Individuals' strategies for wellbeing during the integration process:

an empirical study of capabilities and opportunities through the eyes of Syrian refugees in the Canton of Vaud, in Switzerland

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Abstract. Integration concerns everyone in society as a constantly on-going process of constructing belonging and participation as a member of the group. The common objective of the process for individuals is to increase their subjective wellbeing, according to their individual values. However, refugees undergo an extreme case of integration, with all aspects of their life being impacted at once. Therefore, to gain more knowledge about the integration process from the perspectives of individuals, nine qualitative interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees living in Switzerland. This thesis then mobilises the capability approach to conduct a thematic comparison. The analysis revealed a common pattern among all interviewees which builds up into a *5-stages integration model,* experienced by all interviewees in the same chronological order. Nevertheless, the personal capabilities and opportunities vary, resulting in different strategies to deal with a same context and similar objectives at a specific stage.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……4

LIST OF ACRONYMS……..5

FRONTISPIECE……5

1. SYRIAN REFUGEES' IN SWITZERLAND……6

1.1 Introduction 6

1.2 Research question, aim, motivation and contribution 7

1.3 Delimitations 9

2. REVIEW OF THE FIELD……9

2.1 Defining integration 9

2.2 What is specific about refugees' integration 11

2.3 Assessing wellbeing 13

2.4 Agency and autonomy 15

3. CONTEXT OF INTEGRATION……16

3.1 Forced migrations 16

3.2 Protection status and access to the labour market 17

3.3 Integration policies and institutional practices in Switzerland 19

4. THE CAPABILITY APPROACH……..22

4.1 Brief presentation 22

4.2 Positioning: Why choose this theoretical approach? 23

4.3 Operationalization: "my" capability theory 24

4.3.1 Three sets of modules 24

4.3.2 Choosing capabilities to study 25

5. METHODOLOGY……26

5.1 A qualitative approach and a narrative interview guide 26

5.2 Selection of material: sampling and access to the field 26

5.3 Coding and process of analysis 28

5.4 Anonymity and confidentiality 29

5.5 Evaluation of the results 29

5.5.1 Representability 29

5.5.2 Ethical considerations 30

5.5.3 Reliability and validity 31

6. ANALYSIS……32

6.1 Presentation of the interviewees 32

6.2 Thematic analysis 34

6.2.1 Integration defined by refugees 34

6.2.2 Five stages of the integration process 35

A) Exile 36

B) Healing 38

C) Rebuilding normality 40

D) Affirming one's (new) identity 44

E) Stability 48

7. RESULTS……52

8. CONCLUSION……57

8.1 Contribution and further research 58

REFERENCES……59

APPENDIX……I

I. APPLICATION AND GRANTING OF PROTECTION STATUS AT FIRST INSTANCE I

II. INTERVIEW GUIDE II

III. ORIGINAL QUOTES OF THE INTERVIEWS IN FRENCH VIII

TABLE OF FIGURES AND TABLES

I. Map: Switzerland's external and internal borders 5

II. Graph: distribution of first instance decisions on asylum applications by outcome, 2019 6

III. Flowchart: services to refugees once they join the Cantonal Service Centre for Refugees' Integration (CSIR) 21

IV. Table: presentation of interviewees 32

V. Model: 5-stages integration process 54

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A Master's thesis is a journey and the circumstances in which this one took place were not exactly the most peaceful waters. But William Arthur Ward is attributed the following lines:

"The pessimist complains about the wind;

The optimist expects it to change;

The realist adjusts the sails."

I have been the three of them at different stages of this project. However, it is not a journey I embarked in on my own. For their support and guidance, I would like to warmly thank the following persons:

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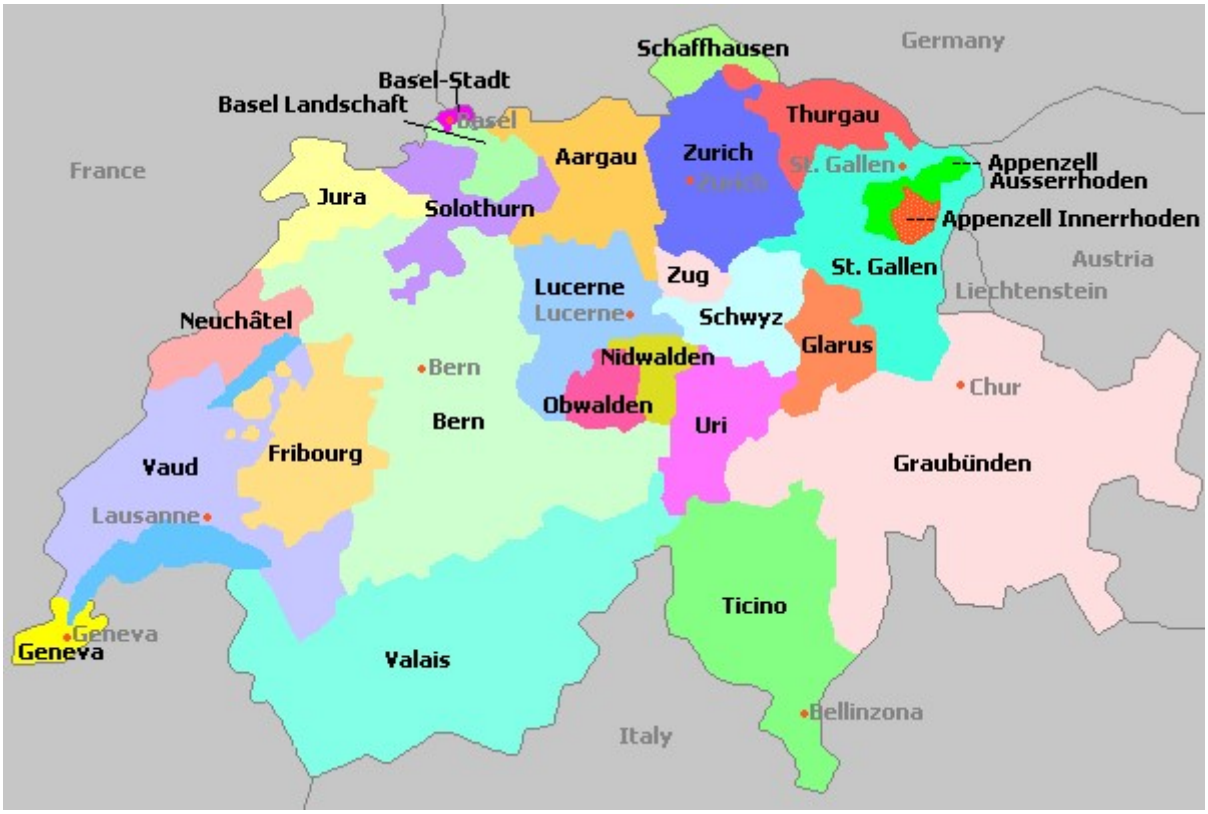
LIST OF ACRONYMS

CSIR	Social Centre for the Integration of Refugees in Canton of Vaud
EVAM	Vaud regional institution to welcome migrants
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SEM	Swiss State Secretary for Migration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

FRONTISPIECE



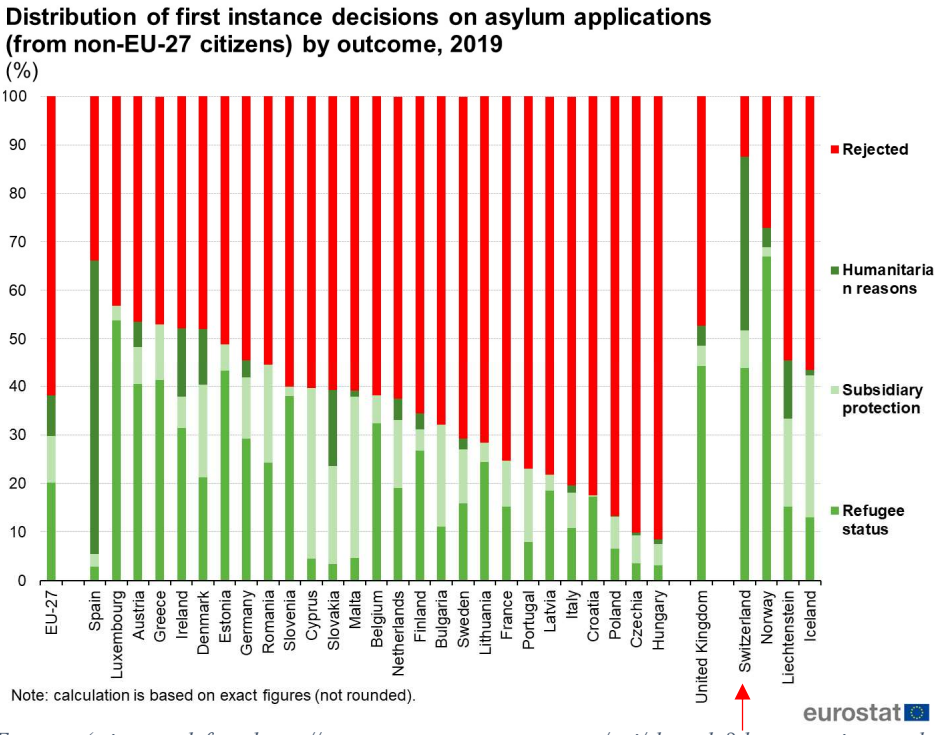
I This map shows Switzerland external borders, as well as the internal governmental division into Cantons, each with varying sets of rules and regulations. This essay focuses on Canton of Vaud (in lilac, South-West). Source: http://adventuresatfranklin.fus.edu/2017/04/switzerland-all-about-cantons.html

1. SYRIAN REFUGEES' IN SWITZERLAND

1.1 Introduction

This research presents the integration journey of Syrian individuals who arrived mostly with their families, aged between 30 and 65, and who obtained a protection status in the Canton of Vaud[1], in Switzerland. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, about 5.6 million Syrians became refugees, and another 6.6 million people are internally displaced (UNHCR 2020*a*). If the peak of asylum requests was reached in 2015-2016, Syria remains hitherto the country of origin of most asylum seekers arriving to Europe, with 74,400 applications in 2019 (Eurostat 2020).

In the last years, Switzerland has had the highest percentage of positive outcomes of asylum requests in Europe (Eurostat 2020). To illustrate, in 2017, in Switzerland, 81 percent of the requests ended up with recognition of a protection status[2] (Malka 2019), positioning it as an interesting destination country to study, regarding integration of refugees. The graph below shows the comparison within Europe for 2019:



II Source: Eurostat (migr_asydcfsta: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asydcfsta&lang=en)

[1] As a federal State, Switzerland is constituted of 26 "states" called Cantons.

[2] Most authors agree on refugees' specific need to be protected and guaranteed basic needs and rights, as their home states have failed to (Mantel 2019: 91). This consensus and focus on the need of protection advocates implicitly for the extension of the status of refugee to a wider group than the current definition is covering, including individuals who fall into the group of subsidiary protection. Therefore, in this thesis, I do not distinguish between different protection status. They are referred to together as "individuals with a protection status" or "refugees" in the present thesis. In Switzerland, this includes refugee status and subsidiary protection, respectively residence permit B refugee and F refugee or F humanitarian.

Individuals' with a protection status are subjected to a specific international regime, defining who can benefit from it, and the specific rights and obligations applying to them (Jubilut 2017). However, how this regime is set into practice is up to each Nation-State. Therefore, the policies, application rules, practices and discourses building up around refugees are to be understood in a national context (Betts and Collier 2015: 12). In this respect, since the first of January 2019, Switzerland has, for the first time, a regulation defining precise integration criteria (Art. 58a, al.1): "respect for public safety, security and order; respect for the values of the Federal Constitution; language skills; and participation in working life or efforts to acquire an education".

However, in social sciences integration is understood as a wider process, taking place in the everyday life, and concerning everyone. Following, in this study, it is regarded as the ability to participate in society or to belong and contains an inherent property of "individual transformation" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 12). Therefore, the narratives of the individuals met during fieldwork in the Canton and online constitute the primary focus of this study. They contribute to illustrate the far wider scope of the integration process than what the concept captures in terms of policies.

1.2 Research question, aim, motivation and contribution

Integration policies and institutions have been extensively studied in Europe. However, in the long refugees' history in Switzerland, few studies have looked at integration through the perspective of the individuals subjected to the process and compared them at the interpersonal level. Polzer (2008: 479) notes, indeed, that "migration and refugee studies rarely incorporate an awareness of the different trajectories and identities members [of the group labelled as refugees] may have taken previously, nor do they allow for members to take different future trajectories".

The present qualitative research conducted with adults' Syrian refugees has for objective to contribute to filling this gap in the literature. Within the modest scale of this study, I capture individuals' subjective points of view and experiences of the integration process in Switzerland, understood as the process of (de)constructing an individual belonging to a group (Legrain 2017). Therefore, it is a complex multifaceted process. This thesis aims to focus on understanding integration as a personal development process, and to analyse how individuals build their personal strategies to improve their wellbeing while undergoing it.

By adopting a stand looking at the "ethics of possibilities" (Appadurai 2013: 299-300), this research contributes to the field of anthropology of goods, as Robbins (2013) called it. This means that the integration process will be analysed not only in terms of what its outcomes currently are, for example in terms of wellbeing, but the analysis includes as well what individuals wished outcomes were. In other words, this research builds on a thematic analysis of narrative interviews conducted on an interpersonal comparison level, to understand integration from the standpoint of refugees. Therefore, the contribution and relevance of this study is two-fold: First, this thesis will produce academically relevant knowledge on integration as a theoretical concept. At the same time, it might serve for all actors involved in the support of individuals with a protection status–policies makers, social services and civil society organisations–to better understand how the process is experienced by individuals directly affected, and to identify where room for improvement exists in the services offered to refugees.

Following, this research looks at refugees as agents with agency and capabilities, who face structural constraints, have varying opportunities, and who actively adopt their own strategies to reach their goals. My overall research question reads as follows: How do Syrian refugees experience their integration process in Switzerland? To answer it, I will mobilise the theoretical perspective of the capability approach and the concept of autonomy. First, through a thematic analysis of the narrative interviews I conducted, I identify individuals' capabilities (what are their resources?) and opportunities (how are they able to use them?) regarding different themes they discussed–family, work, education, helping others, etc.. Then, I analyse how they build personal strategies to improve their subjective wellbeing, defined in terms of what one values as the outcomes of the integration process for her or himself, and set as objectives for themselves in their integration process. This approach, defining a good life and wellbeing as what individuals have a reason to value, is in line with Edward Fischer's (2014) "positive anthropology" and the capability approach developed by Ingrid Robeyns (2017). Furthermore, I conduct an interpersonal comparison to identify the similar patterns or differences which appear through the individual experiences and to understand how individuals can exit their transition status, understood as refugeehood. Finally, the results of the analysis revealed a five-stage chronological integration pattern. This pattern illustrates that similar themes are seen as priorities for each stage among interviewees, but a variety of strategies are adopted to deal with these similar priorities depending on the personal resources and opportunities of each interviewee.

1.3 Delimitations

Race, understood as a social construction, in which different complexion have been assigned different meanings through history (Riaño and Wastl-Walter 2006), continues to influence individuals' path and opportunities up to present (Song 2003: 121). However, in a context where Switzerland, like most European countries, does not collect data on ethnicity, it is difficult to acknowledge to what extent race or ethnicity might play a role in the integration process. Collecting this data by myself is out of scope for this research, therefore, this study focuses on Syrian refugees. In the last years, Syrians have made a great share of the recognized refugee population and newcomers[3] in Switzerland: In addition to individuals arriving through the classic asylum procedure, Switzerland has participated in the UNHCR relocation project since 2013, specifically targeting victims of the Syrian conflict (State Secretary for Migrations or SEM 2018). It might however not be excluded that other racial or ethnic groups face, and report discrimination not observed by the sample of this study. In this perspective, any racial or ethnic group of refugees would provide relevant data, and it would be interesting to gather more studies on different groups, to be able to compare their experience of integration.

In addition, the sample of this study includes nine individuals who have been living in Canton of Vaud in Switzerland up to eight years,, and I applied an age frame between 30 and 65 years old. The regional delimitation is set because Switzerland is a federal State, where the application laws on foreign nationals and integration are the competence of the Cantons and vary greatly from one region to one another (See the study by Probst et al. 2019, on the cantonal leeway with regards to migration law).

2. REVIEW OF THE FIELD

2.1 Defining integration

In my perspective, integration has little to do with international migration *per se* or with being a refugee. Rather, integration has to do with an individual searching to belong and to participate in a society (Legrain 2017). Yuval-Davis (2011: 10) writes that "belonging tends to be naturalized and to be part of everyday practices. It becomes articulated, formally structured and politicized only when it is threatened in some way". In this sense, every individual should have reasons to value being socially recognised as belonging. As the opposite, being casted out,

[3] For more information on application and granting of protection status at first instance by nationality in Switzerland, see annexe I or visit SEM, Asylum Statistics 2018: https://bit.ly/2FRhQDj and, http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/switzerland/statistics.

and being perceived as a "stranger" to the society is often treated as suspicious, as representing a threat or eventually amalgamated to terrorists (Yuval-Davis 2011: 2). Therefore, belonging, as an external validation or social recognition is necessary for individuals to be able to move forwards towards their personal objectives in a group. In this sense, the process of integration might request one to transform their identity to be accepted in the group. This perspective joins Probyn's conception that: "[…] individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than positing of identity as a stable state" (Probyn 1996: 19, as cited in Yuval-Davis 2011: 15). However, Probyn's quote underlines that belonging is not enough for integration, it solely contributes to it.

What is missing, is to understand how one select the different themes to address to increase their participation and be recognized as belonging and in which order they will address them: For example, what aspects of their identity are they wanting to change? It might be their career, their nationality, or the language they speak. Fisher explains that the goal of all individuals is a "good life" according to an individualised representation of what it means (Fischer 2014: 4-5). He explains:

> *"They [folks] envision particular sorts of futures for themselves and the world−the agency to control their own destiny, the meaningful obligations of family and friends, the delicate balance between private interests and common goods. We see individuals giving meanings to their economic activities, each seeking the good life each in his or her own way, and often in ways that run counter to their immediate material interests" (Fischer 2014: xi).*

In this sense, integration is all steps one initiates to achieve what one has reason to value to increase their wellbeing. Therefore, each individual might value different objectives for themselves but what can be considered as the common objective for all is to increase their wellbeing. However, one's priorities might vary when compared to someone else or over time, from having a family and being able to care for its members, having a career, being able to support others who are more vulnerable, or developing good language skills, just to mention a few.

Following, wellbeing differs from happiness, as wellbeing can be seen as the optimised long-term outcome of the integration process, while happiness is a state or feeling and therefore does not last. Thus, wellbeing or the good life "requires trade-offs, and often forgoing hedonistic pleasure" (Fischer 2014: 2). Here, Nozick adds that real life is made of positive and negative experiences, that "pleasures and pains of real experience and struggle give value to the ends enjoyed" (Nozick 1974, as cited in Fischer 2014: 2). So, happiness cannot be taken as a

proxy for wellbeing or a good life, due to the lasting nature of the later. Therefore, happiness is solely one component of a general evaluation of wellbeing, which should include a far wider body of experiences, capabilities, and opportunities to evaluate the ends.

In Fischer's words (2014: 2): "If wellbeing is more than just being well, then perhaps the good life is not a state to be obtained but an ongoing aspiration for something better that gives meaning to life's pursuits". Reworded, wellbeing is the motivation for the actions taken in the integration process. This joins Cathelineau's (2007) observation that integration is "a process perpetually changing"[4]. I join Fischer's approach of integration as a never-ending process, as it should be understood as the process of "self-actualization" of an individual. Therefore, there is no end to the process; individuals are always adjusting. When they achieve some realisation or when they are confronted with some setback, they develop new plans, and adjust their strategies. Following, the objective of integration is theoretical. The goal is to approach the idealistic self-understood best version of oneself.

