of refugees in Austria, Germany and Sweden: Comparative analysis*. Accessed on European Parliament, Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy website on [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/Reg-Data/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)614200\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/Reg-Data/etudes/STUD/2018/614200/IPOL_STU(2018)614200_EN.pdf).
- Lipsky, Michael (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- May, Peter J. and Søren C. Winter (2009). Politicians, managers, and street-level bureaucrats: Influences on policy implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19(3), 453-476. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum030>)

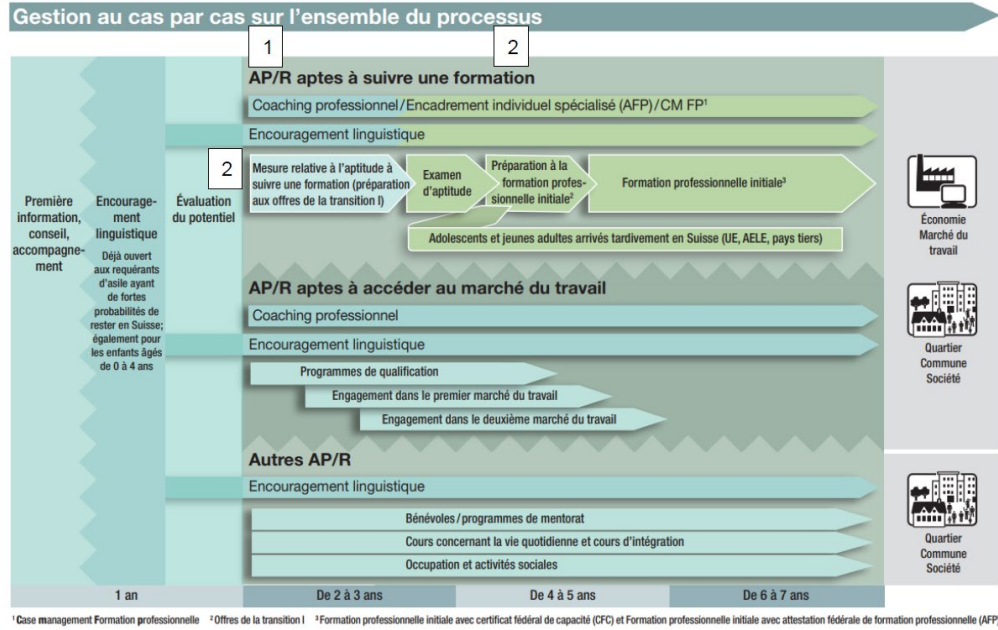
- Maynard-Moody, Steven Williams and Michael Craig Musheno (2003). *Cops, teachers, counselors: Stories from the front lines of public service*. University of Michigan Press.
- Morrice, Linda, Linda K. Tip, Rupert Brown and Michael Collyer (2020). Resettled refugee youth and education: aspiration and reality. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(3), 388-405. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1612047>)
- Mozetič, Katarina. (2020). Cartographers of their Futures: The Formation Of Occupational Aspirations of Highly Educated Refugees in Malmö and Munich. *International Migration*, 59(4), 127-140. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12799>)
- Mozetič, Katarina. (2022). A help or hindrance? Highly educated refugees' perceptions of the role of civic integration programmes in accessing the labour market in Oslo, Malmö and Munich. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 10(1), 8. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00279-z>)
- Mulvey, Gareth (2015). Refugee integration policy: the effects of UK policy-making on refugees in Scotland. *Journal of Social Policy*, 44 (2), 357-375. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727941500001X>)
- Nash, Mary (2005). 'Responding to Settlement Needs: Migrants and Refugees and Community Development', in M. Nash, R. Munford and K. O'Donoghue, *Social Work Theories in Action*. London, Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Nash, Mary, John Wong and Andrew Trlin (2006). Civic and social integration: A new field of social work practice with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. *International Social Work*, 49(3), 345-363. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872806063407>)
- Otmani, Ihssane (2023). 'Towards a 'low ambition equilibrium': managing refugee aspirations during the integration process in Switzerland'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(4), 854-872. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2235902>)
- Phillimore, Jenny (2021). 'Refugee-integration-opportunity structures: shifting the focus from refugees to context'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(2): 1946-1966. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa012>)
- Piętko-Nykaza, Emilia (2015). 'I want to do anything which is decent and relates to my profession': refugee doctors' and teachers' strategies of re-entering their professions in the UK. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(4), 523-543. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev008>)
- Potocky-Tripodi, Miriam (2002). *Best social work practice with immigrants and refugees*. New York.
- Scandone, Berenice (2018). Re-thinking aspirations through habitus and capital: The experiences of British-born Bangladeshi women in higher education. *Ethnicities*, 18 (4), 518-540. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796818777541>)
- Schinkel, Willem (2018). Against 'immigrant integration': For an end to neocolonial knowledge production. *Comparative migration studies*, 6(1), 1-17. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-018-0095-1>)
- Schneider, Lynn (2018). Access and aspirations: Syrian refugees' experiences of entering higher education in Germany. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 13(3), 457-478. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499918784764>)
- Shakya, Yogendra B., Sepali Guruge, Michaela Hynie, Arzo Akbari, Mohamed Malik, Sheila Htoo, Azza Khogali, Stella Abiyi Mona, Rabea Murtaza and Sarah Alley (2010). Aspirations for higher education among newcomer refugee youth in Toronto: Expectations, challenges, and strategies. *Refugee: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 27(2), 65-78. (DOI : <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.34723>)