This is a philosophical definition of integration, that I mobilise here, which moves away from most legal and political definition of the term, towards a more inclusive use of the concept. So, integration can be seen as the result of a double process, on the one hand, the energy invested by a specific individual to belong, and, on the other hand, the meaning and labels attributed to this person, as a results of his or her undertaken actions (Yuval-Davis 2011: 12). To sum up: Integration is the process which leads to wellbeing, defined according to personal preferences. Therefore, analysing the different themes of the integration process, enable one to understand what is important for individuals' wellbeing, and what they prioritize.

2.2 What is specific about refugees' integration

Integration is often presented in the literature as a linear process with a starting point, generally an immigrant arriving in a new context, and a finish line defined by full integration, or "the perfect citizen" (Infrarouge 2008). As exposed earlier, integration concerns *de facto* all individuals in the society. However, the specificity of refugees is that they are undergoing a particularly heavy integration process, following the multidimensional loss they experienced through exile (social markers, wealth, quality of life), and facing the necessity to build a new

[4] Original quote in French: "Contrairement aux idées reçues, ce concept [l'intégration] n'est en rien contingent et ne comporte aucune finalité puisqu'il s'agit d'un processus en perpétuel mouvement" (Cathelineau 2007).

belonging. Thus, this project focuses specifically on refugees, as an extreme case study of integration.

Most authors agree on refugees' specific need to be protected and guaranteed basic needs and rights, as their home states have failed to do so (Mantel 2019: 91). However, even if this consensus exists, the study by Wehrle et al. (2018: 83) underlines that "trying to re-establish their lives in a host country, refugees face multiple integration barriers in relation to work and society". The labelling as refugee comes, indeed, with expectations that those labelled as refugees will have specific behaviours (Freedman 2017: 23). Therefore, as noted by Wehrle et al. (2018: 84), refugeehood is an experience which often represents "threats to existing identities and the imposition of new and threatening identities". In this sense, the refugee label is a transition and substitution label imposed on individuals who have lost their other labels– social status, profession, language skills, financial autonomy from the state–and have only this transition left to categorize them in the eyes of society. Until they come off this transition status when other categorizations erase it. The process where the categorization as refugee is erased to the benefit of other categorizations, is a specific process of integration, as it implies the loss of social recognition and identity, and the need to build a new self. Therefore, refugees are distinct from nationals, in matter of integration, as they are requested to perform and prove that they are fit for the society. In this sense, integration is often described in the literature as a discretionary process of institutions, imposed on refugees (Probst et al. 2019: 18).

In addition, by focusing on policies, governments, and institutions of power perspectives', literature thus far has often depicted migrants as passive recipients of the integration process. However, for integration to happen, refugees as actors are as important as the receiving society, which is not reflected in the literature. Indeed, Strang and Ager write: "much analysis has been undertaken from a policy perspective, rather than acknowledging refugees themselves as primary social actors in making a 'home' in their new environment" (Strang and Ager 2012: 12). This follows from the essentialisation of refugees as helpless victims without agency and as dependants, criticised by Turner (2010) and it overlooks the diversity of individuals labelled as refugees. Malkki (1995: 511) observes that "there is a tendency, then, to proceed as if refugees all shared a common condition or nature". In this sense, individuals with a protection status are subjects to the collective imagination, in the context of a Nation-State, where their rights and legitimacy as foreign nationals constantly need to be reasserted (Perréard 2019: 65).

2.3 Assessing wellbeing

If the previous section showed that integration is an on-going process to reach a state of wellbeing or a "good life", the following section looks at how to assess wellbeing. During the last two decades, a significative number of tools have been developed to measure wellbeing. However, the academic and political debates about how to define and assess wellbeing are continuing as no consensus has been reached. Anna Alexandrova (2013) observes, indeed, that different fields have a different understanding of the concept. Each measurement tool takes into consideration a different set of values to define wellbeing. In addition, most of these tools adopt a quantitative approach, viewing wellbeing as an outcome which can be cut down into different indicators. The most and the highest level on these indicators the closer to the maximum wellbeing an individual comes. Stepping aside from this general trend, I focus on approaches using a qualitative method.

Fischer (2014: 10) writes that "the Human Development Index and other multidimensional measures are a big improvement over GNP rankings, but they remain very blunt measures for overall wellbeing, eudaimonia". Qualitative approaches like the Human-Scale Development approach defines wellbeing in terms of universal human needs. This approach assumes each individual to have similar needs, defined in a short list considered exhaustive, and constant through time and space as: "subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity and freedom" (Cruz et al. 2009: 2023). In this view, what vary are the strategies adopted on a societal scale to fulfil these needs, as they can be expressed in varying "personal and cultural values which are themselves satisfiers and change as well historically and spatially" (Cruz et al. 2009: 2022). Rephrasing: Increasing wellbeing by filling the defined needs is considered a universal objective, but the ways to maximise wellbeing varies greatly between diverse societies. Therefore, the different strategies adopted lead to outcome variations in terms of wellbeing. This theory is interesting and might be relevant, however, by comparing societies, it overlooks interpersonal variations and agency within the same group. Therefore, the Human-Scale Development approach appears as a great mid-range tool, but it seems to give more weight to inter-societal variations. It does not leave much room for interviewees self-definition of wellbeing, understanding strategies on an individual scale, and to compare in-depth interpersonal variations, by acknowledging agency or autonomy in the personal process to reach wellbeing.

Following up, the argumentation of Chirkov et al. is in line with Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory which makes a case for universal "basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (Chirkov et al. 2003: 97). In other words, that means that self-determination and actualisation are treated as the core universal values to reach wellbeing. Therefore, the role of society is to offer conditions where these universal needs can come to fruition in an autonomous way (Chirkov et al. 2003: 97). Demonstrating the relation between autonomy and wellbeing as constant across culture, the self-determination theory offers an interesting perspective for this research. However, it does not offer enough room for assessing the multidimensionality of the integration process.

Sabina Alkire goes a step further by trying to define wellbeing in its totality. To do so, she proceeds by defining a negative definition and researches the "missing dimensions", focusing on the concept of poverty as a lack of wellbeing. She underlines unemployment as a central dimension of poverty: "Having a good and decent job is usually associated with being out of poverty, however poverty is defined. […] low employment quality is a fundamental aspect of individual deprivation" (Alkire 2007, as cited in Fischer 2014: 11). In addition to the financial and material deprivation following from unemployment, one's psychological state is being affected by other's humiliating judgement and discriminative attitude towards their deprivation, raising feelings of shame (Fischer 2014: 11).

However, Fischer (2014) makes a point against starting with universal indicators of wellbeing. According to him, interpersonal variations are precisely the most relevant to understand wellbeing (Fischer 2014: 207). He writes: "From an anthropological perspective, what is lost is often what is most important: a subjective understanding of what people value, what their view of the good life is and could be, the pathways they see for realizing their aspirations" (Fischer 2014: 207). Martha Nussbaum (2011: 20), who is one of the biggest contributor to the capability approach, offers a more exhaustive list than the previous approaches and moves in the direction suggested by Fischer by identifying not solely individual's capabilities, but also autonomy of choices and opportunities connected to one's social context as important concepts for assessing wellbeing (Fischer 2014: 12).

Deneulin and McGregor's study (2010) working on the capability approach as well, adopts a position which enables an in-depth qualitative analysis of how individuals self-evaluate their subjective wellbeing. They write that "social meanings enable people to make value judgements

about what they will do and be, and to evaluate how satisfied they are about what they are able to achieve". Values are therefore important as a personal orientation in life (Fischer 2014: 202).

This view, in line with philosophers' and psychologists' understanding of wellbeing as varying from one individual to another, is the line adopted in this research. Fischer (2014: 12) writes: "We may all want to live the good life, but we also differ widely on just what that entails, on what the good life might look like and the best means to get there". Therefore, more than shared values, what is common to all individuals in the process of reaching what they consider a good life, is a capacity of resilience and to imagine the future, or what Appadurai (2013) describes as the "capacity to aspire". Following, Seel (1997) adds that agency "provides the basis for how we think and feel about ourselves and others" (Seel 1997, as cited in Deneulien and McGregor 2010: 503). In other words, subjective wellbeing has an individually constructed meaning, which serves as a lens on how one will reflect on their personal situation and social context. The next section details how agency and autonomy are important to reach wellbeing.

2.4 Agency and autonomy

Autonomy is defined here as the capacity to make enlightened decisions for one-self's actions and how to proceed (Doyal and Gough 1991: 53), while agency is understood as the liberty to take action in accordance with personal beliefs and choices (Fischer 2014: 11). In other words, autonomy is the ability to have informed reflexions on what one wants, and agency is the capacity to set in practice the decision being made. Therefore, both are stages of the same process: planning and execution. Following, subjective wellbeing cannot be defined in universal terms, but is the result of an individual's cognitive process of value judgements. Aspiration and the capacity to imagine the future, are the motor for agency as "the power to act and the sense of having control over one's own destiny. Both are core elements of wellbeing in affluent as well as poor contexts" (Fischer 2014: 207). However, it is important to note that a lack of autonomy and agency, makes the situation *de facto* one of "unfreedom" as Amarty Sen (2009) defines it, as individuals do not have the possibility to use the possibilities they receive (Fischer 2014: 208). The contrary can lead to a "frustrated freedom" when autonomy and agency exceed real possibilities (Sen 2009). This last observation on unfreedom and frustrated freedom underlines the interconnectedness between an individual and their environment. To maximise wellbeing, individual capabilities need to balance opportunities they obtain.

To understand subjective wellbeing and compare it between persons, it is necessary to adopt a qualitative approach which allows for enough space such that interviewees may express their own autonomous conception of wellbeing, as advocated for by Deneulin and McGregor's study (2010). The present study contributes to the knowledge on refugees' wellbeing in the integration process, by researching how individual's autonomy is restricted by structures, constraining their opportunities. According to Deneulien and McGregor (2010: 501) it is necessary to "include consideration of the social structures and institutions which enable people to pursue individual freedoms in relation to others". In other words, it is important to understand that individuals are embedded in a network and in relations that influence their wellbeing and, most scholars agree on autonomy as an important value to understand subjective wellbeing, at least in Western countries.

3. CONTEXT OF INTEGRATION

3.1 Forced migrations

The huge numbers of people forcibly displaced has increased in the last ten years to figures which have not been seen in Europe since World War II. The United Nations Refugee Agency published a report earlier this year, stating that "we are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record […] an unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home" (UNHCR 2020*a*). If the current pandemic has drastically curbed the arrivals curve, people will keep arriving to Europe after this, because millions are still waiting in crowded asylum-seeker and refugee camps, like the 34,000 asylum-seekers stuck on Greek islands, while the camps there have a capacity to provide for 6,000 (de Bellis 2020). More specifically, millions of Syrians are living in hazardous situations in Syria or in the neighbouring countries. With the war going on, many people have but one choice, to leave to survive (UNHCR 2020*b*). This high number of arrivals put the asylum-system under pressure in many countries. Switzerland, for example, did not have enough places prepared to welcome newcomers, and some ended up living in undergrounds bunkers for months. The Swiss government, however, is well aware of the situation, and in 2018, they made a statement reaching the same conclusion than the UNHCR, that recognized that "the humanitarian situation, notably in Syria and its neighbouring countries is still dramatic" (Swiss Federal Council 2018).

If the asylum-procedures have been widely studied, wellbeing of newcomers and their integration, especially in the refugees' perspectives is very little researched. However, forced

migration "often implies downward mobility and consequent dissatisfaction" as observed by Colic-Peisker (2009: 194). Beside this, if national, or even regional application of migration and integration law may vary, non-European migrants and refugees face similar barriers of access, such as problems of recognition of their professional and educational experience and certificates, in the whole context of Europe, due to the international agreements privileging European workers and free-movement within the Union, while securitizing the border towards the outside of Europe. Following, most refugees are still dependant on social benefits, even years after settling down (Swiss Federal Council 2018: 1-2). The reliance on social benefits is a result of the difficulty to integrate into the labour market, which is detailed in the following section.

3.2 Protection status and access to the labour market

Next to the diverse integration barriers refugees face in relation to work and society, and the redefinition of their identity, they need to cope with discrimination. The study of Wehrle et al. explains: "refugees are often seen and treated in the host country in ways that not only threaten and invalidate their previous identities (i.e., Smyth et Kum, 2010), but that impose them stigmatized and threatening identities upon them (e.g., being unemployed, foreign, and a potential threat to the host country's real and/or symbolic resources […])" (Wehrle et al. 2018: 84). For these reasons, devaluation and stigmatisation, wellbeing, and past, present, and future identities are strongly intertwined. Phillimore and Goodson's article (2006: 1718) emphasises the difficulties to leave the "transition status": "[…] difficulties in gaining work lead to high levels of economic inactivity. With no obvious route out, people feel trapped; they become depressed and lose initiative perhaps resulting in frustration and negative behaviour".

Refugeehood and unemployment are similarly described by different authors as "transition status" (Vinokur and Caplan 1987; Wehrle et al. 2018). In addition, Power and Wilson (2000) underlines "[t]he relationship between an individual's unemployment, social exclusion, and the downward mobility of a neighbourhood (Power and Wilson 2000, as cited in Phillimore and Goodson 2006: 1718). Even more concerning, Wheatley-Price's (2001) study on the UK found that "recent White immigrants experienced a transitory period of disadvantage whereas non-White immigrants never attained equality with native-born Whites" (Wheatley-Price 2001, as cited in Phillimore and Goodson 2006: 1717). This is particularly important to take into account in a context where many refugees are black, people of colour, or are from indigenous

communities of different ethnicity from the majority group when they find refuge in Europe (State Secretary for Migrations–SEM 2018).

After five years living in Switzerland, 86 percent of refugees aged between 18 and 65 years old still rely on social benefits, while 32 percent of this group have a professional occupation (Swiss Federal Council 2018: 1-2). The Swiss Integration Agenda, which is the common integration plan agreed on, in 2018, by the Swiss government and the regional governments has as its objective to integrate refugees and people with a substitution protection status faster than before on the labour market. It stipulates that "close to 70 percent of individuals with protection status and of working age, have the potential to integrate into the labour market for the long-term, to provide durably for their needs, and their families, and reduce the dependence to social help" [in French in the original[5]] (Swiss Federal Council 2018). However, the lack of opportunities and recognition of skills and competences in the refugee's population hinder their access to the labour market.

The link between unemployment, loss of social status, and a diminished well-being is shown in numerous studies (Colic-Peisker 2009; Vinokur and Caplan 1987). In parallel, many studies have underlined the difficulties individuals with a protection status specifically face to enter the labour market (Bolzman 2001). Both processes–unemployment and refugeehood–have been linked to social exclusion as well. Wehrle et al. (2018: 84) write: "An inability to re-establish their earlier career trajectories can threaten refugees' previous identities". Therefore, Flores-Borquez[6] explains that the experience of refugeehood implied for her, as for many others: "[…] the loss of control over my life, this experience has meant that I have not been allowed to regain control over it" (1995: 101). These difficulties are recognized in Europe through different employment and integration programs targeting specifically unemployed citizens and individuals with protection status (Legrain 2017: 4).

Legrain (2017: 4) points out that "to start working, refugees and asylum seekers need three things: the right to work, appropriate skills, and job opportunities". Phillimore and Goodson (2006: 1718), however, emphasize that it is not only a question of the number of jobs available:

[5] Original quote in French: "Près de 70 % des personnes en âge de travailler appartenant à l'une de ces deux catégories présentent le potentiel nécessaire pour s'intégrer à long terme dans la vie professionnelle, subvenir durablement à leurs besoins et à ceux de leurs familles et, ainsi, réduire leur dépendance de l'aide sociale" (Swiss Federal Council 2018).
[6] Flores-Borquez has been recognized as a refugee in the United Kingdom and reflects in an academic paper on her experience (1995).

"It is important to consider the quality of job opportunities made available". Indeed, the authors explain that "using labour market flexibility to create jobs does little to reduce social exclusion if those made available are 'marginal jobs' which lack security, a decent wage, training and promotion prospects" (Phillimore and Goodson 2006: 1718). A counter argument discussed by Atkinson (1998, as cited in Phillimore and Goodson 2006: 1719) is that "such jobs can be viewed as stepping-stones to something better". However, Atkinson analyses that "there is a complex relationship between employment and social exclusion: success depends on whether the work restores a sense of control, acceptable relative status and prospects for the future. Evidence suggests that refugees who are able to locate work very rarely find jobs that meet these criteria" (*Ibid*.). Furthermore, receiving States institutions have a strong power to impact refugees' trajectories, causing them to lose some freedom and agency in the process. State institutions and frontline workers, like social workers, contribute to constantly structure and delimit refugees' possibilities and opportunities (Bolzman 2001: 136). In this specific context, the study of Probst et al. (2019: 170) analyses that "migration and integration policy is not solely about inclusion, but about selection and control as well" [in French in the original[7]]. A selective process takes place particularly in the relocalisation programs, where the destination country can decide who to take in, but control of refugees take place at different stages of the integration process. First, through the security centres to which refugees arrive where the first procedures are conducted in Switzerland, that being the control of their story and identity through an interview. Later, control is exercised on refugees' possibilities to move and travel, their financial means, and how they spend their money if they depend on social benefits, which is the case for most even years after settling down.

3.3 Integration policies and institutional practices in Switzerland

If Switzerland and each Canton have specific integration policies and practices, the themes and different fields of life concerned by integration have a wider resonance. Therefore, systems and institutions might be different in other regions or countries, but the themes identified in this research, might serve as comparison or orientation in other contexts too. An example is the

[7] Original quote in French: "Dans ce contexte, il convient de rappeler que, lorsqu'on évoque la politique d'intégration et de migration, on ne parle pas seulement d'inclusion, mais aussi de sélection et de contrôle. Cela est évident non seulement en Suisse, mais aussi au niveau de l'UE, où l'on observe dans les différents Etats membres, outre la demande de migration qualifiée, une interdépendance accrue entre les politiques d'intégration et d'admission des ressortissant·e·s de pays tiers" (Probst et al. 2019: 170).

support offered to refugees to find a job, if this is related to the context, it might nevertheless serve to guide reflexions in different contexts.

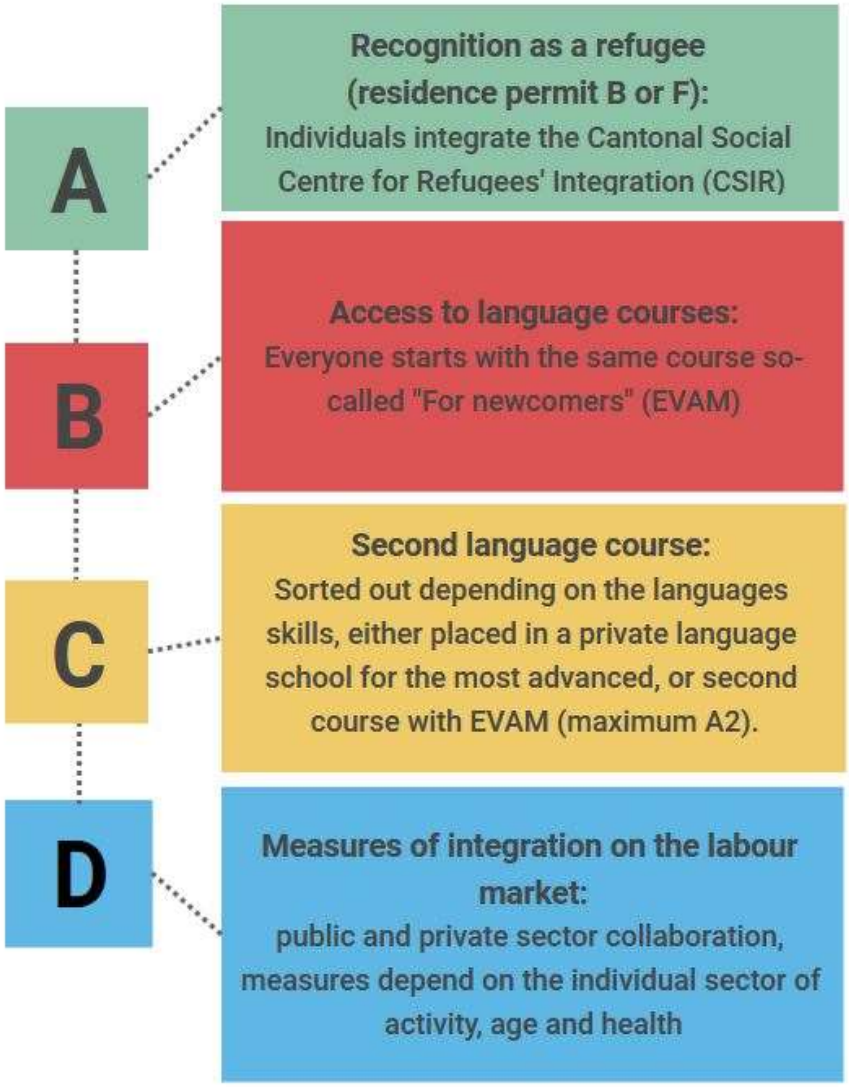
Moving on to the integration policy in Switzerland, the study of Probst et al. (2019: 7) pointed out that "in a federal system, there is not one integration policy, similarly one cannot talk about integration in singular with regards to the cantonal differences" [in French in the original[8]]. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the introduction, a common Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration is enforced since the first of January 2019. Therefore, what vary is the implementation of the law from one canton to another and thus, the success of the different measures taken might vary as well. The study of Probst et al. (2019: 170) focuses on authorities and emphasizes that it will be interesting to contribute to filling the gap in literature by targeting other actors with in-depth interviews. This research will make a modest contribution in this sense, by adding the perspectives of individuals who obtained a protection status in Canton of Vaud and therefore are directly targeted by the policies Probst et al. analysed.

The study of Valli et al. (2002) underlines the leeway of social workers in the integration process. Especially, regarding the energy and efforts they invest to support a specific individual, based on their personal evaluation of the situation. In this context, Perréard (2019: 65) analyses that categorisation, notably of foreign nationals, in the public discourse, has consequences on the legal frame and produces direct effects on the daily life of these individuals. Perréard (*Ibid*.) did not perceive any differentiation or discriminant treatment from the social workers managing cases of Swiss and foreign nationals' beneficiaries. However, Fossati explains that "employers may, consciously or unconsciously, discriminate against individuals with a different cultural background" (Fossati et al. 2007: 4). As all asylum seekers who lodged an asylum-request in Switzerland in 2018 were non-European citizens[9], how extra-European foreign nationals are perceived should be acknowledged when studying immigrants' capabilities and opportunities.

The highly individualised integration process, if it offers the possibility to personalise the service depending on sector of activity, age and health of each individual, means at the same time that decisions need to be made on the distribution of limited resources. Hence, some opportunities might be allocated to a beneficiary, who will be evaluated as benefiting greatly from a specific measure, but the same measure might be refused to another one, evaluated as

[8] Original in French: "Il n'y a donc pas *une* politique d'intégration dans un système fédéral, tout comme on ne peut pas parler d'intégration au singulier au regard des différences cantonales" (Probst et al. 2019: 7).
[9] See Appendix I for the SEM statistics on applications and granting of protection status at first instance, in 2018.

benefiting less from it, or not needing it (Perréard 2019: 27). Due to limited resources in terms of time and budget, the social workers at the Social Centre for Refugees' Integration–CSIR– have to decide on which means to allow to whom. Each measure and allowance must be justified as corresponding to the objective set for the individual concerned and that it will contribute to the final objective of the institution, in terms of financial independence through work or education (Perréard 2019: 57).



III Services to refugees in Canton of Vaud, once they integrate the Cantonal Social Centre for Refugees' Integration (CSIR), for maximum 5 years. During this period of time, the CSIR is responsible for the financial support allocated to each refugee. First, everyone attends the same basic language course. Then, the services become individualised. Table created by the author of this thesis, with information compiled from a worker of the CSIR met during this research.

The system is oriented towards working as its goal. In the institutional perspective, integration happens through work and gives a status, a place to the individual in the society (Perréard 2019: 55). Hence, if everyone whose protection status is recognized is accompanied by a social worker, Perréard (2019: 61) underlines in her study that an individual is nowadays

valued in society depending on his or her social and economic participation. This system overlooks that individuals who are considered "not integrated" in the society have often faced successive loss of status, not only their financial autonomy. In such a situation, many individuals who obtain a protection status, experience adjustment processes to their new life, leading to the adoption of new strategies to cope with the situation and reach, or at least draw near, of what they define as wellbeing or the good life. Shifting the focus here on refugees' perception of the integration process introduces a new focus to gain a deeper understanding of the process of integration. Therefore, this thesis is complementary to Perréard's (2019).

4. THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

4.1 Brief presentation

The capability approach is a pertinent and interesting framework for this research, as a wide approach, accounting for multiple dimensions. In Robeyns's words: "The capability approach cares about people's real freedoms[10] to do these things [they value], and the level of wellbeing that they reach when choosing from options open to them" (Robeyns 2017: 8). Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen was the first to reflect about economy and social issues in terms of "capabilities". He defines the capability approach as "an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do the different things a person has reason to value doing or being" (Sen 2009: 16). Robeyns, who has been a scholar of Sen, adds that the core of the capability approach is that "when asking normative questions, we should ask what people are able to do and what lives they are able to lead" (Robeyns 2017: 7). Sabina Alkire (2007: 2) has emphasized that the approach is adapted to evaluate "social arrangements" in terms of individuals capabilities and opportunities. Robeyns's describes these social arrangements as the frame for the social and cultural interpretation of capabilities. She adds that an individual capability set is being *de facto* restricted by other individuals' choices in the context they live in.

In other words, the capability approach has been conceptualised for evaluative or normative research, such as assessing an individual success in reaching his or her objectives or assessing one's autonomy in the process of working towards their objectives (Robeyns 2017: 24). Therefore, the capability approach is an appropriate framework to capture individuals'

[10] "*Real* freedoms" is used by Robeyns to express freedoms that individuals can enjoy. For example, think about the youngest child in a family. He or she theoretically has the freedom to study at University, but his or her family might have money to send only one child to University. In this case, the youngest child freedom would eventually be restricted by his or her older siblings' decisions. If one of them choose to study, the freedom to study for the youngest child only exists as a theoretical one, but not as a real opportunity.

capabilities and opportunities in the integration process and its structures, by offering the possibility to identify and reflect on the different dimensions relevant to an individual and to conduct an interpersonal comparison. Therefore, the approach offers the possibility to research in-depth processes in the perspective of the individuals concerned. For instance, by analysing what they report as important for their wellbeing and their personal strategies, instead as evaluating the process solely based on its outcomes.

4.2 Positioning: Why choose this theoretical approach?

The self-determination theory and the human-scale development approach, which look at objective wellbeing, by defining specific *universal* needs, postulate that wellbeing is achieved through the fulfilment of the same needs for all individuals. By contrast, the capability approach offers an alternative framework to compare capabilities and opportunities interpersonally. With this approach, I can look at different themes of integration, like social interactions and networks, work or professional training, family and friends, language, etc. and analyse what individuals value in these different themes in the pursuit of their wellbeing. This study, more specifically, adopts the stand often taken in philosophical discussions about wellbeing, which is about a personal assessment on how one's own life is going, therefore researching subjective wellbeing (Robeyns 2017: 119). Fischer (2014: 203) notes indeed, that "life-satisfaction questions are sensitive to conceptions of the good life (*eudaemonia*) in a way that measures of hedonic happiness miss". In this view, what a person has reasons to value might vary depending on his or her personal capabilities and environment. Not only achievements, but the processes creating capabilities and opportunities to reach a goal are considered. Most happiness studies agree on the importance of material resources, physical health and safety, and a social network for wellbeing. This study is in line with Fischer's book (2014), and consider that these are relevant dimensions, but not sufficient. For this reason, I add the three following dimensions pointed out by Fischer, as codes for my thematic analysis: "aspiration and opportunity, dignity and fairness, and commitment to a larger purpose" (Fischer 2014: 5). The subjective understanding and perception of the three last dimensions, particularly, requires a qualitative approach able to capture interpersonal variations. For these reasons, I chose to apply the capability approach as theorised by Robeyns (2017) for this empirical research and combine it with a theory of agency and autonomy. The capability approach has clearly demonstrated its suitability in different studies and contexts, to evaluate individuals' perceptions of their own wellbeing (Fischer 2014; Robeyns 2017; Sen 1979) but agency or autonomy are not always considered central in this approach. However, I argue that they are important factors of a successful integration. For this

reason, I decided to include agency and autonomy as central themes to understanding refugees' strategies in this study. The next section will spell out my theoretical framework, which builds on the structure in modules of the capability approach theorised by Ingrid Robeyns[11] (2017), in more detail.

4.3 Operationalization: "my" capability theory

4.3.1 Three sets of modules

First, the most central element is that real[12] capabilities and opportunities are at the heart of each capability theory. Capabilities are the abilities and competences an individual has, while opportunities are his or her possibilities. Capabilities and opportunities plurality needs to be acknowledged and they should be defined as "value-neutral" in the sense, that their mobilisation or realisation do not always imply a beneficial outcome. In some cases, the absence of a negative outcome is enough to justify them as valuable. In other words, the approach is interested in what is effectively possible, on "whether the person could be or do if she wanted to" (Robeyns 2017: 39).

Secondly, the researcher needs to be cognizant of instrumental or intrinsic value of a capability: "The capability approach focuses on people as ends as they are what ultimately matter when thinking about wellbeing and the quality of life" (Robeyns 2017: 48). This means that processes are being assessed based on how they affect individuals. Outcomes for people are regarded as what matters the most for the analysis, in this sense, they are considered as the end, as the approach searches to understand how to maximize their wellbeing, by analysing individually and producing an interpersonal comparison of advantage.

Then, if the capability approach offers the possibility to evaluate achievements, it is important to pay attention to the process as well, this may suppose to add other dimensions, as some capability might be perceived as ends on themselves and as instrumental for other ends.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the three modules Robeyns developed, please refer to her book (2017).
[12] As a reminder from the section on what is specific about refugees integration: The precision of *real* capabilities' emphasises here that this study is primarily interested on the possibilities one *de facto* has to realise what they want to, in contrast to capabilities which might be offered by law, but impossible to realise for diverse reasons (Robeyns 2016: 406; Strang and Ager 2012: 13). An example might be, the access to higher education, which might be theoretically open to everyone, but the number of students a University will accept is restricted or expensive fees might push financially vulnerable students to drop out to take a paid-work.

Robeyns (2017: 55) gives the example of "being educated", as an individual might benefit directly from being educated, as being able to read and develop reflexive competences, but it might serve other purposes such as finding a job or gaining social recognition.

Furthermore, it is important to explicit the purpose of the specific application one is making. In the case of this study, the purpose of the capability theory is to evaluate the effects of an integration frame on people's capabilities. Then, one needs to select dimensions or capabilities which are relevant for a specific theory (see following section). In addition, one should be conscious that structural constraints may vary from one individual to one another, depending on sociodemographic factors and the context in which an individual lives, which might be race or ethnicity, gender, age or society in which one lives. In other words, human diversity and its consequences on specific individuals should be acknowledged (see section "Selection of material"). Finally, autonomy and agency are analysed as central for this research.

4.3.2 Selecting capabilities to study

Sabine Alkire (2007: 7) further develops how to choose dimensions or capabilities to study for a specific capability theory. In other words, in this research dimensions are understood as themes that an individual sees as valuable in their integration process to reach wellbeing.

The themes I selected for my capability theory build on a cyclic process between what Alkire (2007) names a "normative consensus" and "empirical evidence regarding people's values". Therefore, identifying these dimensions requires diving into the literature on wellbeing, to observe what other authors have describe as important dimensions for wellbeing and in which context, to confront this literature with the interviews' narratives.

As a reminder, the research question, this paper is analysing is: How do Syrian refugees aged 30 to 65 experience their integration process in Switzerland? Therefore, the dimensions or themes orienting this research should help assess capabilities, opportunities, and autonomy in the integration process and how individuals adapt or react to this context to make sense of their new reality and pass through their transition status as refugeehood. Following, this study observes the dimensions most happiness studies agree on, such as the importance of material resources, physical health and safety, and social network for wellbeing. However, as mentioned previously, I do not consider these dimensions to be sufficient to gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals define their wellbeing and their strategies to reach it. Therefore, I add the dimensions Fischer uses "aspiration and opportunity, dignity and fairness, commitment to a

larger purpose" (Fischer 2014: 5) to better mirror the data collected. Finally, from the theory and the interviews, a few more dimensions appeared central: being educated, having a good job, being able to move and visit people, and having the ability to support others.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 A qualitative approach and a narrative interview guide

Adopting an inductive-iterative approach necessitates to make choices and to think about the sample which will allow for the best conclusions, applicable or comparable with a larger population. My objective is to gain access to how individuals understand wellbeing and what strategies they use to attain it in a qualitative approach. Therefore, in-depth narrative interviews seem the most appropriate. Indeed, this method gives the interviewees the most space to express themselves, construct and organise their discourse, as compared to guided interviews with standardised questions (Glaser et Strauss 2012: 83). Thus, I adopted a semi-structured interview guide, with an open question at the beginning of the interview to give the contributors space to phrase their answers with their own words and frames of reference, and with little interference and suggestions from the researcher (See Appendix II for the interview guide). The themes emerged form a cyclic process between previous research and interviewees' narrations, which were collected in an inductive-iterative process.

5.2 Selection of material: sampling and access to the field

To guarantee a study context where all interviewees are subjected to the same legislations and regulations, my sample includes solely interviewees living in Canton of Vaud and who have obtained a protection status. It is a region of higher immigration than the national average and most of the population is living in towns (Probst et al. 2019: 68), but the determinant criteria were the official language of the Canton, French, and the existing network I have there, to guarantee me an access to the field. Conducting the interviews in French offers me the benefit, as a researcher, to conduct the interviews in my native language and offer, for most of the interviewees, the possibility to conduct the interview without any interpreter, to minimise the questions around reliability of translated data, which are discussed in the evaluation of the results.

This makes possible to analyse how individuals experience the integration process in a similar context, reducing the bias of other factors. For the same reason, focus is put here on Syrian nationals only, to eliminate the influence which race, or ethnicity might play. This is not to underestimate the importance race and ethnicity might have in the integration process, but

exactly the opposite, they would need a far larger sample as the one in reach and scale of this study. However, within this specific selected group of Syrian nationals, with a protection status, a sampling strategy with maximum variation will be applied, which is one of the purposive sampling methods defined by Flick (2014: 123). This is to recall the variations of experiences within this group and to account for the intersectionality between gender, age, education, social status and familial context/social network and thus, to obtain the highest representativity of experiences in interpersonal comparison between interviewees.

In addition, I focus on adults aged between thirty and sixty-five. Thirty, because by this age, individuals generally have achieved some stability: either a job, or a completed education, a family, a house, and memories. In this respect, the older someone gets, the more they might have to lose. Therefore, I assume that individuals over this age might experience stronger feelings associated to downward social mobility and loss in general than younger ones. This is in line with Colic-Peisker's findings that "respondents were confronted with the loss of their pre-migration socioeconomic status and this affected their life satisfaction. Well-educated and (previously) middle-class people may be better equipped to cope with resettlement but they also may have much to lose in the process" (Colic-Peisker 2009: 194). Sixty-five reflects the end of the active life. Therefore, people over this age might have different priorities, as they are not expected to be part of the workforce anymore.

Besides, before the CoVid19 pandemic I had been volunteering for an association helping Arabic natives' speakers with learning French and with administrative tasks, mostly visited by Syrian nationals. My intention was initially to create a first contact with potential interviewees through this association and eventually conduct some ethnographic observations as well, which had been agreed to with the President of the association. I had planned to dedicate the end of March and the whole April 2020 months for conducting my interviews. Unfortunately, this was revealed to be the worst time to conduct interviews due to the Covid19 pandemic and the lockdown established in Switzerland. All none-essential services were shut down beginning on the 13th of March and some remained closed until the 8th of June. This situation removed my easiest access to interviewees through personal contacts.

Furthermore, before the lockdown, I had conducted only two interviews. So, I had no choice but to switch to online interviews to make progress with my research. The consequence was that it slowed down the process and narrowed the population I had access too. The president of the association where I had planned to volunteer, revealed himself to be extremely helpful.

Acting as a gatekeeper, he contacted people he knew and that he thought might have an interesting profile, to explain my research. Another Syrian friend was able to recruit interviewees in his own network. An interviewee tried to be helpful too in creating a snowball effect by talking about my research with his acquaintances. Therefore, this research benefited greatly from the support and investment I received from these people. To illustrate, I contacted different other associations. They told me they will see how they can be helpful but never answered back again. The shortcoming of relying on gatekeepers for the sample selection will be discuss in the section on reliability.

In addition, for technical reasons, I had access mostly to interviewees who knew how to install some specific programs on their computers or telephones. Indeed, when planning online classes with the association, we realised that while most people know how to use popular applications on their phone, like WhatsApp[13], most had trouble downloading and understanding how to use a new program, like Zoom[14]. Generally, they get assistance from friends or volunteers at the association to set up new applications on their phone and the lockdown eliminated this possibility. Following, interviewees I would have had access to at the association local under normal circumstances, had to be excluded from my sample.

5.3 Coding and process of analysis

I picture the coding of my interviews, as a process of "cutting, conceptualizing and organisation of data" (Flick 2014: 307). This thematic analysis builds on the grounded theory according to Strauss; however, it might be necessary to make some minor changes to adapt the process and "increase the empiric comparability of data" (Flick 2014: 318). This is the reason why specific themes are defined prior to the interviews and these different dimensions will guide the analysis. A thematic analysis is appropriate to research issues such as "the social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon or a process" (Flick 2014: 318), which fit the current thesis. Furthermore, thematic coding is applied in three different stages. First, each interview is coded line by line to identify what themes are discussed by each interviewee, then larger categories are created by grouping similar themed codes together. The final stage is the interpersonal comparison: All interviews will be lined up and compared theme by theme. (Flick 2014)

[13] Application for texting and (video) calls.
[14] Program for video conference.

5.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

To guarantee anonymity of the interviewees, personal information has been removed or anonymised and fictive names replace interviewees names, so identity is preserved while keeping it clear for the reader to which interviewee quotations are referring. For confidentiality, I informed the interviewees that all recording or videos will be destroyed, once they will be transcribed and that the anonymised transcription might be read by my supervisor, or other students in order to get feedbacks. Finally, I explained that the complete transcription would not be part of the final version, but only anonymised quotes would be inserted. The way the issues of anonymity and confidentiality were explained to the interviewees can be seen in more details in Appendix II at the beginning of the interview guide.

5.5 Evaluation of the results

5.5.1 Representability

Relying on gatekeepers and on the snowball effect to get in touch with interviewees has some shortcomings which are important to consider when reflecting on the representativity of the data collected. That made me vulnerable to the gatekeeper's bias, with their own vision and understanding when preselecting interviewees. I explained to them that I was interested in the most different profile of interviewees. Nevertheless, I observed a tendency, to guide me towards individuals that the gatekeeper might consider to be a 'good example'. The gatekeepers insisted on multiple occasions on the efforts the interviewees they would contact make to integrate and how they sometimes end up as "victims" of the system. They put me in touch with individuals who have found a job, apprenticeship, or activity, which as mentioned above does not represent the majority. Some seemed as well reluctant to put me in touch with individuals whose French was weaker or who do not have a stable activity yet, but when I did get access to two interviewees with such profiles, it turned out their experiences were very instructive for this research.

Another shortcoming, when accessing interviewees through gatekeepers and a snowball effect to generate the sample, is that it restricted me to a smaller sample of interviewees, who attach some importance to the association I started my sample from. Therefore, these individuals seem to have in common to value education and learning the language. This might create a distortion in the representativity of the sampled group. Conducting interviewees through other channels, like associations having a different focus than education would have been a way to get access to more diversified experiences. Unfortunately, without previous

personal contacts with other associations, this strategy was unsuccessful in the context of the pandemic when this study was conducted.