- State Secretariat for migration (SEM) (2018a). Agenda Intégration Suisse Rapport du groupe de coordination du 1er mars 2018 Accessed on 01.03.2022, on <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/kantonale-programme/integrationsagenda.html>.
- State Secretariat for migration (SEM) (2018b). *Annexe 3 : Aperçu de l'encouragement de la première intégration des AP/R*. Accessed on 01.03.2022, on <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/kantonale-programme/integrationsagenda.html>.
- State Secretariat for migration (SEM) (2019). *Information succintes* Accessed 30.05.2024, on <https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/sem/fr/data/publiservice/publikationen/info-flue-va/info-flue-va-fr.pdf>.
- State Secretariat for migration (SEM) (2021). *Politique suisse en matière d'intégration*. Accessed on June 28, 2021, on <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/politik.html>.
- State Secretariat for migration (SEM) (2022). *Archives dès 1994*. Accessed on 01.03.2022, on <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/publiservice/statistik/asylstatistik/archiv.html>.
- Swissinfo (2017). *Switzerland, land of European immigration*. Accessed on 01.03. 2022, on [https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/willkommen-bienvenue\\_switzerland-land-of-european-immigration/42941390#:~:text=Switzerland%20has%20one%20of%20the,years%20of%20immigration%20to%20Switzerland](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/willkommen-bienvenue_switzerland-land-of-european-immigration/42941390#:~:text=Switzerland%20has%20one%20of%20the,years%20of%20immigration%20to%20Switzerland).
- Swissinfo (2022). *Apprenticeships in Switzerland* Accessed on 10.02.2024 on <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/apprenticeship-system/43796482>.
- Udayar, Shagini, Laurence Fedrigo, Federico Durante, Eva Clot-Siegrist and Jonas Masdonati (2021). Labour market integration of young refugees and asylum seekers: A look at perceived barriers and resources. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 49(2), 287-303. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2020.1858023>)
- Valenta, Marko and Nihad Bunar (2010). State assisted integration: Refugee integration policies in Scandinavian welfare states: The Swedish and Norwegian experience. *Journal of refugee studies*, 23(4), 463-483. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feq028>)
- Van Heelsum, Anja (2017). Aspirations and frustrations: experiences of recent refugees in the Netherlands. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(13), 2137-2150. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1343486>)
- Williams, Lucy (2006). Social networks of refugees in the United Kingdom: tradition, tactics and new community spaces. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 32. (5), 865-879. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830600704446>)
- Winter, Søren C (2002). Explaining street-level bureaucratic behavior in social and regulatory policies. In *Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Boston* (Vol. 29).
- Zacka, Bernardo (2017). *When the state meets the street: Public service and moral agency*. Harvard University Press.

## Appendix

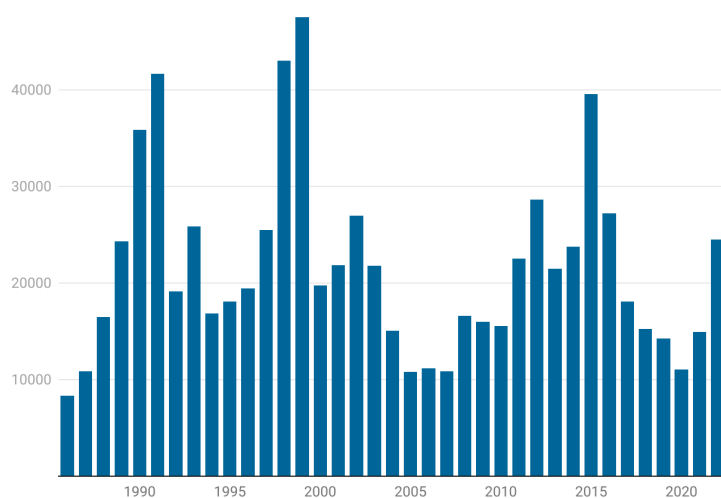
Figure 1: Paths to integration as shown in the publicity material for Swiss integration agenda (AIS)