5.5.2 Ethical considerations

A further delimitation is an ethical and technical concern, due to the current health situation regarding the spread of CoVid19. The age group I am focusing on is not at the highest risk, but some might have health issues I am not aware of, or live with someone older, which could put them particularly at risk. Initially, when the recommendations from the government and the university were not out yet and only rumours about an eventual lockdown were still on-going, I addressed the situation by taking extra precautions to schedule my interviews in private places instead of public ones, with only the interviewee and myself. I also attempted to get back in touch with individuals whose interviews were already scheduled to give them a possibility to postpone their interview until after the lockdown or to digitalise it because of the specific context. Eventually, most interviews ended up digitalised, which raises further questions on the security of data collected through a program like Zoom, which has been under sharp criticism for data being sent to Facebook[15], or that encryption of the free video calls is not guaranteed. Therefore, I left it up to the interviewees to choose the program they preferred to use when they opted for digitalisation.

Beside this, a fear I had before starting the online interviews was how to deal remotely with emotions. Yet I was surprised of how well the online interviews went. Moving online does not seem to affect the content quality, depth, or detail. I believe that relying on a gatekeeper that the interviewees trust helps as an icebreaker, even for online interviews. When reflecting on the two first interviews I conducted in person, I observed that my interviewees were open to tell their story, but some memories brought up strong emotions for them. Therefore, I felt a little uncomfortable conducting my interviews through a video-call and letting them to deal with these emotions on their own at the end of the call. As noted by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004: 108): "Topics that are sensitive because they are emotionally painful, however, may well benefit from in-person interviews". Indeed, online interviews constrain the possibilities to respond and cheer up an interviewee, who would experience strong emotions during the process. When meeting them, I can take the time which is necessary at the end of the interview to make sure that they leave with a positive experience. Furthermore, I think that it is easier to capture and understand their emotions in a face-to-face interview.

[15] Social network

5.5.3 Reliability and validity

My experience with the online interviews is that they present two disadvantages. The first one is that the communication is slowed down. The little lag between the image and sound makes it harder to react to the interviewees, for example, to encourage them to develop their idea without cutting them. Little pauses are harder to interpret in these conditions, and it makes it more difficult to have a fluent communication. Cutting interviewees might break their thinking process and orient their answer depending on the next theme the interviewer introduces. However, I tried to avoid this by stopping myself as soon as I realised an interviewee might not be finished, and by inviting them to continue to develop what they were saying, and eventually, it got better with each interview.

The second disadvantage, which results from the first one, is that in these conditions, it seems quite laborious to conduct interviews with individuals who do not speak French and would need to rely on an interpreter. Consequently, this further lowers the number of interviewees to which I had access, and might jeopardize the maximum variety of my sample, as language skills become an additional criterion. However, interviewees tend to underestimate their language skills. Most of them expressed wanting to participate without an interpreter but were unsure if their language knowledge was developed enough. Therefore, it appears valuable for interviewees self-esteem to get this opportunity to practice their French and to become aware of their skills. I relied on an interpreter, the grow-up son of one of the interviewees, for two interviews. As with many young people, he is used to translate in all situations for his parents, and he has been helping with an association for official translation, therefore I trust his interpretation. Especially because a few times when he had doubt about how to translate precisely, he mentioned those, which makes him appear as dedicated and trustful.

Other than that, I did not detect any major reliability or validity issues. I tried to be as transparent as possible with the interviewees, always taking time at the beginning of the process to explain to them how the interview was planned, that they can always skip a question, take a break or stop the interview at any moment. A pattern I recognized through different interviewees, however, was the desire to please me as an interviewee, when interviewees asked me if that was "right" or "interesting" for me. I tried to reassure and encourage them every time it happened by reassuring them about the fact that I was interested in their experience and that therefore there were no right or wrong answers, that they are the experts and can share what they want.

6. ANALYSIS

6.1 Presentation of the interviewees

The data analysed hereafter was collected through nine in-depth narrative interviews, scheduled for approximately 60 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 50 minutes, but when the exchange extended, I met the interviewees twice, bringing the longest interview to a total time of 150 minutes. Below, I present my nine interviewees in a recapitulative table: All of them were born in Syria, are from Syrian nationality with a refugee status in Switzerland and are aged between 30 and 58 years old. The presentation sentences found in the table are how the interviewees presented themselves when they were asked what is important for them to tell when they introduce themselves to someone new. However, all the names and information which might be too revealing about an interviewee's identity have been anonymised. Therefore, all interviewees are referred to with a pseudonym in the following table and in the upcoming analysis.

	Informant fictive name & Self-presentation during the interview	Residence permit, since when	Age, Gender	Arrival in Switzerland/ Transit country	Family
1)	Hana: "I am an architect and I have done a lot of professional training for personal development."	B refugee, since 1 April 2016	54 years old, Female	June 2015/ Lebanon	Travelled with her husband and their 4 children, has a sister living in Switzerland for many years
2)	Rim: "First, I am Syrian ; Second, I am married and a mother of three children ; Third, I worked in Lebanon, I visited many countries, I would like to study many languages, I'd like to reach my goal of becoming a graphic designer."	B refugee, before arrival: her husband travelled a few months earlier and obtained family reunification	33 years old, Female	Mai 2016/ Lebanon	Travelled with her two children, joined her husband who was already in Switzerland, third child was born in Switzerland
3)	Nour: "I am Syrian. I am very proud of it because everyone loves Syrians."	B refugee, before arrival: UN refugee relocalisation program	32 years old, Female	March 2019/ Lebanon	Travelled with her husband and their three children, no relatives in Switzerland.

4)	Yasmine: "My name is [Yasmine]. I am Syrian. I am married. I have 5 children, 2 daughters and 3 sons. I am 40 years old. I like to walk in the town. I don't have friends or neighbours here. I would like to find friends to talk French with, and not to stay alone at home. I am very sad because my family is in Lebanon, in a difficult situation. My daughter is in Lebanon, and gave birth to my granddaughter but I couldn't meet her and that makes me very sad."	B refugee, before arrival: UN refugee relocalisation program	40 years old, Female	October 2017/ Lebanon	Travelled with her husband and four of their five children, their older daughter is in Lebanon until now, no relatives in Switzerland
5)	Samir: "I am proud of my diploma as a civil ingineer and about my culture, but I'm missing a job and this is really hard for me. I wish there were some group to help me communicate with the firms, because when I contact them by myself, they don't listen to me and they are not interested in a refugee with no experience here."	B refugee, obtained at the end of 2015	56 years old, Male	July 2014/ Lebanon, Algeria, Libya, Italy	Travelled to Switzerland with his wife, and their 7 children, some relatives in other countries in Europe but does not have any relatives in Switzerland.
6)	Amer: "I never thought about it. I tell only my name and I wait for other people to ask what they want to know."	B refugee, after 7 months in Switzerland, summer 2014	57 years old, Male	December 2013/ Turkey	Travelled with his wife and their four children, they split up in Switzerland, has a brother in Switzerland for over 20 years and an uncle for 50 years, some other relatives travelled to Switzerland too (nephews, sister).
7)	Issam: "My name is [Issam], I am 32 years old. I am Syrian, I am proud to be Syrian."	B refugee, obtained after 10 months in Switzerland, summer 2016	32 years old, Male	September 2015/ Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, etc. in total crossed nearly 9 countries.	Travelled with his wife, who was 7 months pregnant, and his parents-in-law, 1 child born in Switzerland, his wife has a brother in Switzerland for 10 years.
8)	Talal: "I would like to obtain some job qualitifcations, a certificate in Switzerland, and learning French is very important for me."	B refugee, since August 2018	30 years old, Male	September 2015/ Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Austria	Travelled alone, has his aunt and uncle in Switzerland for many years
9)	Bassem: "I have been in Switzerland for two-and-half years. I speak a little French, I am learning. I am looking for a job."	B refugee, before arrival: UN refugee relocalisation program	50 years old, Male	October 2017/ Lebanon	Travelled with his wife and four of their five children, their older daughter is in Lebanon until now, no relatives in Switzerland

6.2 Thematic analysis

6.2.1 Integration defined by refugees

To begin with, it seems that the interviewees have built their own understanding of integration, being aware of the laws and regulations they are subjected to and how they are reflected in the medias, the political discourse, or the public sphere. Many of them have very similar definitions, including a phrasing which matches the legal regulations. To illustrate, Issam defines an integrated person as: "someone who speak the language, or at least understand the basics. This is, someone who follows the rules and laws". Hana's definition is very close to Issam's one: "someone who has decided to continue their life in this society, in this country. This person needs to learn the language of this society, learn the rights, the rules and laws framing this society and respect them".

Most interviewees start with similar phrasing and then add different aspects. For example, Samir agrees, but him, Amer, and Rim emphasise on the relational aspect. According to Samir : "Integration means having friends, having good relationships with the neighbours, with the other people living here". Bassem and Yasmine picture working as a central theme of integration. She says: "[…] finding a job to be like everyone else and to be treated as equals with the rest of the society." Finally, Nour and Talal reflect on the limits of their adaptation to the Swiss community. They see local habits and customs as the heart of the integration process. Nour says that integration means that "people are used to the life here in Switzerland and to how everyone behaves and that they accept this life." She adds that integration is about being open-minded "to change a little bit how one thinks." But she is still searching what integration really is about: "I cannot explain it. What is it ? Should I forget who I am ? Or change, and be like the others ? Accept them as different ? I am not sure". Finally, Talal agrees as he believes that it is necessary to respect the habits and customs, but he is not sure about wanting to adopt them. He underlines here a new aspect of proactivity necessary to integrate, when he says: "I'm not sure what else is important, because I didn't try to meet Swiss friends yet. In my private life, I did not try yet. I work a lot and all my friends are Arabs. So, I do everything in Arabic, except for work, there it is all in French. So, for working, I know how to behave with people, I ask them questions, I am nice with them. But in a private context, I don't know yet".

To sum up, the themes of the integration process which show up the most through the definitions given by the interviewees are: language as a means to facilitate communication, learning the rules and laws and complying with them, building a social network, work, and

respecting differences even if one is not wanting to change themself, or eventually adapting a little bit, to be more similar to the locals. The social aspects are emphasised a lot, "being nice", "having good relations with neighbours" and "making Swiss and international friends". The need to find a job and integration through work are discussed, however, they come often after the social aspects and integration in the community. Financial autonomy was mentioned only once, and not as an end itself, but as a way to (re)gain social recognition and to be respected. Therefore, integration is principally understood by the interviewees as integration in a new social group, emphasizing on the human relational aspect, which shows that they are aware to be the ones required to integrate or adapt to the new society, but that they have rights as well to conserve at least some aspects of their identity. Half of the interviewees underlined this, through a notion of moving on with life here, accepting and embracing the change in their environment and situation, but not renouncing to their own identity when it comes to personal aspects like religion, friends, or food. The different themes that interviewees discussed as important in their integration process are indicated thereafter with a symbol of diamond[16]. Furthermore, within each theme, personal capabilities and opportunities are identified and analysed in relation to the individual's set of strategies.

6.2.2 Five stages of the integration process

The interpersonal comparison revealed a common pattern in all interviews. It appeared when organising the different themes an individual discussed as important in a chronological order and then lining up all interviewees. The pattern observed is that the same valued themes show in the same chronological order for all interviewees. Indeed, five common stages can be identified in the integration process, defined according to the themes valued by the interviewees: A) Exile, B) Healing, C) Rebuilding normality, D) Affirming one's (new) identity, and E) Stability. The different themes might expend through different phases, but the value put on each on them vary depending to the phase. Therefore, the focus of the analysis is on the themes which are at the core of a specific stage. The objective of this study is to answer the question of how Syrian refugees aged 30 to 65 experience their integration process in Switzerland. Therefore, I analysed what individuals' capabilities and opportunities are in the integration process and the autonomy they have to set their personal strategies in practice to improve their subjective wellbeing. Finally, I analysed how they overcome their transition

[16] The symbol used to identify the different themes:
❖

status (understood as when the integration process finishes, and other labels take over the transition label of "refugee").

A) Exile

❖ Forced departure

A first theme which emerged from the analysis, is the forced aspect of the migration. The interviewees present their journey as starting from circumstances beyond their will. In their own words, they did not choose to leave, but they reached a point where they considered having no other option left.

> *"A bomb fell next to me, and my brother sent me straight to an emergency room in Turney, because there is no hospital left in Syria. After the months I spent in the hospital in Turkey, I couldn't go back to Syria. I already lost an eye, if I were to go back to Syria as the war was not over, I might lose the second one. So, with my parents and my uncle we decided that it would be better for me to go to Switzerland." Talal, 1*[17]

> *"I took part in the protests. So, I went to prison twice. […] A friend of mine, working for the government, suggested to me to leave Syria, she told me that otherwise my name will be sent around, and I would be tracked." Samir, 2*

❖ Personal resources

It appears that if the departure can indeed be considered as a situation individuals had no power over, the decision on where to go depends on different strategies, where individuals use, at least partially, their agency. Most of them flee first to a neighbouring country, generally Lebanon in the specific case of these interviewees, and from there on, apply different strategies, depending on their resources and network. A small minority might have a Schengen visa and the financial means to afford flying to their desired host country:

> *"We left from Syria to Turkey, and then, as I had a Schengen visa, we flow to Switzerland with my family" Amer, 3*

Those having relatives in a specific country in Europe generally mobilise their help to ease their journey there:

> *"I arrived here by plane, because my sister who is living in Switzerland could obtain humanitarian visa for me and my family. Therefore, that was a great chance for us to arrive to*

[17] The quotes are numbered to make it easier for the reader to refer to the original quotes in French, in Annexe III.

Switzerland by plane, to not have to take a very perilous journey at sea or something similar which would have been extremely dangerous for our lives." Hana, 4

"I did not have a choice. I had to leave Syria and staying in Turkey was a bit complicated. So, I preferred to go to Switzerland. I didn't think about another country because my uncle has lived there for a long time. He knows the country well. So, I thought more about being with my uncle, than about the country where I would go. I didn't know anything about Switzerland, I had never travelled to Europe, but my uncle told me "Come here, everything is just fine here", so I thought "Yes, why not, let's go". Talal, 5

Some cannot afford anything else than staying in Lebanon, but they can apply for a humanitarian visa and a few ones are offered relocalisation by the United Nations operating there. With this strategy, autonomy is partially compromised, as individuals cannot choose their destination country, but the decision is made by the destination country authorities, who can choose who they relocate.

"We did not choose to come to Switzerland. The UNHCR told us "It is up to the destination country to choose individuals" and then they announced us that Switzerland has chosen us to immigrate there. We said "yes", and Switzerland it was." Nour, 6

Others might decide to take their chance and try to reach Europe by themselves, taking a risky and illegal journey to reach the destination of their choice. Generally leaving with a vague plan, and adjusting it on the way, according to the information they can gather. Here, the process is autonomous, but the result might be compromised if the individuals are caught before reaching their wished destination.

"I talked to my wife, we got ready within four days, and we left the country with our children. We did not say to anybody that we were leaving. My goal was to reach Belgium, which has a good quality of life, they speak French and one can get the nationality rather quickly. I hadn't thought about Switzerland at all but my friend told me that life is wonderful there and that the country is very good for families, that there are very good schools for the children, and that the government gives you a flat. Finally, I decided to come to Switzerland." Samir, 7

To sum up, the phase of exile seems to begin with circumstances beyond the control of an individual, which affect one's capabilities to stay safe and healthy, and to access basic material resources. Then, the strategies adopted vary greatly depending on the personal capabilities and opportunities. If individuals have the capability to dispose of financial resources, they might use them to travel to Switzerland by themselves. This option offers the highest level of autonomy, as individuals can decide on their road and destination. It is a very risky strategy as

well, involving smugglers, illegal crossing of borders, and traveling for days in hazardous conditions. Another popular strategy is to mobilise one's close social network when connexions exist in a safe destination country. When neither of these options are available, individuals can only adopt strategies affecting their autonomy to a higher degree, such as applying for a humanitarian visa or relocalisation through the United Nations program. These two last strategies imply an unpredictable waiting-time and an uncertainty issue mostly in precarious conditions, as refugees are tolerated but not supported by the Lebanese government. Therefore, for many of them it is a day-to-day survival. In addition, Lebanon is experiencing a period of unrest, with a huge economic crisis in the recent months, which make the living conditions even worse for many.

Whatever the strategy one adopts to reach their destination country, once there, the process becomes similar, individuals are all subjected to the same rules applying for asylum seekers and refugees. Individuals become aware of what they have left, and start realizing the devaluation that comes with exile. From the different interviews, it becomes clear that one might need months or even years to process the loss of wealth and social recognition. As a result, the first phase in the host country is a phase of healing. Most interviewees do not appear to have a clear strategy then, only resilience and time seems to help, as is shown in the next section.

B) Healing

Refugeehood and the consequences of fleeing a war often continue even once one has reached physical safety, with psychological and emotional dilemma, or with posttraumatic symptoms like survivor-guilt such as described by Mia Flores-Borquez (1995). In the following excerpts, the interviewees illustrate the mix of emotions which need to be dealt with in the first months or years when reaching a safe destination country, such as stress, fear, confusion, sadness, loneliness, and guilt. Therefore, the strategies adopted seem mostly to be observation and comparison between country of origins and host country, introspection, being patient, or accepting to be dependant and to rely on others for a varying period of time while analysing and adapting to the host country.

❖ **Downward mobility**

Individuals who are over fifty mostly, and had a successful career back in Syria, speak about the contrast between the great quality of life they had before the war, and the sense of loss and downward mobility they experience as refugee.

> *"I am not a normal citizen, like the others who live here. Yes, I receive social benefits, but this is hard for someone like me, who has been making a lot of money before… I was not poor when I was in Syria. There are, indeed, Africans coming to Europe to upgrade their living standards… Not me, my quality of life is diminished but I had no choice, I had to leave." Samir, 8*

❖ **Psychological state**

Another theme is psychological health and emotional stability. In their healing process, interviewees mentioned the stress, psychological fatigue, or posttraumatic syndromes they need to deal with. To illustrate, Yasmine recalled how the arrival centre she arrived at increased her family's stress in the first months, instead of helping to alleviate their psychological state.

> *"The first seven months were particularly hard. Especially the first months, in the closed arrival centre, where we couldn't go out when we wanted, we couldn't eat what we wanted. That was really hard. We were the whole family in a single room. We came to Switzerland in a state of intense psychological fatigue, and in this centre, we were really shocked, we became far more exhausted." Yasmine, 9*

An important psychological burden that interviewees mention as well is the feeling of guilt. In some cases, it is even intensified by the pressure put on refugees, by family members or relatives still in the country at war or in neighbouring countries. The example brought up by Hana shows how it can affect a whole family, even in the host country.

> *"My husband worked in a distribution centre collaborating with an international NGO. He received goods from the NGO, and he organised the division and distribution, so it would be divided fairly between all the inhabitants of the city. So, when he left this position and we came to Switzerland, everyone started telling him: "Why did you do that? Are you having a good life in Switzerland? You probably eat well… You're leaving us without food, without money, and we have no jobs! Why are you leaving us like that?" That was really hard to cope with for him. He lost 15 kilos, he was in a dilemma between staying in Switzerland with his family in peace, or going back to Syria, where the situation is still disastrous. Finally, he decided to go back. […] The months after he left were horrible for the whole family, we were all physically and psychologically exhausted." Hana, 10*

> *"Everyone we know, in Syria and Lebanon, believe that we are very happy here. We have a better quality of life, that's true. But they think that we have a lot of money and they always ask us to send some." Bassem, 11*

The preceding examples brought up by Hana and Bassem show how individuals must deal on the one hand with the adaptation to their host society, and on the other hand with the representations and expectations their relatives might have about their new life. This can serve to raise an individual's stress, as they already find themselves in a hard-emotional process, and they cannot meet their relatives' expectations, who are in worst situations than them and who they cannot support. Surprisingly, no individual mentioned any other support than their social worker during the first months, like psychologists or other specialists they might have met. It might be that they did not want to mention it, but the complete absence of mention of such services raises questions about their existence and access for asylum seekers and refugees. It seems that many of the interviewees might benefit from such services, so it would be an interesting area to develop in further research.

C) Rebuilding normality

After the first few months, which mostly contribute to digesting one's experience and healing, in the sense of recovering from the stress and the fatigue, individuals start to rebuild their life. In the first months or years, the barriers on individuals were mostly internal, as they needed to manage their own emotions and experiences. When they start moving towards rebuilding normality, external support or hinderers gain in importance in the individuals experiences.

> *"It is like someone entering a basement, and at the end of the corridor, there is a light. You need to walk step by step to reach the light. This is the story of each refugee. You need a lot of patience. It is very difficult to start a new life 2.0. It is really hard to choose friends, neighbours, everything is different ! To illustrate, I spent 50 years in my country, I know everything there, I had a comfortable lifestyle, I had a good income. And here ? Nothing. Back to the starting point. It is a huge difficulty to overcome". Samir, 12*

- **Social network support**

Most of the interviewees emphasize on how external help from relatives in Switzerland or individuals they met in Switzerland was essential in supporting them to get a stable situation, such as settling down, searching for a flat, finding a job. Many interviewees underline that they would not have been able to achieve the same results if they had not received external support.

"When one arrives to Switzerland, if there is someone to help them, it is very easy, but it takes time. Because, when I arrived in Switzerland, I had to learn everything, just like a baby. I needed to learn French, how to address to people, I needed to forget about my job, and do an apprenticeship. Approximately 50% of my life, I needed to start over. I needed to start again from zero". Talal, 13

"End of 2015, we obtained our residence permit B refugees, which means that from this moment on, my family was accepted here as refugees. With this decision, we had to leave the asylum seekers accommodations and we had to find a flat by ourselves. That was very complicated. We visited 69 flats, but nobody accepted to rent us anything, because I do not have a job. Finally, with the help of a Swiss friend, we obtained a very beautiful and well-located flat, rented by someone she knows, and that she asked personally to rent us the flat. That's wonderful! For us, this is a celebration! It was a huge celebration! That made me, my wife, and children so happy. The good life for us started then." Samir, 14

Mobilising one's support network appears as a popular strategy, and indeed one of the strategies offering the best results in terms of achievements. However, it is not clear why an individual develops a network faster or slower than another person. Social connexions probably form the field where personality plays the biggest role. Further research would be needed to understand how one rebuilds a network when in a new place with no social connexion.

- **Priority on the children**

Given the age group observed during this study, eight out of nine interviewees have children. Therefore, a core focus is put in the first months or years in giving a sense of stability to the children.

"After two years in Switzerland… We arrived in 2015, and in 2017 I really started learning French, but the two first years here, I focused solely on my family. I worked only with my children, to support them and to help them to find their own path." Hana, 15

In the process of rebuilding stability for the children, giving them the best opportunities and freedom of choice appear to be strongly valued. Even more central in the discourses of most interviewees, higher education is perceived as instrumental for a better quality of life and for more freedom of choice and opportunities when it comes to the professional life.

"I'd like to see my children study something they really like, that they have picked for themselves, because sometimes you can see people who have to do something they didn't choose, they are forced to do something they don't like. I don't know why, for example, my oldest son, it's compulsory for him in school now to do an internship, but what he wants is to go to the University to study. If my children all find what they want to do, it's good enough for me". Rim, 16

Therefore, a strong emphasis and value is put on education, which is a common feature shared by most interviewees. Especially for individuals who themselves have higher degrees, children's access to higher education appears as an issue of crucial importance, as a way to demonstrate social value it seems. As shows in the following example, where Samir underlines that his children's success is even more important, now that he is unemployed:

> *"It is very important for me to encourage my children, especially now that I don't have a job. So, it is important for me to support them, with their studies, as my three youngest ones are in high school and my oldest one is studying medicine at the University. […] A central criterion, when we were searching for a flat, was its proximity to the University, as my son was about to start his first year, which is really hard. So, I wanted to live close to the University, to be able to support him at my best." Samir, 17*

❖ **Barriers to further education**

Finally, a more unsettling pattern which appeared multiple times throughout the interviews is that the interviewees perceive a tendency from social workers to discourage higher education of refugee youth and the acquisition of advanced skills for the adults.

> *"My son studied French for 3 and half years with the EVAM–Vaud regional institution to welcome migrants–and the teachers said that he studied well, and that he should continue with an apprenticeship, but my son wanted to go to the University. He had good grades in Syria. But the teachers asked me: "Don't you want your son to start learning a job instead?" But no, I want my son to study at the University. And they told me: "Studying at a high school [to be granted access to University in the Swiss system] is very difficult, only 2 out of 100 refugees succeed". But I was confident for my son to be in those 2." Samir, 18*

The following excerpt illustrates this reported discouraging attitude, regarding the access to French classes once that individuals have been recognised as refugees and are under the responsibility of the CSIR–Social Centre for Integration of Refugees. Many interviewees are critical of the CSIR. These critics should however be understood in a context such as explained by Fischer (2014: 213) that "institutions are necessary to facilitate practices but also that institutions are always in danger of becoming corrupted, subordinating the pursuit of internal goods to that for external goods". For example, according to Talal's view, only financial autonomy is relevant for the institutions, what individuals needs to progress and reach their goals does not seem to concern them in his words.

> *"When we ask something, he [social worker in charge of their family] answers straight "No, no, no, this isn't possible for you. We cannot do that". For example, when we told him that we need*

more French courses… (At this moment we had only an A2 level and we had gone only 6 months to French courses) but he said "no, no, that's enough for you, you speak good enough". So, he forced us to search for jobs like caring for elderly people or working in a restaurant. He forced us to look for jobs that we don't like." Rim, 19

"A: I asked multiple times the CSIR for French courses. I wanted to learn, but every time the answer was "No". That was very difficult to accept for me.

Interviewer: Did they give you a reason at the CSIR? Or explained you why there aren't any French course available?

A: [sigh] Once, my social worker told me: "We have no budget for you for French classes".

Interviewer: Do you know what this person meant by "for you"?

A: Yes, for me, maybe for the people who are my age, maybe that's what was meant. Yes, they don't want to lose money for people over 50. Maybe, that's what it is.

Interviewer: Did they offer you any other trainings?

A: Yes, I did a professional training, but the training manager told me "You don't need this training!" …because it is already my job! I know it well. He told me "You need to learn French." And he wrote a letter to my social worker about it, but the social worker answered, "He will learn French working with the others", but the other employees who worked with me… They were like me! They did not speak French!" Amer, 20

When being denied further French courses by the CSIR, three strategies emerge: self-education online and with books, generally combined with finding free alternatives with volunteers or associations for example, and a minority reports enrolling and paying for classes by themselves.

"A negative aspect of the CSIR–Social Centre for Integration of refugees–is that they don't offer any advanced French classes. For us, the "older ones", there are solely basic courses. The CSIR refuses to enrol for courses above level B1/B2. So, I worked on my own, secretly. They refused me for French study at the University. That is a pity, when people are motivated, they should support them, help them, not just say "no". I'm 57, I have 8 years [until retirement age] but they refuse to help me, they say "no"." Samir, 21

Whatever the chosen alternative, an important feature is the extraordinary self-determination and self-discipline which is at core of those strategies, as illustrated by Hana:

"I woke up every morning at 4 a.m., to read books about psychology and therapies in French! [She bursts into laughter.] For the first page of my book, I probably needed a whole day of study, because there were so many words that I didn't understand. However, I know the topic very well, because I studied it in Arabic, but learning the words in French, that was a nightmare. I wrote down everything. I translated from French to Arabic: I read the first sentence in French, I translated each

word and wrote it down, I read the sentence in Arabic to understand the meaning, and then I went back to read it in French to learn it. Then, I did the same with each sentence. And I proceeded that way, paragraph by paragraph for two whole books, comparing what I was reading in French with my translation in Arabic, until I was sure to fully understand what I was reading in French. After two months of self-study, I contacted an institute to start a certificate with them." Hana, 22

Language is not the only field where some interviewees express a lack of support from the CSIR. To illustrate, Talal explains that he would like to progress professionally, to get a certificate in Switzerland:

"I asked my social worker multiple times, and every time she says "Okay, I will try to figure it out", but then she doesn't do anything about it. I don't think that it has to do with her personally, as it is the same scenario every time that I asked the CSIR how to progress professionally. For example, I should get more responsibilities step by step, I should not stagnate as an entry level worker for years. Unfortunately, they are only concerned about money, how much do I earn a month, how much does my rent cost, and so on. Money: That's all they are concerned about." Talal, 23

Talal's situation is not an isolated case. In the period observed, up to eight years in Switzerland, none of the interviewees made it to financial autonomy. If a minority of the interviewees were able to find an apprenticeship, or another form of professional training and therefore reached a Swiss recognized qualification, many of them struggle to find any position, even a voluntary one. In this sense, refugeehood can be seen as a transition status, from the rapid loss of one's social markers, to a slow process of redefining them.

D) Affirming one's (new) identity

Once one is used to life in Switzerland and has developed some basic skills, such as a basic language level; and that one has achieved some material stability and gained back a sense of normality, the next step is generally to start focusing on finding one's place in the society. Working appears central here. If employment is not an end for many people, it has an instrumental value in providing the means to improve one's quality of life, and therefore contributes to autonomy and wellbeing. This mirrors Fischer's idea that "income is crucially important for one's ability to achieve a good life, but alone it is not enough" (Fischer 2014: 8). Another theme which appears crucial at this stage, is the language of the household, as threatening one's identity and role within the family.

❖ **Career**

Finding a job remains challenging for refugees. Especially for those who had high responsibilities or highly qualified positions, adjusting to their new situation might be very difficult. To the contrary of many studies results, highly qualified newcomers do not seem to find a job more easily than less qualified ones in Switzerland.

> *"I prepared my resume and I started looking for work. I had a comfortable income back in Syria, as I had my own firm. I conducted many projects in their totality: from scratch until the delivery. I have 20 years of experience in the construction field. So, I started contacting firms to ask them for job… but three years have passed now, and I haven't found any opportunity." Samir, 24*

Especially for the oldest ones, with decades of experiences in their field, this means putting their ego aside, and accepting to start with internships again, before eventually finding a position.

> *"In Syria, I worked in the construction field, so I did many internships in my field here. However, I could not find any firm interested to hire me." Amer, 25*

The next strategy adopted is to focus on a new field of interest or to widen one's prospected field by starting a new professional training or apprenticeship, to get a Swiss certification, and reach their objective in the long run, like Issam in the following excerpt, who decided to start back with an apprenticeship, to get a formal education in Switzerland.

> *"People from an association supporting newcomers helped me to write my resume, a cover letter, and to find an internship. Then, I found a second internship by myself, and a third one, at the end of which I got hired as an apprentice." Issam, 26*

> *"Architecture is something in the past, it was amazing, because I did many projects with my husband. We built many buildings, many tower-blocks. But this is life, many changes happen on a path. […] This is the reason why I focused on the field of personal development therapies. I like this path a lot, as much as architecture of course, but for personal development therapies, I can work here because I obtained a diploma here and with all the things I taught myself on the Internet and with the books I read and translated. I think this is the best for me now." Hana, 27*

When internships do not lead to a position in one's field, one of the most mobilised strategy to deal with the present is to decide to let go of the past, to be able to lower one's expectations:

> *"The period before I decided to forget my past was really hard. Let me think of an example. I was thinking, overthinking, all the time, and I wanted to return to Syria. I was thinking only about this, all the time: "Should I go back?" But the war went on, the situation became even worse there…*

So, after 2 and ½ years, I need to forget this idea, I need to forget my past, and who I was, yes. I need to focus on the present now". Amer, 28

"Until now, I couldn't find a job. Some people told me: "It's because of your age, even for those who are born here, it is difficult to find a job over 50." So, I changed my strategy to find a job. I am searching in other fields now too, as finding a position in my field is hard. So now, I am considering other alternatives, like working as a salesperson in a little shop… My goal is to work, because until now I am unemployed, and I must rely on social benefits. So, anything, anywhere would be just fine for me." Samir, 29

Talal's strategy is to keep asking his social worker recurrently about the possibilities to progress professionally and to look for information by himself. It is important, however, to note here what an integration coach[18] brought up during an informal discussion I had with him about the integration regime: "Beneficiaries see only a small piece of the whole picture". Therefore, if it might be the case that some opportunities are refused, it is important to consider that institutions have their own goal and budget to maintain. As pointed out by Perréard (2019: 27), social workers are evaluated based on their performances and need to justify every investment they grant to a beneficiary. Therefore, due to the objective of rentability of the institutions, social workers need to take decisions, and prioritize some cases over others. Perréard notes that the limited resources in time and budget at the disposal of the social workers force them to make choices, and therefore, impact directly the beneficiaries (*Ibid*.).

The lack of adequate and sufficient accompaniment to find a job is one of the concerns which occurs the most often throughout the different interviews. It appears that most of the interviewees express that employment is a high priority for them after the two first years–during which the majority focuses on learning the language, dealing with stress, getting used to their new country and situation, and supporting their children in finding their own path. Especially, it appears that the support which helped most interviewees towards a job, came from their personal network. Issam, for example, explains that the social workers focus solely on language, but not on employment. Therefore, his strategy, like many others, was to turn to the civil society and an association to find the support he needed. Following this, Bassem and Samir both express that a helpful strategy to find a job would be to have association or institutions dedicated

[18] An integration coach is a person working with the CSIR, in addition to a social worker, as a case manager and interpreter for families who specifically arrived through the UN relocalisation program.

to help refugees specifically with finding a job, because their personal strategies, such as proactively contacting firms by themselves, and doing internships have not paid off so far.

> *"For work, after my second French course, I adhered to [name a civil society organisation]. They helped me a lot to write a resume, a personal letter, and to search for an internship. I found my job thanks to the association because they brought us to a job fair where different jobs were presented. So, I got an opportunity to discuss with people there, understand what they do, and I found this job interesting. The people at the association explained me more about it. So, yes, I think that if there were more branches of this association, I think it could help about 80 percent of newcomers to succeed." Issam, 30*

> *"What is needed is a firm or an official organisation to help specifically in finding a job. For example, each town might have a group supporting refugees with their job hunt, with individuals having good knowledge of the job-market and close contacts with firms. That would be ideal I think." Samir, 31*

- **Language of the household shifting**

The lack of support and access to French courses for the adults has consequences on the dynamics within the family by making the parents dependant on their children for their daily life, as they need to rely on them for translation. This challenges the traditional roles or identities in the family, where children are dependent on their parents, and where parents are the ones who support their children and teach them.

> *"For the children, all is well. My children, and the other Syrian too get integrated far quicker than us. They learn French quickly, but the problem is the adults. It is quite difficult. The whole system is very different for us." Nour, 32*

> *"[…] I sent an email but after an hour, my phone started ringing and I was scared because it was the phone number of the institute I had contacted by email. I couldn't speak on the phone; this I could do only in Arabic or English. This was far too stressful to do in French. I told my daughter I needed her help. So, I opened the loudspeaker on my phone, so she could listen and translate for me." Hana, 33*

The opposite dynamic has consequences for the family as well, with many children speaking better French than Arabic, this serves to increase the misunderstanding between parents and their children by making communication more difficult. It jeopardizes the transmission of the culture of origin as well, especially when members of an extended family are not living in the same language area, and therefore Arabic becomes crucial as the only common link between all of them. Here, the strategy adopted is to establish Arabic as the household language, at least

with the parents, as it appears difficult to keep between the children once they start school and speak French all day long.

> *"I told my children that it is forbidden to speak French at home, inside the house we speak Arabic and when we go out, we speak in French. It is important that they don't forget Arabic, especially because my youngest child is three, so it's important that he learns Arabic." Nour, 34*

E) Stability

Cangià and Zittoun's study (2020) explains that the capacity to accept the present and imagine the future influences the perception of subjective wellbeing and a good life. From the interviews, it appears that accepting the present is a process which might take months or years. If the capacity to imagine the future does not disappear, it seems that it is often shut down during this period, and until an individual achieves more stability, at which point they may begin imagining a better future for themselves.

- **Satisfaction**

After a few years, some of the interviewees reach a stability and a situation they are satisfied with:

> *"Now I am satisfied with my situation. I am busy instead of spending all my time at home, which was hard for me, as I am used to always do something. I cannot go out if I don't have an objective, somewhere to go. […] How I see the future… I am 58 years old, so I will probably keep going like that until retirement. I think that I can say that I achieved what I wanted" Amer, 35*

> *"I am not young, I am 55 years old, I am Muslim, I wear a hijab, and I don't speak French very well. So, finding a job, in my situation, especially working with a psychologist, that was my dream and when I saw it starting to take shape, it was unbelievable. I worked hard for it, I read a lot, I studied a lot, but I never imagined that I could find a job that easily. I didn't need to send any resume, or to ask many people for job, and get rejected multiple times until someone would hire me. That was something incredible to find directly a contact who told me "I know a psychologist you could work with if you want" My dream was about to become reality so easily, so I couldn't believe it." Hana, 36*

- **Personal projects**

When they reach a stable situation, especially regarding work, most individuals start working towards personal projects, which seem to have been relegated somewhere at the back of their minds until this point of time:

"Once our life is a little more settled down, I would like to have one more child, but not now, maybe in 4, 5 or 10 years." Nour, 37

"I won't be an apprentice all my life. I will finish my apprenticeship in two years. So, of course I have dreams for the future. I don't know if that's a big dream or easy to achieve, but I would like to open my own business. So, if I succeed in creating my own business, I would encourage my daughter to study something related, so we could all work together, my wife, my daughter and me, as my wife already studied Business Management, so she just needs to get an equivalence." Issam, 38

❖ **Helping others**

Fischer explains that "life satisfaction also depends on doing something meaningful with one's life–having aspirations and hope, which imply the values with which we vest our very notions of self" (Fischer 2014: 208). Serving a bigger purpose, or being able to help others, appears in many interviews, such as in the two following excerpts:

"I need to keep trying to find a way to help more people. My dream… [her voice fills with emotions] is to help people, not only here, but outside of Switzerland, in Turkey, in Lebanon, in Jordan. That's my biggest dream. I don't know how it will turn out, but I would like to help the many Syrians in refugee camps. As their life are horrible, without food, without electricity, without…anything. […] I had to leave my house when it was destroyed, and I felt terrible. So, I understand how they feel, and my dream is to help them." Hana, 39

"I would like to do something good with my job, like offering my services for free in elderly houses, or to people with a handicap. Back in Syria, I did it, and that brought me much joy. So, I would like to do it here too, as a service free of charges for elderly and people with a handicap." Bassem, 40

❖ **Dealing with long separation**

Not all refugees achieve a life they are satisfied with. A big issue which remains unsolved for many of the interviewees is the issue of social relations, missing close relatives, and being unable to reunite with them.

"The most important thing for me now is to find a solution so that my fiancée can join me here in Switzerland. I hope to find a solution soon, but we'll see." Talal, 41

The following excerpt by Yasmine illustrates how the divergence of social organisation between the country of origins and host country can affect refugees' psychological wellbeing, due to different representation and links between family members. It appears throughout many

interviews, that many Syrians have a social organisation where three generations live close to each other and have daily contacts with a larger group of relatives than Swiss families do.

> *"I have always been used to spend time with my brothers, my sisters, my neighbours in the afternoon. But here, I'm always all by myself and this is very difficult for me. This is not a life for me. Sometimes, I talk to… the walls." Yasmine, 42*

❖ **A state of limbo**

Following, some consider that even if they were to live all their life in Switzerland, they would not be happy.

> *"Not only me, but everyone who is like me, who still has family in Lebanon […] Me, I have my oldest daughter there. I will never be happy in Switzerland, even if I stay here my entire life. I will never be happy, because my daughter is in Lebanon and I think of her constantly." Yasmine, 43*

One of the strategies often considered is to return to Syria, but this solution is seldom possible in practice; the personal, emotional, or financial costs might be too high.