### Processus d'intégration des personnes admises à titre provisoire et des réfugiés reconnus (AP/R)



Source: SEM 2019

Figure 2: Asylum applications in Switzerland since 1986 (primary + secondary requests) with origin countries<sup>9</sup>



Source: *asile.ch* (2021)

Table 1: Profile of participants

Participant <sup>10</sup>	Age	Gender	Type of permit	Country of origin	In Switzerland since	Qualifications
Faven	28	F	F refugee	Eritrea	2014	8 <sup>th</sup> grade
Fatimeh	25	F	B	Somalia	2017	First year university
Ali	22	M	F	Afghanistan	2015	10 <sup>th</sup> grade
Jemal	40	M	B	Eritrea	2016	Bachelors degree in medical sciences
Samir	19	M	F	Afghanistan	2015	Primary school
Mussawa	36	M	B	Eritrea	2015	Completed the 12 <sup>th</sup> grade

<sup>9</sup> Ukrainian refugees are not included in the graph

<sup>10</sup> Fictitious names. Participants' names were changed to protect their identity.

Marjani	31	F	B	Ethiopia	2015	Completed the 12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Nadia	19	F	F	Afghanistan	2015	Primary school
Aymen	23	M	F	Afghanistan	2015	First year university interrupted because of war
Youssef	25	M	F	Syria	2017	2 <sup>nd</sup> year bachelor's in economics interrupted because of war
Nawaz	23	M	F	Afghanistan	2015	Primary school
Aya	32	F	F	Syria	2017	2 <sup>nd</sup> year bachelor's in economics interrupted because of war
Sara	22	F	F	Afghanistan	2015	Primary school
Farid	26	M	F	Afghanistan	2015	Primary school
Omer	41	M	B	Turkey	2018	Master's degree in economics
Murad	34	M	B resettlement	Syria	2016	Engineering degree
Tesfay	35	M	B	Eritrea	2014	8th grade
Petros	29	M	B	Eritrea	2016	Completed 12 <sup>th</sup> grade+ one-year training certificate in accounting
Bassel	29	M	B	Syria	2015	First year university interrupted because of war

Robel	29	M	B	Eritrea	2015	Completed 12 <sup>th</sup> grade+ one-year training certificate in medical sciences
Nijaz	32	M	B	Turkey	2018	Completed a bachelor's/master's degree in his country. Worked in his field in his home country
Samuel	32	M	B	Eritrea	2017	11 <sup>th</sup> grade
Farzad	29	M	B	Afghanistan	2017	Completed 12 <sup>th</sup> grade+ one-year training as a policeman
Burak	26	M	B	Turkey	2018	Started but didn't finish high school in his home country
Ahmet	38	M	B	Turkey	2018	Completed master's degree in law and public administration and worked as a judge in his home country
Taim	27	M	F	Country not specified	2014-2015	Completed one-year bachelor's degree
Omari	26	M	B	Eritrea	2014	Didn't finish compulsory school
Anwar	29	M	F refugee	Iran	2016	Completed a degree in engineering in his home country

Yildiz	35	M	B	Turkey	2018	Completed a master's degree in criminal sciences, worked as army officer.
--------	----	---	---	--------	------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------

Source: Table constructed from own data by author

Table 2: List of case workers interviewed in Switzerland (Vaud)

Case worker designation	Position	Organization type
SLB 1	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 2	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 3	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 4	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 5	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 6	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 7	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 8	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 9	Social worker	Public organization in charge of refugee status
SLB 10	Social worker	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status



SLB 11	Social worker	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 12	Social worker	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 13	Social worker	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 14	Social worker	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 15	Job coach and career orientation	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 16	Job coach and career orientation	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 17	Job coach and career orientation	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 18	Job coach and career orientation	Public organization in charge of temporary humanitarian status
SLB 19	Job coach and career orientation	NGO in charge of the implementation of integration measures
SLB 20	Job coach and career orientation	NGO in charge of the implementation of integration measures
SLB 21	Job coach and career orientation	NGO in charge of the implementation of integration measures
SLB 22	Job coach and career orientation	NGO in charge of the implementation of integration measures