> *"I would like to go back to Syria at some point. My whole life is in Syria, my relatives, my house, my parcels of lands, my memories. But my children, they want to stay in Switzerland. My youngest daughter for example… [She asked her teens daughter directly if she would like to go back, the daughter answers negatively with no hesitation, the mother laughs]." Yasmine, 44*

> *"Even if I were to go back to Syria, I wouldn't be as happy as before the war, because some of my relatives died, some disappeared, some are in jail, or fled abroad, and our house was probably destroyed during the war too." Bassem, 45*

So, the strategy most interviewees adopt is to stay in contact via modern technologies:

> *"I'm in contact with my family, every day…Twice. [She laughs.] We have a WhatsApp group with all my family, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, and we talk every day. We share pictures of the food, the new clothes we bought for Eid[19]." Nour, 46*

> *"I'm used to the situation now. I often talk with my mom on the phone, 2 or 3 times a week but that's it. I need to carry on with my life. It's extremely hard, but I have no other choice." Talal, 47*

[19] Eid is an Islamic holiday. There are two of them during the year. Here, the interviewee refers to the one celebrated at the end of the annual Islamic month of fasting called Ramadan, as the interviews were conducted during this period of fasting observed by most the interviewees.

Another strategy, is to build back a Syrian community, or a circle of friends with similar migratory trajectory, to support each other:

> *"I know many people who arrived at the same time as me, and now we are friends. Each one has a different expertise, so we help each other. For example, I didn't speak French, or English when I arrived, so one of them always accompanied me when I needed an interpreter. So, each one shares his experience to help the other." Talal, 48*

And again, like with work, a way to deal with personal issues is to forget the past, to focus on the present:

> *"I need to stop worrying about my family all the time, I need to forget about the situation in Syria, that's what I think. What is important for me is that my parents are healthy, that's all that matters. But living with them, now, it's… complicated, I need to forget this idea, I have no choice." Talal, 49*

❖ **Belonging**

Nevertheless, forgetting the past is often not that easy, and especially forgetting about the past is not enough to feel a sense of belonging or to be accepted in a new place, which indeed seems to be a dilemma many interviewees face. To illustrate, some feel lost between both countries:

> *"Unfortunately, I lost both countries. Whether I stay in Switzerland all my life, I will always be a stranger, it is not my country and if I go back to my country, I would be a stranger too." Talal, 51*

> *"After nearly five years in Switzerland, now when I think about it, and I ask myself: Am I Syrian or not ? Am I Swiss or not ? And I'm lost between both, really. I don't know, maybe after a while it would change… Because now, if I imagine going back to Syria, really, I will need integration courses there! [He laughs.]" Issam, 52*

However, most interviewees express how proud they are to be of Syrian nationality:

> *"Everyone loves Syrians ! [She bursts into laughter]. I moved during the pandemic, so all shops were closed, and I needed to buy everything online, second-hand. Every time, people ask me: "Where are you from originally?" I answer that I am Syrian, and people are enthusiastic about it: "Oh, I love Syrians! Syria is very pretty! I visited it !" So, yes, I am proud to be Syrian because everyone loves Syrians!" Nour, 50*

However, in the process to forget the past and to integrate in Switzerland, many are looking forward to obtaining the Swiss citizenship, even if the process is longer and harder than in most other countries in Europe. One reason mentioned by most interviewees, is the freedom to travel abroad:

> *"Now, I am at peace with my situation, but my project for the future is to perfect my French skills, because I would like to acquire Swiss citizenship so I could travel. I would like to visit the Arabic countries, because it's forbidden with a Syrian passport, but with a Swiss one, it is easier." Amer, 53*

Samir, however, expresses deeper motivations to obtain the Swiss nationality. To name them, the security and stability it would bring to his family in the long term, and the extended rights coming with the nationality instead as a residence permit:

> *"A residence permit is great, but I think that acquiring citizenship is a necessity. It gives an individual the right to vote, it gives more rights than the residence permit. Life is easy with a residence permit, but when I think about my children, it is important that they acquire Swiss citizenship. The difference is that once you have the nationality, Switzerland will protect you, you can receive assistance. Wherever you are, the government will assist you if you get in trouble. […] Each individual is valued in European countries ! In the Arabic countries, or oriental countries, that's not the case. An individual might die, without anybody hearing or caring about it. But here, each citizen is highly valued once they have the nationality." Samir, 54*

7. RESULTS

As a reminder, this thesis explored the question of how Syrian refugees aged 30 to 65 experience their integration process in Switzerland, which was answered in three steps. First, I identified individuals' capabilities (what are their resources) and opportunities (how are they able to use them). Then, I analysed how they build personal strategies to improve their subjective wellbeing, defined in terms of human needs that one values and set as objectives for themselves in their integration process. Finally, I conducted an interpersonal comparison to identify the patterns and differences which appear throughout the individuals' experiences and to understand how individuals can overcome their transition status, understood as refugeehood.

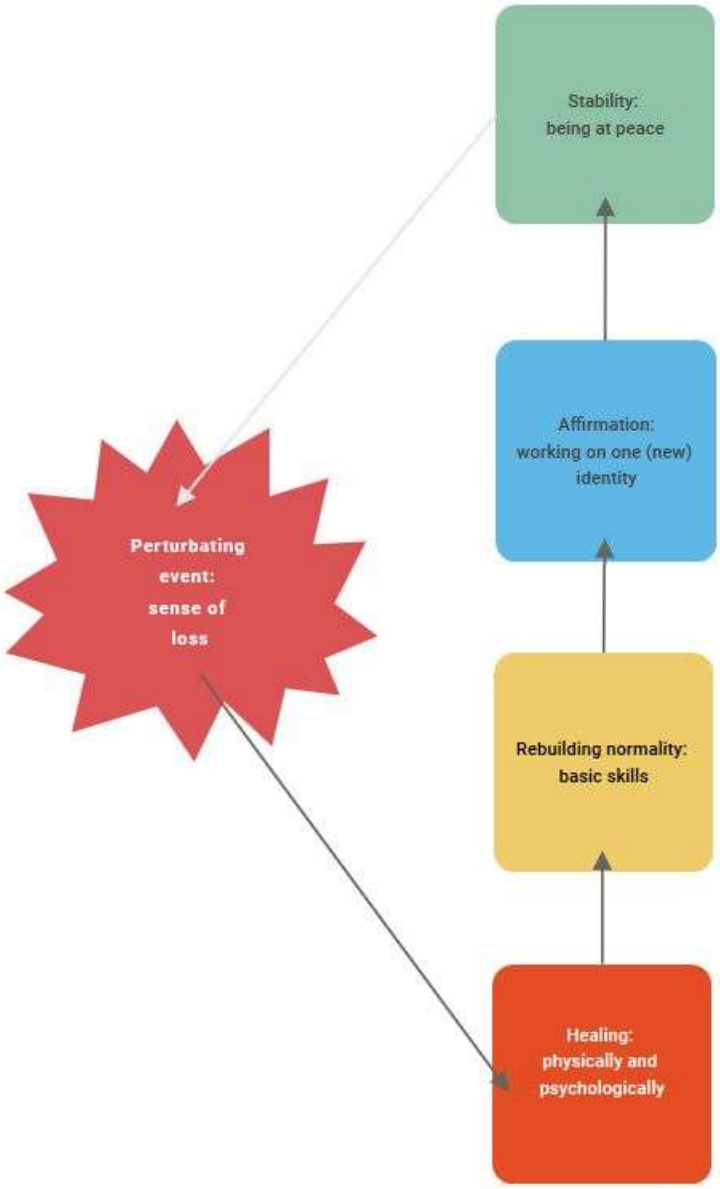
The thematic analysis highlighted the different themes individuals value for their wellbeing during their integration process. At the end of each narrative interview, I asked the interviewees to summarize what the different themes are that they see as important for their wellbeing and to have a good life, to understand better what they set as their individual goals, motivations and

expectations from their life in Switzerland. Interestingly, even if employment does not appear as central for integration in the interviewees' perspectives, all of them mentioned that finding a job is one of the central aspects for them to have a good life and contributes to fulfilment in their life. The other central aspect mentioned by all interviewees is the wellbeing of their family: being reunited and spending time with them, that their children find their own educational path and that they can study what they want. A new dimension which appears here is that, more than just having good relations with others, half of the interviewees find it central to be able to contribute to a bigger goal in the society, through helping and supporting others. The social aspects such as having good relationship and learning the local language are still mentioned multiple times. At the same time, connected to the social network, being separated from some family members, and thinking a lot about the situation in Syria and in Lebanon are mentioned as hindering wellbeing, as well as creating physical or psychological health issues.

However, all these themes are not valued the same for all times in the integration process. Five common stages can be identified in all the interviews, and each stage is characterised by the themes valued and therefore focused on as objectives to improve subjective wellbeing at this specific stage. In term of duration, these phases vary from one individual to another, but the pattern of themes follows a similar chronological evolution for all interviewees. Therefore, this pattern forms the spine of the integration process. In other words, integration is a transformative process from a dispossession of different capitals–which might be material and psychological–one possessed towards the (re)building of a new self, and this pattern reveals how multifaceted the integration process is.

Besides, there is no such a thing as a one-fits-all way to build a new life individuals would be satisfied with as interpersonal variations appear in the personal resources, (or capabilities and opportunities) at the disposal of a specific individual. These variations explain why different strategies are adopted to deal with a similar context or challenge, or in other words, to fill similar needs, leading to wellbeing.

The pattern identified through the interviews I conducted shows that a new integration cycle is launched by a disruptive event causing a sense of loss, and is composed of five different stages, which I explain hereafter and sum up in the chart below as the *Integration model.*



IV 5-stages integration model developed by the author based on the data collected during the interviews

1) In the specific case of this study, the Syrian conflict threatened the physiological needs and safety of the interviewees, pushing them into exile to preserve these basic needs. However, exile is associated with dispossession in other regards, such as wealth, status, or skills one had. As different interviewees express it, it is a transformation they endure, not one that they actively initiated. It appears in the interviews through a vocabulary of obligation and difficulties, Samir mentions "I had to leave my country". The strategy

sets up here is similar for all interviews: fleeing. However, where they can go, and by which means depends on their personal, financial, and social resources.

2) Following, the second stage appears as a healing phase. For example, Yasmine explains that she became even more psychologically tired once she reached Switzerland, because she was really shocked by the living conditions at the arrival centre. Individuals focus on recovering from physical and psychological harm caused by the war and exile, release stress, and accept the loss experienced. It is described by most interviewees as a difficult transition period. Samir alludes to "a dark corridor one need to cross". Therefore, strategies adopted seem mostly to be observation and comparison between country of origins and host country, introspection, being patient, accepting dependancy and reliance on others for some period of time while learning about and adapting to the host country.

3) Once, the basic needs for shelter, food, security, and a peaceful environment are satisfied, individual objectives evolve. They start to value becoming integrated in their new environment. It appears in the interviews after a period of a few months to a few years, where the newcomers focus on developing basic skills, such as communication and understanding how the new society they live in works, how people interact with each other, what are the technologies used in the daily life. Samir, for instance, explained how he had to learn to use a GPS navigator on his phone to orient himself through town. This is a stage where interviewees focus mostly inwards towards their family, to building a new family balance, and supporting their children, but they also start to socialise with others. Talal, makes a direct allusion to the fact that "I had to learn everything" and felt "like a baby". This is the turning point when individuals become far more active, they focus on basic skills such as learning French, in a strategy to develop communication as a tool for the next stages.

4) The fourth stage is when most individuals move from focusing on their family members needs and start focusing on their own development, and how to fulfil their own needs and expectations. Many realise that their previous skills, experience, and diplomas might not be enough to find a job and become autonomous from the State's financial assistance and be recognized in the society. Therefore, they adopt new strategies to develop a new self, with new competences and skills. The vocabulary chosen by the interviewees illustrates this idea of a rupture between the past and the present, between

an "old" and a "new" life. Samir talks about starting "a new life 2.0". Hana talks about her over-20-years-long career as an architect as "being in the past" because she thinks "it is impossible" to find a work in this field in her present life, with a rupture of six or seven years.

5) Finally, some do reach a new stability. This is a period where the interviewees come to peace with their new identity and new life. Often, an element which appears highly valued at this stage by many individuals, is to participate in projects which help others. Therefore, they might move on to more personal projects or start planning or taking part in projects serving a bigger purpose than themselves, what Samir phrases as "giving back" some of the help his family received, for example. Some interviewees mention the question of acquiring the Swiss nationality as well, to be able to participate fully as members in the society and reach more stability and security in their situation.

Stability thus marks the end of an integration cycle. However, many interviewees talked about the difficulties to reach it, as they experience different difficulties. Particularly regarding their identity, some consequences like being separated from relatives, continue in the present. An example is illustrated by Yasmine, whose daughter is still in Lebanon. The mother explains that she cannot let go of the situation, that she is always worried for her daughter and sad to be separated from her. As such, her mind is always wandering back to Lebanon and Syria, and she cannot find the necessary peace of mind to move on to (re)build her life in Switzerland. In this sense, she finds herself in a state of limbo similar to many others who are still searching for their place in the society. Talal and Issam, just to mention a few, express that they feel lost between both countries, that even if they have a stable situation, and feel accepted, they do not feel as belonging.

Finally, the issues which seem to need to be prioritized in the eyes of the refugees interviewed, are: On the one hand, the issue related to finding work, as most see it as a key to belong and participate in the host society. On the other hand, solutions need to be found regarding family reunion in a larger definition than nuclear family. If not for living together, at least to be able to travel and visit each other's every now and then, which at the moment is impossible for refugees, due to the international agreements forbidding them to travel back.

8. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to understand integration as a personal development process, and to analyse how individuals build their personal strategies to improve their wellbeing while undergoing the integration process. I did so by exploring the question of how individuals experience their integration process. The analysis showed that individuals possess varying resources or capabilities and consequently opportunities. Therefore, they adopt different strategies while acting in a similar context. To illustrate, when forced into exile, strategies depend mostly on the financial means at disposal and the social network, as relatives in a safe host country might apply for a humanitarian visa for instance.

However, the interesting finding of this research is that despite these variations, a common chronological pattern of integration is identified for all interviewees. Following, a hierarchy of priorities can be established through the themes commonly valued by interviewees at each of the 5 stages identified. The most pressing ones unsurprisingly show finding a way to flee to safety and healing or mourning their loss. Then, it appeared that adults might delay their own process of integration to focus on supporting their children. Consequently, children adapt far quicker, but this destabilizes the balance within the family, as parents become dependent on their children in their daily life, in some cases for years, as they do not learn the local language. Furthermore, many interviewees underlined how their quality of life improved, once they were able to communicate better in French and following, could obtain a more interesting job.

Especially as work appears highly valued by the interviewees as an instrumental way to gain participation in the society and financial autonomy from the State, it appears counterintuitive to delay learning the local language. It joins Fischer's finding that individuals seek "the good life each in his or her own way, and often in ways that run counter to their immediate material interests" (Fischer 2014: xi). However, many interviewees underlined the difficulties they face when searching for a job and emphasized that localised services specifically supporting them in this regard would be particularly helpful.

Finally, the question of how and when the integration process finishes could not be fully answered through this thesis. It was identified that, once an individual reaches stability in terms of financial resources and work, they start focussing on more personal projects and on helping others. Therefore, erasing their label of refugee in the society from being the ones in need to become the one helping others (Polzer 2008). However, most of the interviewees have not reach stability in fields like work or financial autonomy from the State in the period of time covered

by this research. In this sense, it might affect their sense of belonging and participation in the host society. As exposed earlier, forced migration as opposed to other forms of migration is a high intensity process, as the perturbator event affects all the sector of life at once. The individual loses most of his or her social labels, recognition, and identification at once to become "a refugee". Following, it might be that eight years is a too short period of observation, as the recovery or integration process can take longer. Samir, for example connects belonging with acquiring the Swiss nationality. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct a study with individuals who have been in Switzerland for ten years and more, to learn more about the identity transformation, and the feeling of belonging in the refugee's population. No conclusion could be reached neither in this study, concerning the role of gender in the experience of integration. It might be postulated that it plays a role, as Turner (2010) has shown that gender influences how one is perceived, either as a victim or as a threat. However, this study did not reveal different experiences depending on gender.

8.1 Contribution and further research

The focus of this research has been on Syrian refugees solely. This is because issues of race and ethnicity would need a far larger sample as the one in reach and scale of this study. Due to the huge understudied field that race and ethnic relations represent in Europe, it could be the central topic of a whole study. Therefore, a comparative study on the role of race and ethnicity in the integration process represents an open field which will need to be addressed by further studies. Another focus of future studies might be in building comparison studies between different cantons, as the application rules vary from one region to one another, it would be interesting to understand how the context influence the personal perceptions of integration and affects wellbeing.

In addition, as detailed when defining integration, it concerns everyone, not only migrants, because a society transforms and evolves even without immigrants, and one's situation changes (Yuval-Davis 2011: 1). Therefore, new cycles of integration might be launched, every time an individual experiences a major change in their life, such as starting studying at university or getting a new job, losing a job, moving in with someone, becoming a parent, going through a divorce, or grief, etc., which might constitutes a disruptive factor. In conclusion, the 5-stages integration model developed here might be useful in other context than refugees' integration, but in all kind of process launched by a loss of stability and a need to rebuild it.

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APPENDIX

I. APPLICATION AND GRANTING OF PROTECTION STATUS AT FIRST INSTANCE, SWITZERLAND 2018:

	Applicants in 2018	Pending at end 2018	Asylum	Temporary admission	Rejection	Asylum rate	Temp. Adm. rate	Rejection rate
Total	15,255	11,594	6,358	9,174	4,949	31.2%	46.2%	24.9%

Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers

Eritrea	2,825	1,534	2,981	908	943	61.7%	18.8%	19.5%
Syria	1,393	1,772	1,070	1,563	180	38%	55.6%	6.4%
Afghanistan	1,186	1,619	741	3,942	194	15.2%	80.1%	4%
Turkey	1,005	1,188	280	45	184	55%	8.8%	36.1%
Georgia	873	142	0	28	414	0%	6.3%	93.7%
Algeria	747	121	3	3	129	2.2%	2.2%	95.6%
Sri Lanka	652	1,024	322	99	586	32%	9.8%	58.2%
Iraq	611	587	215	615	342	18.3%	52.5%	29.2%
Somalia	561	477	159	355	84	26%	59.4%	14.6%
Nigeria	511	95	5	29	31	7.7%	44.6%	47.6%

Source: SEM, Asylum Statistics 2018: https://bit.ly/2FRhQDj., [Consulted online November 5, 2019]
http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/switzerland/statistics 05.11.2019

II. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Beforehand: Would you like for an interpreter to be present during the interview or are you comfortable conducting the interview in French on your own, alone with me ?

- Est-ce que vous voulez qu'une personne soit là pour servir d'interprète au cours de l'interview ou êtes-vous confortable à mener l'interview en français, seul(e) avec moi?

Motives and objectives of the interview: I am interested in understanding the wellbeing of individuals over 30 years old, with a protection status who are facing difficulties finding a job (or who work less than 20%), in the Canton of Vaud.

- Je m'intéresse à comprendre le bien-être des individus de plus de 40 ans, dans le canton de Vaud, avec un statut de réfugié-e-s et qui sont sans emploi, ou qui sont employé à un taux très faible (- de 20%).

Presenting myself: About myself, my name is Irina Widmer, and I am conducting this research in the frame of my Master's in Social Sciences. I am doing a Double Degree Program between University of Malmö and University of Neuchâtel.

- A propos de moi, je m'appelle Irina Widmer, et je fais cette étude dans le cadre de mon Master en Sciences sociales, je fais mes études en double programme entre l'université de Neuchâtel et l'université de Malmö.

Is it okay for you if I record our meeting today? I will delete the recording as soon as it will have been written down (maximum 2 weeks), with care for confidentiality and anonymisation. No one else will have access to the recording. The written transcriptions might be shared with my Professors and fellow students, to get feedback from them. So, it will not be able to identify you on these transcriptions and in the final document, only brief citations will be included. A copy of the final version of this work will be uploaded on Malmö University website and a printed copy will be kept at the University of Neuchâtel.

- Est-ce que c'est okay pour vous si j'enregistre aujourd'hui ? L'enregistrement va être conservé uniquement la durée nécessaire (maximum 2 semaines) pour le transcrire de manière confidentiel et anonymisée, personne d'autre n'aura accès à cet enregistrement. Les transcriptions écrites seront partagées avec mes professeurs et camarades de classes afin qu'elles et ils puissent m'aider et me donner des feedbacks. Donc vous ne serez pas identifiable dans les transcriptions que je vais partager et dans la publication finalement,

uniquement des courtes citations seront incluses. Une copie du travail final va être téléchargée sur le site de l'Université de Malmö et une copie sera gardée à l'Université de Neuchâtel.

Ethics concerns

Technical: Following is how we will proceed for the interview: For my research, I am interested in your experience, therefore you are the expert on the topic, and you can tell me as much as you want and you can talk as long as you want. You will talk mostly, and I will write down a few notes while listening to you and I will not talk much. We have one hour today and if more time is needed, we can arrange a second interview. At the end of our meeting, I will leave you time to ask me all the questions you want about myself or my research.

- Voici comment va se dérouler cette interview: Dans ma recherche, je suis intéressée dans votre expérience, donc vous êtes l'expert sur le sujet, vous pouvez dire ce que vous voulez et parlez aussi longtemps que vous voulez. C'est donc vous qui parlez et moi je vais vous écouter en prenant quelques notes et je ne vais pas parler beaucoup. Nous avons une heure à disposition aujourd'hui et si plus de temps est nécessaire, nous pouvons regarder pour organiser un deuxième entretien. A la fin de notre rencontre, je vous laisserai également un moment pour me poser toutes les questions que vous voulez.

Also, feel free to not answer one or many questions, take a break, or stop the interview anytime. It is important that you feel comfortable talking to me.

- Aussi, vous êtes libre de ne pas répondre à une ou plusieurs question(s), de faire une pause, ou d'arrêter l'interview à tout moment. Il faut que vous vous sentiez confortable et à l'aise.

Finally, I will delate the recording in maximum two weeks, when everything will have been written down, with care for anonymising all the data which make it possible to recognize your identity and therefore protect your personal and sensitive data.

- Finalement, je vais détruire les enregistrements dans un maximum de deux semaines quand tout aura été retranscrit en prenant garde d'anonymiser afin de protéger votre identité et toutes données personnelles ou sensibles.

Do you have questions before we start ?

- Avez-vous des questions avant que l'on commence ?

Opening question/ Question d'ouverture

I am interested in your life and experiences, not only regarding your protection status or your employment situation, but in general as well. I would like you to tell me about you, can you tell me everything which is important and that happened to you from your arriving to Switzerland until now. You can take all the time you want. I will listen and take a few notes. Then, only when you will be finished, I will ask you a couple of questions.

- Je m'intéresse à votre vécu et à vos expériences, pas seulement en lien avec votre statut de réfugié ou votre situation d'emploi, mais aussi de manière plus générale. J'aimerais donc vous demander de me parler de vous, de me raconter tout ce qui vous semble important et qui vous est arrivé depuis votre arrivée en Suisse jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Vous pouvez prendre tout le temps que vous voulez. Je vais écouter et prendre quelques notes. Ensuite seulement, quand vous aurez terminé, je vous poserai quelques questions.

Follow-up

1) **Self-identification process with regards to external categorization**
   Processus d'auto-identification et de ressentis par rapport à des catégorisations externes
   Connected to Switzerland (population, authorities, institutions)/ En lien avec la Suisse (population, autorités, politiques, institutions)
   With country of origin/ Avec le pays d'origine
   With other categories of social differentiation (ethnicity, religion, gender, migration, …)/ En lien avec d'autres catégories de différenciation sociale (ethnicité, religion, genre, migration, etc.).
2) **Education, formation, and insertion in the job market**
   Trajectoire d'éducation, de formation et d'insertion dans le marché du travail
   - **Influence of choices made and motivation for these decisions**
     Influence des choix pris et motivations des décisions en la matière

When you make decisions, do you rely on yourself or do you have other people you consult ? Can you give me an example ?

- Lorsque vous prenez des décisions, est-ce que vous comptez sur vous-même ou sur les autres ? Pouvez-vous me donner un exemple ?

Who can you go to when you need help or information for making a decision ?

A qui vous adressez-vous lorsque vous avez besoin d'aide ou d'informations pour vos décisions ?

- **Alternatives/ Alternatives possibles**

What are your projects ? (Professional/personal) ?

Quels sont vos projets ? (Professionnels/personnels) ?

- **Experiences of discrimination and other difficulties**
  Expériences de discrimination ou autres difficultés rencontrées

Do you experience difficulties in Switzerland ? Could you speak more on this issue?

- Rencontrez-vous des difficultés en Suisse ? Pouvez-vous développer à ce sujet ?

What has been difficult/easy when you arrived in Switzerland ? How is it these days?

Quelles sont les choses qui ont été difficiles/faciles à ton arrivée en Suisse ? Qu'en est-il aujourd'hui ?

Satisfaction

3) **Social network/ Les relations sociales**

Who are the people you feel close to ?

- Qui sont les personnes dont vous vous sentez le plus proche ?

Where are these people ?

- Où se trouvent ces personnes géographiquement?

How often do you meet ? Are you in contact through other communication means ?

- A quelle fréquence vous rencontrez-vous ? Êtes-vous en contact par d'autres moyens ?

How are these people important/not important for your decision-making ? (Examples)

- Comment sont-elles importantes/ou non pour vos décisions ? (Exemples, Pouvez-vous m'en dire plus) ?

Are you a member of any club or association ? Which ones ? How often do you participate in their activities ? How is it important for you?

- Est-ce que vous faites partie de clubs ou d'association ? lesquelles ? A quelle fréquence vous y rendez-vous ? Qu'est-ce que cela vous apporte ?

Transversal questions: gender/ethnicity - Bloc transversal: genre/ethnicité

External questions/ Questions externes

Specific to (un)employment intersectionality with migration/ Spécifiques à l'emploi intersectionnalité avec la migration

Which position did you occupy in your country of origin ?/ Quelle position occupiez-vous dans votre pays d'origine ?

Did you ever imagine changing your profession ?/ Imaginiez-vous changer de voie professionnelle un jour ?

Have you ever had difficulties with your career in the past ? In your country of origin ? Could you tell me more about it ? How did you manage the situation ?/ Avez-vous déjà eu des difficultés d'emploi dans le passé ? Dans votre pays d'origine ? Pouvez-vous m'en dire plus ? Comment avez-vous géré la situation ?

For you, why is it important/not important to have a job ? / Qu'est-ce que ça signifie pour vous d'avoir un emploi ?

Does having a protection status affect your daily life ? / Qu'est-ce que ça signifie pour vous d'avoir un statut dit de réfugié ?

How did you make the decision to come to Switzerland ? Why Switzerland and not another country ? What were your criteria ?/ Comment s'est prise la décision de venir en Suisse plutôt qu'un autre pays ? Sur quels critères ?

We often hear the word « integration ». What does it mean to you that "someone is well integrated"? Can you give me an example ? Is there anybody you consider as a model ? Could you tell me more about this person ? / On entend beaucoup parler d'intégration, mais pour vous, être intégré, ça veut dire quoi ? Pouvez-vous me donner un exemple, y-a-t-il une personne que vous considérez comme un modèle d'intégration ? Pouvez-vous m'en dire plus sur cette personne ?

Do you remember the first time you became aware of your ethnicity/origins/heritage/race ? How was this realisation ? Does it has changed during your life ?/Vous souvenez-vous de la première fois où vous vous êtes rendu-e compte que vous étiez de telle ou telle origine ? Comment l'avez-vous vécu et comment est-ce que ça a évolué au cours de votre parcours en Suisse ?

Can you tell me more about your arrival to Switzerland (place, intermediaries, first impressions, …) / Pouvez-vous me racontez votre arrivée en Suisse (lieu, intermédiaires potentiels, premières impressions, etc.) ?

Was it difficult at the beginning ? Do you have examples ? And now? Avez-vous trouvé difficile vos premiers temps ? Avez-vous des exemples ? Et maintenant ?

How do your relatives view the fact that you are living in Switzerland now ? Comment les personnes de votre entourage, considèrent votre vie en suisse aujourd'hui ?

4) Sociodemographic data/ Données sociodémographiques

Place of arrival in Switzerland and date/ Date d'arrivée en Suisse et lieu

Legal status, since when ? / Status légal, depuis quand ?

Gender; Age – year of birth / Âge – année de naissance

Nationality (Nationalities)/ Nationalité(s); Place of birth /Lieu de naissance

Religion

Transit/Waiting time/ Stay in another country before relocating in Switzerland ? transit/ temps d'attente/séjour dans un autre pays avant d'être relocalisé en Suisse ?

Identity/Identité: When you introduce yourself to someone, what are the information you want to give, what is important for you in your identity?/ Quand vous-vous présentez à quelqu'un, quelles sont les informations importantes de votre identité que vous avez envie de donner ?

Thanks/ Remerciements

Thank you very much for your time and availability to share your experience with me./Merci infiniment pour votre disponibilité et d'avoir partagé votre expérience avec moi.

(I have a few more questions, would you like to meet for a second interview ?) / (J'ai encore quelques questions, est-ce qu'il est possible que l'on se revoie pour un deuxième entretien ?)

Do you have anything you would like to add?/ Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter ?

Do you have any questions for me ? About my research or me? Avez-vous des questions pour moi? Sur ma recherche ou sur moi-même ?

III. ORIGINAL QUOTES OF THE INTERVIEWS IN FRENCH

The following quotes are anonymised direct transcriptions from the interviews. As French is not the mother tongue of the interviewees, the language reflects their different level and knowledge of the French language.

Talal, 1:

« Quand je travaillais dans mon restaurant, il est tombé une bombe à côté de moi, à même pas 150m. Après mon frère, il m'a envoyé directement en Turquie, aux urgences, parce qu'il n'y a pas d'hôpital en Syrie. Et puis quand je suis resté en Turquie… J'ai fait l'hôpital en Turquie, je suis resté quelques mois. Après… Un œil, mon œil je l'ai perdu, ils ont enlevé un œil. Si je reviens en Syrie et que la guerre elle n'est pas finie, c'est possible que je perde mon deuxième œil, je ne sais pas. Après j'ai décidé avec mes parents et mon oncle, pour aller en Suisse. »

Samir, 2:

« J'ai participé aux manifestations dans la rue. J'ai été 2 fois en prison. […] Une amie qui travaille dans le gouvernement m'a conseillé de sortir de Syrie, que sinon mon nom allait être distribué et qu'ils allaient me traquer. »

Amer, 3:

« On est parti de Syrie vers la Turquie, puis de la Turquie vers la Suisse en avion, parce que j'avais un visa Schengen. »

Hana, 4:

« J'ai arrivé ici dans l'aéroport avec l'avion, parce que ma sœur ici, elle a obtenu un visa humanitaire pour moi et ma famille aussi. Pour ça, on est ici, c'était une grande chose, une grande chance pour arriver en Suisse par avion, pas par la mer ou quelque chose très très dangereux pour la vie et la famille aussi. »

Talal, 5:

« Je n'ai pas le choix, je suis obligé de sortir de Syrie. Et si je veux rester en Turquie, c'est un peu compliqué. Moi, je préfère aller en Suisse. En fait, je n'ai pas pensé à un autre pays, parce que mon oncle il est ici depuis longtemps, il connaît bien, ici en Suisse. Et puis, j'ai pensé à mon oncle, plus qu'au pays où je suis allé, je n'ai pas pensé à la Suisse. Parce que je connaissais pas la Suisse, pas du tout. Je n'ai jamais fait de voyage en Europe. Et puis, quand j'ai parlé avec mon oncle il m'a dit "Viens ici, c'est très bien ici". Bon, allez okay. »

Nour, 6:

« Nous n'avons pas décidé de venir en Suisse. Ce sont les Nations Unies qui nous ont dit 'C'est le pays de destination qui choisit les personnes' et après ils nous ont annoncé que la Suisse nous a choisi pour immigrer là-bas. On a dit 'Oui' et ça a été la Suisse. »

Samir, 7:

« Donc j'ai parlé avec ma femme, pendant 4 jours on s'est préparé avec ma femme et mes enfants. Je n'ai dit à personne que j'allais sortir de Syrie. […] Mon but était d'aller en Belgique, la vie est bien, ils parlent français et elle donne les papiers très vite. Je n'avais pas pensé à la Suisse du tout. Mais mon amie m'a dit que la vie est formidable et que c'est très bien pour les enfants, que s'il y a des enfants c'est très bien pour l'école et ils donnent un logement. J'ai choisi la Suisse finalement. »

Samir, 8:

« Je ne suis pas un citoyen normal comme les habitants ici. Oui je reçois de l'aide social, mais pour nous, c'est dur pour la personne comme moi, qui a travaillé qui a gagné beaucoup d'argent avant… Moi, je n'étais pas pauvre quand j'étais au pays. Il y a, oui, des Africains qui viennent ici pour améliorer leur vie. Non, ma vie est diminuée pour moi. Elle n'est pas comme avant, mais, je suis obligé de sortir de mon pays. [Long soupire]. »

Yasmine, 9:

« Les premiers 7 mois en Suisse, c'était vraiment très très durs, surtout les premiers mois, dans le foyer de sécurité, dans lequel on ne pouvait pas sortir quand on veut. On ne peut pas manger ce qu'on veut. C'était vraiment très dur. Et on était tous dans une seule chambre et voilà. Et nous, on est venu en Suisse très fatigué psychologiquement aussi et dans ce foyer, on était vraiment très choqué, on est devenu beaucoup plus fatigué. »

Hana, 10:

« Mon mari il travaille comme un centre pour recevoir ces choses et diviser les choses pour tous les gens à Homs. Il va avoir la même chose pour rester en vie. Quand il a laissé ce poste de travail… Et on est ici en Suisse. Tous les gens… heu… Ils vont demander à lui "Pourquoi tu fais ça? Tu vis en Suisse tranquille? Tu manges très bien. Tu nous laisses sans nourriture, sans argent, on ne peut pas travailler avec cette situation très très difficile! Pourquoi tu nous laisses comme ça?" C'était quelque chose qui était très très compliqué pour lui et il… il avait perdu 15 kilos de son poids. Parce que beaucoup d'idées pour rester avec sa famille ici, avec la paix de Suisse, avec la… toutes les choses qui vont être très tranquilles, elles bougent très tranquillement. Mais toutes les choses en Syrie, elles ne marchent pas bien, pas très bien. Dans cette situation, il a décidé de retourner. […] Les mois après qu'il soit parti étaient horribles pour toute la famille, on était tous très très fatigués physiquement et psychiquement. »

Bassem, 11:

« Tout le monde en Syrie et au Liban, ils pensent qu'on est vraiment très contents ici. On a une meilleure qualité de vie, c'est vrai, mais les autres aussi, ils pensent qu'on a beaucoup beaucoup d'argent ici. Ils demandent toujours d'envoyer. »

Samir, 12:

"It is like someone entering a basement, at the end of the corridor, there is a light. You need to walk step by step to reach the light. This is the story of each refugee. You need a lot of patience. It is very difficult to start a new life 2.0. It is hard to choose friends, neighbours, everything is different ! To illustrate, I spent 50 years in my country, I know everything, I had a comfortable lifestyle there, I had a good income. And here ? Nothing, starting point. It is a huge difficulty".

Talal, 13:

« Quand on arrive en Suisse, s'il y a quelqu'un qui m'a aidé, c'est très facile, mais c'est loin. Parce que moi, quand je suis arrivé en Suisse, je dois apprendre comme les bébés. Je dois apprendre la langue, comment je dois parler avec les gens; je dois oublier mon métier, à peu près 50% je dois recommencer et faire l'apprentissage, généralement, ça dépend les gens. Et ça prend beaucoup de temps. C'est-à-dire, si je veux voyager dans un autre pays, mais qu'ils parlent arabe, c'est plus facile, parce que je vais commencer le travail tout de suite, pas besoin de langue mais ici, je dois commencer de zéro ».

Samir, 14:

« Fin 2015, on a obtenu le statut B réfugiés, ce qui veut dire que la demande d'asile de ma famille a été acceptée. Quand on a obtenu notre permis de résidence, on a dû déménager et trouver un appartement par nous-mêmes. C'était très difficile de trouver un appartement parce que personne ne voulait nous en louer, parce que je n'ai pas de travail. Pendant trois mois, on a visité 69 appartements. Par chance, à la fin une amie suisse nous a aidé. Elle connaissait la propriétaire d'un appartement et elle lui a demandé de nous le louer et la propriétaire a accepté. C'était un moment très heureux, de fête, pour nous. La belle vie pour nous, elle commence avec cet appartement. »

Hana, 15:

« Après deux ans qu'on est ici, depuis 2015, j'ai commencé vraiment, de faire les cours de français, depuis deux années et demie, 2000… Le premier juin 2017, je commence à apprendre le français. Mais les deux ans avant, j'ai travaillé seulement avec ma famille, pour soutenir et pour aider chacun pour faire son chemin privé. »

Rim, 16:

« Si les enfants, ils ont fait aussi les études qu'ils ont choisi, parce que je pense qu'on trouve quelquefois quelqu'un qui sont obligés de choisir autre chose que ce qu'ils aiment. Je ne sais pas pourquoi, parce que… comme mon grand, ils sont obligés de faire un stage maintenant. Mais lui, il aimerait bien faire l'université ou comme ça. Si chacun, il a trouvé ce qu'il aime faire, c'est bien pour moi. »

Samir, 17:

« Pour moi, c'est très important d'aider mes enfants, de leur donner du courage, surtout que je n'ai pas de métier et j'ai beaucoup à faire pour les soutenir. Maintenant mes trois plus jeunes sont au gymnase et mon grand est à l'uni en médecine. Je leur explique les maths dans la langue maternelle, en arabe, car mon français n'est pas très bon, mais celui de mes enfants, maintenant il est très bien. [Explique les difficultés qu'il a eu à trouver un appartement]. Ce qui était important pour moi, c'était un appartement proche de l'uni, parce que je me suis dit que mon fils, il va commencer sa 1ère année et que c'est très dure donc je voulais quelque chose de proche de l'uni pour pouvoir le soutenir au mieux. »

Samir, 18:

« Mon fils a fait 3 ans et demi de français à l'EVAM, les professeurs ont dit qu'il est bien, alors qu'il peut continuer à l'école pour faire un apprentissage, mais mon fils, il veut aller à l'Université. Il avait un bon niveau en Syrie. Mais l'école de l'EVAM a fixé un rendez-vous avec l'OPTI, mais j'ai dit que mon fils il veut aller à l'Université. Ils m'ont demandé, "Tu ne veux pas plutôt un métier pour ton fils?" Non, je veux qu'il aille à l'Université. Ils m'ont dit que "les études au gymnase c'est très difficile, que 2 sur 100 réfugiés réussissent". Mais j'ai dit que j'ai confiance en mon fils, pour qu'il soit dans les 2. »

Rim, 19:

« Après, on doit changer, pour un assistant social, qui est privé pour notre famille. Lui, il n'est pas… Comment dire… Si on lui demande quelque chose, il dit tout de suite "Non, non, non, ce n'est pas possible pour vous. Ce n'est pas possible qu'on fasse ça." Mais… Par exemple, quand on a demandé, qu'on a dit on a besoin de plus de cours de français, il dit non non non, ça suffit pour vous, parce qu'on a bien parlé en français et il nous a obligé à chercher un travail comme de s'occuper des retraités, ou comme la cuisine, et quelque chose comme les… Comment dire… J'ai perdu le mot [Rit]… Oui. Il nous a obligé à faire un travail qu'on aime pas, avec notre niveau de français.»

Amer, 20:

« A: *J'ai demandé beaucoup pour faire des cours de français au CSIR. J'avais envie pour apprendre le français, mais toujours: Non. C'est ça qui était difficile pour moi.*

Interviewer: *Est-ce qu'ils vous ont donné des raisons? Ou pas du tout? Sur pourquoi il n'y avait pas de cours de français?*

A: *[soupire] Une fois l'assistant social m'a dit: "On a pas d'argent pour vous" "Pour faire des cours de français".*

Interviewer: *Okay… Et ce qu'il voulait dire par le "pour vous"?*

A: *Oui, pour moi, pour peut-être les personnes qui ont le même âge que moi, peut-être que c'est ça. Oui, ils ont pas envie de perdre l'argent pour les personnes plus… plus de 50 ans. Oui peut-être que c'est ça.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Et après, avec le… Donc il y a eu le CSIR avec l'assistant social, et là, vraiment, ils ne vous ont rien proposé de cours? Ou de formation?*

A: *En formation, oui. J'ai déjà fait la formation à [ville vaudoise - service de formation dans cette ville] mais le [abréviation du service de formation] il m'a dit "Tu n'as pas besoin de faire de formation". Parce que je… C'est mon métier! Je connais bien mon métier, je suis menuisier. « Tu as besoin d'apprendre le français ». Il [le formateur ou la personne de ce service] a écrit une lettre à l'assistant social. Et lui il a dit "Non, il va apprendre le français avec les autres".*

Interviewer: *Okay… Mais du coup, est- ce que…*

A*: Mais les employés qui ont travaillé avec moi… Oui, comme moi! Ils ne parlent pas le français! [Rit]. »*

Samir, 21:

« Un point négatif au CSIR, pour les personnes "âgées" il n'y aucun cours de français avancé. Seulement des cours de base. Le CSIR refuse d'inscrire à des niveau B1/B2. Donc moi j'ai travaillé tout seul, secrètement. On m'a interdit d'étudier à l'uni. C'est dommage, si les gens sont motivés, il ne faut pas regarder leur âge, il faut les pousser, les aider, pas dire non. Moi j'ai 57 ans, il reste 8 ans (avant la retraite) mais ils refusent de m'aider, ils disent non. »

Hana, 22:

« H: *Chaque jour, je me suis levée à 4h du matin, chaque jour! Pour lire... [rit] les livres sur le développement personnel, en français [éclate de rire]. Pour la première page, je pense, que j'ai eu besoin… d'un jour de travail, parce qu'il y beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup des mots que je n'ai pas. Mais le sujet, je le sais très très bien, parce que j'ai fait quelque chose qui est très similaire. Mais les mots c'étaient quelques choses… je ne sais pas… Incroyables mais dans le sens négatif. J'ai étudié et j'ai fait… J'ai écrit tout, tout. J'ai fait la traduction de français en arabe. Et après, parce que… J'ai lu et traduit chaque mot. J'ai lu la phrase, j'ai traduit, j'ai compris en arabe, j'ai écrit en arabe, Encore, la deuxième. J'ai lu la phrase, j'ai traduit les mots, j'ai compris en arabe et après j'ai travaillé avec chaque passage, non pas passage…*

Interviewer*: Le… le paragraphe?*

H: *Oui, le paragraphe. J'ai travaillé avec chaque paragraphe que j'ai lu en français pour… pas apprendre… pour… heu je ne sais pas… Pour savoir tous les détails en français. Et après j'ai écrit tout… Heu j'ai lu tous les paragraphes en arabe, oui le même très bien. On va continuer comme ça. La première page, un jour, j'ai travaillé au bureau 10h, quelque chose comme ça, j'ai fait des aller-retours comme ça. Mais il y a eu beaucoup d'idées dans mon cerveau quand j'ai laissé mon ordinateur et que je suis allée pour faire les autres choses, cuisiner, aller chercher mon cadet, pour faire les choses, "Allez retourne ici…" [Elle rit] Pour faire toutes les choses que tu as besoin. Le premier livre est très très petit, mais il était incroyable. Il m'a aidé beaucoup beaucoup. Le deuxième était très grand. Je n'ai pas fait la traduction comme pour le premier. Il y a des mots, mais pas très, très grands, heu pas beaucoup. Quand les deux mois ont fini, j'ai pris la décision que je dois faire cette formation. [Elle martèle la table comme pour accentuer sa détermination sur chaque mot]. J'ai contacté l'institut. »*

Talal, 23:

« Moi, par exemple, à mon assistant social, j'ai demandé plusieurs fois, il m'a dit toujours "Okay, je vais essayer de faire ça", mais sans rien faire. En fait, je ne sais pas si c'est seulement elle, mais quand j'ai posé la question pour monter l'escalier bien, par exemple, je ne veux pas rester toujours employé normal. Après 2 ans, ça doit être moi qui gère le magasin par exemple. Je dois faire quelque chose de plus. Je ne peux pas rester juste un employé, sans rien faire. Malheureusement, ils sont toujours qu'insister sur l'argent, comme on dit généralement, franchement. Combien j'ai gagné par mois, combien je dois payer le loyer, etc. Ça sera tout. »

Samir, 24:

« S: J'ai préparé un CV et je cherche du travail. Moi, j'ai gagné bien ma vie en Syrie. J'avais un bureau privé. Et j'ai effectué beaucoup de projets, privés aussi pour les gens, comme par exemple, des villas, des appartements, du point 0 jusqu'à z, jusqu'à la clé, jusqu'à la livraison. Vous savez ça, comme ça, c'est juste? Jusqu'à la livraison, c'est ça?

Interviewer: Oui, jusqu'à la livraison, jusqu'à ce que les gens aillent les clés en main. Les clés en main, on dit.

S: Clés en main, oui. Heu… J'ai fait beaucoup d'entreprises comme ça. J'ai fait des piscines, des restaurants. Heu… Fait des cours pour des…. Heu magasins, par exemple, comme ça. J'ai environ 20 d'expérience dans le domaine de construction. J'ai fait le CV, j'ai contacté… J'ai fait des messages pour les entreprises, est-ce que je peux travailler. Jusqu'à maintenant, ça fait maintenant environ 3 ans. Le point depuis lequel je cherche du travail. »

Amer, 25:

« Comme j'étais menuisier, j'ai déjà fait beaucoup, plusieurs stages. Mais je n'arrive pas à trouver quelqu'un, qui s'intéresse pour m'employer. »

Issam, 26:

« Ils [membres d'une association] m'ont aidé, pour faire un CV et une lettre de motivation et chercher un stage. R. m'a aidé pour trouver le premier stage, et après j'ai trouvé le 2ème stage, seul. Et le 3ème stage, l'entreprise m'a engagé. »

Hana, 27:

« L'architecture était quelque chose dans le passé, mais était magnifique, parce que j'ai fait beaucoup beaucoup beaucoup de projets avec mon mari. On a construit beaucoup de bâtiments, des immeubles. Mais c'est la vie, il y a beaucoup de changement dans un chemin. […] Si bénévole ou pas bénévole, c'est quelque chose d'impossible je pense ça avec l'architecture c'est fini. Et c'est pour ça que je me suis concentrée sur le développement personnel. Parce que j'aime beaucoup ce chemin, comme l'architecture bien sûre, mais je peux travailler ici avec mon diplôme que j'ai obtenu ici et avec toutes les choses que je me suis apprises à moi-même, seule, sur l'internet et tous les livres que j'ai lu et traduit. Je pense que c'est mieux maintenant pour moi. »

Amer, 28:

« Cette période, avant que je décide d'oublier le passé…Ahhhh, oui. C'était très difficile cette période [rit]. Je réfléchissais, j'ai réfléchi beaucoup… Tout le temps, pour… Je veux rentrer en Syrie. Je réfléchis seulement à ça. Il faut rentrer en Syrie, je réfléchis à ça. Toujours. Mais la guerre en Syrie a toujours augmenté. Après deux ans et demi, ouai… Je dois oublier ça et oublier le passé et oublié qui j'étais, ouai. Il faut préparer le maintenant. »

Samir, 29:

« Jusqu'à maintenant, je ne trouve pas de travail. Et quelques gens, ils ont dit, "c'est parce que tu es un homme âgé et en même temps, c'est difficile pour les personnes qui sont nées, ici, en Suisse, c'est difficile de trouver un travail dans votre âge". Mais, maintenant, j'ai changé mon avis. Maintenant, je pense, j'ai émis une autre stratégie pour trouver un travail. Je cherche un travail dans un autre domaine, maintenant. Parce que c'est difficile de trouver du travail dans le domaine de construction, donc je fais… Maintenant, je fais… je pense que je dois faire, vendre des choses dans un petit magasin… Euh… n'importe où, n'importe quel domaine, mais pas dans le domaine de construction, un autre domaine, ça irait aussi. Parce que le but, c'est travailler, parce que je suis jusqu'à maintenant, dans le chômage, au social. »

Issam, 30:

« Pour le travail, après de finir le 2ème cours, je me suis inscrit avec l'association [nom de l'association]. Ils m'ont aidé, pour faire un CV et une lettre de motivation et chercher un stage. R. m'a aidé pour trouver le premier stage, et après j'ai trouvé le 2ème stage, seul. Et le 3ème stage, l'entreprise m'a engagé. […] Ah! Oui! En fait, j'ai choisi ce métier à cause d'une visite à un Salon des métiers avec l'association. Oui, j'ai vu le métier là-bas. J'ai communiqué avec les gens: Vous faites quoi? Et ça m'a intéressé. Et l'association m'a expliqué plus sur ce métier, pour voir si je suis intéressé ou pas. Heu, oui. Je pense, que s'il y a, en Suisse, plusieurs branches comme cette association, je pense ça va aider les gens, vraiment, à 80% à réussir. »

Samir, 31:

« Le CSIR ou autre... Il faut faire une heu… une entreprise, comme une petite entreprise, pour aider les gens qui ont besoin de travail. Ce groupe spécifique, pour donner de l'aide des personnes du travail. Ramener les personnes jusqu'au point du travail. Par exemple, faire des groupes comme ça! A mon avis, s'il y a… Je ne sais pas… Si le… l'Etait acceptait de faire comme ça, un groupe, dans chaque ville et aider les réfugié-e-s pour trouver un travail. »

Nour, 32:

« Pour les enfants, ça va très bien. Les miens et les autres Syriens aussi. Les enfants s'intègrent plus rapidement que nous, ils parlent le français rapidement, mais le problème, c'est nous, les grands. C'est assez difficile. Et encore, le système de vie, c'est très très différent de chez nous. Oui, c'est tout. »

Hana, 33:

« H: J'ai envoyé un email. Mais… Après une heure, mon natel a sonné. Et… J'ai peur parce que c'est le même numéro que… Je n'ai pas parlé sur le téléphone. Cette chose, je fais seulement en arabe, en anglais. En français, c'est… ça me stresse beaucoup beaucoup. J'ai dit que j'ai besoin de l'aide de ma fille, j'ai fait comme ça et ouvrir le… [mime le geste du son qui sort du téléphone].

Interviewer: Le haut-parleur?

H: Le… Oui! Et elle écoute et elle m'a donné la phrase pour dire les choses. »

Nour, 34:

« Mais j'ai dit à mes enfants, c'est interdit de parler le français chez moi, à l'intérieur il faut parler arabe. A l'extérieur on parle français, mais ici à l'intérieur il ne faut pas oublier l'arabe. Surtout mon petit, il a 3 ans, c'est très important d'apprendre l'arabe. »

Amer, 35:

« Maintenant, je suis satisfait avec ma situation. Je suis occupé, plutôt que de rester tout le temps à la maison. Ça, c'était très dur pour moi, parce que je suis habitué à toujours faire quelque chose. Je ne peux pas sortir de chez moi, si je n'ai pas un objectif où aller. […] Pour le futur… J'ai 58 ans, donc je vais probablement rester comme ça jusqu'à la retraite. Je pense que je peux dire que j'ai achevé ce que je voulais. »

Hana, 36:

« Parce que je ne suis pas jeune, j'ai 55 ans, heu, je suis Musulmane et avec… Je ne parlais pas très bien le français. Cette chose pour trouver un travail, avec toute la situation qui m'entoure. Mon travail avec une psychiatre ici c'était mon rêve. Et j'ai vu que mon rêve était vraiment [Rit] j'ai vu mon rêve construire. Je ne sais pas comment dire ça en français? Oui, j'ai vu mon rêve se construire en face de moi-même. C'était quelque chose d'incroyable. C'était quelque chose de très positif mais quand j'ai trouvé immédiatement une personne qui m'a dit 'Tu peux travailler avec elle, à son cabinet' J'étais en face de mon rêve, facilement, pour ça que j'étais étonnée? »

Nour, 37:

« Quand notre vie sera un peu plus tranquille, j'aimerai avoir un quatrième enfant. Mais pas maintenant, peut-être dans 4, 5 ou 10 ans. »

Issam, 38:

« Je ne vais pas rester toute ma vie un étudiant. Je vais finir après 2 ans. Et je pense que tout le monde à un rêve. [Rit.] Mais je ne sais pas si c'est un grand rêve ou facile à réaliser, mais j'aimerai faire ma propre carrosserie. Si je réussis à ouvrir une carrosserie, je pense que je vais pousser ma fille à étudier la carrosserie, ou l'économie, quelque chose, pour qu'on puisse bien être avec moi. Et ma femme, elle a déjà sa licence, mais elle a un petit problème aujourd'hui. Ma femme a étudié en Syrie, Business Management. Et elle aimerait aujourd'hui, l'équivalent ou faire quelque chose en Suisse qui soutiennent ses études. »

Hana, 39:

« Mais je dois encore essayer pour trouver un chemin, pour travailler avec beaucoup de gens et après mon rêve… [Sa voix se remplit d'émotions]. C'est d'aider les gens, qui sont… pas seulement ici, dans l'extérieur de la Suisse, en Turquie, au Liban, en Jordanie. Je ne sais pas, mais c'est mon grand rêve, mais on va voir comment ça marche. Pour aider beaucoup beaucoup des Syriens qui sont dans les camps, parce que ces vies sont horribles, sans manger, sans électricité, sans… sans toutes les choses, sans rien. Seulement ils respirent. […] Au début de la guerre, j'ai seulement quitté ma maison, parce qu'elle a été détruite complètement et je suis allée à la maison de mes parents, de ma mère et je me sentais horrible. Comme ils se sentent maintenant, avec rien. Rien de… je ne sais pas comment dire ça en français, quelque chose d'horrible. Mon rêve: Aider tous les Syriens au monde. Je ne sais si c'est possible ou pas, mais c'est mon grand rêve. »

Bassem, 40:

« J'aimerai bien avoir un métier, comme un coiffeur dans les maisons de retraite. Je ne sais pas si c'est possible ici en Suisse, mais oui, j'aimerai bien faire ça. Même en Syrie, je l'ai fait pour les handicapés, et les personnes âgées, j'allais chez eux pour couper les cheveux. Je ne prenais pas d'argent, je faisais ça gratuitement, comme service pour les personnes âgées et les handicapés. Ça me fait plaisir. »

Talal, 41:

« Le plus important pour moi maintenant, c'est de trouver une solution pour que ma fiancée me rejoigne en Suisse. J'espère trouver une solution rapidement, mais on verra. »

Yasmine, 42:

« J'ai l'habitude, depuis toujours, de voir tout le temps mes frères, mes sœurs, mes voisins l'après-midi. Mais là, je suis toujours toute seule et c'est vraiment difficile pour moi. Ce n'est pas une vie pour moi. Des fois, je parle… avec les murs. »

Yasmine, 43:

« Pas seulement moi, mais tous les gens qui sont comme moi, qui ont de la famille au Liban, moi j'ai ma fille au Liban. Moi, je ne serai jamais contente en Suisse, même si je reste là le reste de ma vie. Je ne serai jamais contente. C'est parce que ma fille elle est au Liban et je pense toujours à elle. »

Yasmine, 44:

« Bien sûre que j'aimerais rentrer un jour. J'ai tout en Syrie. J'ai mes proches, j'ai mes maisons. J'ai mes parcelles de terrain, j'ai mes souvenirs. Mais les enfants, non. Ils veulent rester en Suisse. Ma plus jeune fille par exemple. [Elle lui demande directement si elle veut aller en Syrie, elle répond négativement, ils rigolent]. »

Bassem, 45:

« Même si je rentre en Syrie, je ne vais pas être heureux comme avant, parce qu'il y a une partie de mes proches qui sont morts, et il y a une partie qui sont disparus et il y a une partie qui sont en prison. Il y a une partie qui ont voyagé, qui sont à l'étranger. Il y a les maisons qui sont détruites à cause de la guerre. »

Nour, 46:

« Je suis en contact avec ma famille au Liban chaque jour. Deux fois. [Rit]. Parce qu'en fait on a fait un groupe pour toute la famille, mes parents, mes frères, mes sœurs, on parle tous les jours. On partage des photos de la nourriture, les habits pour l'EID. »

Talal, 47:

« J'ai l'habitude de la situation maintenant. Je parle souvent au téléphone avec ma mère, 2 ou 3 fois par semaine, et c'est tout. Je dois continuer à avancer avec ma vie ici. C'est vraiment très dur, mais je n'ai pas d'autre choix. »

Talal, 48:

« Je connais beaucoup de gens qui sont arrivés en même temps que moi, et maintenant on est amis. Chaque a sa spécialité, donc on s'entraide. Par exemple, je ne parlais pas français, ni anglaise quand je suis arrivé, donc un d'entre eux m'a toujours accompagné quand j'avais besoin d'un interprète. Donc chacun partage son expérience pour aider les autres. »

Talal, 49:

« Je dois arrêter de m'inquiéter pour ma famille tout le temps. Je dois oublier qu'est-ce que je pense, la situation en Syrie. C'est la vie, c'est comme ça. Ce qui est très important pour moi, c'est que mes parents, ils sont en bonne santé, ça c'est très important pour moi. Mais pour habiter avec eux, maintenant, c'est un peu compliqué, je n'ai pas le choix. »

Nour, 50:

« Je suis si fière d'être Syrienne, parce que tout le monde aime les Syriens! [Elle éclate de rire]. Quand j'ai déménagé tous les magasins étaient fermés, donc j'ai tout dû acheter d'occasion en ligne. Et à chaque fois, les gens me demande "Vous êtes de quelle origine?" Je suis Syrienne, et les gens sont enthousiastes: "Ah j'aime beaucoup les Syriens! La Syrie est très jolie! J'ai visité la Syrie!" Je dis: Oui, je suis Syrienne, n'importe quelle nationalité aime les Syriens. »

Talal, 51:

"Malheureusement, j'ai perdu les deux pays. Si je reste en Suisse toute ma vie, je vais rester un étranger. Si je retourne dans mon pays, je vais être un étranger aussi. »

Issam, 52:

« Aujourd'hui, après presque 5 ans, que je réfléchis à comment je me sens, je me dis: Je suis Syrien ou pas? Je suis Suisse ou pas? Et je suis perdu entre les deux, vraiment. Je ne sais pas, après un bout de temps comment ça va changer...Qu'est-ce que ça devenir ce sentiment-là. Parce que des fois, j'imagine que je rentre en Syrie aujourd'hui… Vraiment, j'aurai besoin de faire des cours d'intégration en Syrie! [Rit]. »

Amer, 53:

« Ma situation maintenant, oui j'ai accepté, mais pour le futur, je ne sais pas. C'est pas encore… Il faut apprendre le français mieux. Pour faire quelque chose. […] J'aimerai prendre le passeport suisse pour faire les voyages. Mouai [rit]. Mais pour le travail, je réfléchis pas. J'aimerai heu... Visiter les pays arabes. Parce qu'avec ma nationalité c'est interdit pour nous. Mais pour les Suisses c'est plus facile. »

Samir, 54:

« Le permis ça va mais le passeport je crois, c'est nécessaire. C'est nécessaire pour voter, c'est plus vaste, c'est plus large la nationalité, c'est autre chose. Mais ça va, le permis B ça va, la vie est tranquille. Mais quand je pense à mes enfants, aussi, ils ont besoin d'obtenir le passeport suisse. Ça change par exemple, s'il y a des problèmes, à n'importe quelle place, à l'aéroport, n'importe quel pays, la Suisse elle va défendre ses gens. Parce qu'ils ont la nationalité de la Suisse. Ils ont le droit de demander de l'aide du gouvernement. La personne elle a de la valeur dans les pays Européens! Mais chez nous, dans les pays arabes, ou les pays orientales, ce n'est pas comme ça. Peut-être que la personne elle va mourir, et personne n'entend rien de qu'est-ce qui se passe là-bas. Mais ici, le citoyen il a une grande valeur, s'il a obtenu le passeport, la nationalité de ce pays. »