

## **Introduction**

Migrant workers currently are very important for the economies of industrialized countries. Thus, it is important for both the economy and policy makers to understand migrants' mobility behaviors and particularly the durations of their stays and their possible settlement or return/onward migration.

Switzerland is an interesting country to study migration flows, as it is characterized by a high level of arrivals and departures. Every year, Switzerland has more than 100,000 departures among its population of 8 million. In 2017, Switzerland had approximately 15 emigrations per 1000 inhabitants, a rate higher than that of other Western European countries of similar sizes, such as Austria (7.5 per 1000), Belgium (7.5 per 1000) and the Netherlands (6.3 per 1000<sup>1</sup>). Because most of the emigrants are workers, 82% of the emigrants in 2017 were aged from 20 to 64 at the time of their emigration, thereby impacting the labor market.

The relative weakness of the theoretical approach to explaining remigration behaviors is surprising given the increasing importance of temporary migration; this weakness is linked to the lack of empirical data on emigration flows and, in particular, on the reasons for return/onward migration. New data are necessary to better understand the behaviors of migrant workers regarding their settlement or return and, more generally, to link migration intentions with actual behaviors.

A recent survey conducted among 5973 migrants in 2016 (Steiner and Wanner, 2019) with a follow up in 2018 allows a comparison of migrants' self-declared emigration intentions with their situations two years after the survey. The aim is first to compare intentions and departures

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pordata.pt/en/Europe/Gross+emigration+rate-1935> based on <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/TPS00177>. Consulted 20 August 2019.

during the two years following the survey. The second aim is to identify the factors associated with emigration intentions and behaviors among recently arrived migrants and to discuss whether the determinants of both dimensions are the same in order to understand the extent to which intentions can predict the future behavior of this group.

Overall, less than 3% of the respondents intended to stay less than 2 years in Switzerland; this proportion ranges between 1.2% (migrants who came to Switzerland for both professional and family reasons) and 8.8% (migrants who had short-term permits). The proportion of respondents who emigrated is more than four times higher, at 12.6%. This proportion ranges from 7.4% (again, migrants who came for both professional and family reasons) to 36.2% (migrants who held short-term permits).

Among the respondents who declared their intentions to stay in Switzerland forever, 3% left Switzerland during the 2-year period. Among the few respondents who intended to stay less than two years in Switzerland, more than 80% left. Thus, the respondents' intentions are confirmed to accurately predict their future behaviors.

Logistic regressions were done to analyze the associations between emigration intentions/behaviors and some determinants or factors identified in the literature review and gathered during the 2016 survey. Results of the regressions show that the factors associated with the intentions are almost the same than those associated with the actual behavior. They are related to the migration trajectory, ties with the country of origin, the institutional context, professional life and social integration. The demographic and family dimensions that were included in the models do not impact intentions to leave Switzerland but do slightly impact behaviors. Perceptions of discrimination practices are not associated with either intentions or actual behavior. The results are consistent with the literature on the determinants of emigration intentions and behaviors among migrants.

It is however observed that, while the family situation does not play a role in intentions for return migration or departure from Switzerland, it slightly influences return behavior. As expected, being involved in a conjugal relationship and sharing accommodations with a spouse reduces the probability of leaving Switzerland. The lack of significant effects of these variables on intentions probably indicates that departure may not necessarily be immediately achievable. Departure is a stage with many consequences for family life as well as professional life. Interestingly, people who report that improvements in their professional situations as a result of migration have similar levels of intentions to leave as people who have not made any progress. On the other hand, their probability of leaving is significantly lower, which is certainly explained by the fact that the realization of the intention to leave requires the migrant to confront the potential cost of leaving and represents an occupational risk that he or she may not be ready to take.

Overall, results show that intentions can be a good predictor of behaviors and, by extension, the level of emigration. Intentions reflect personal feelings at the time of the survey and sometimes also reflect the potential to remain in Switzerland from a legal point of view. On the other hand, behaviors are more rational in the sense that migrants' reflections on their actual situations seem to be more profound, and their choices to stay in Switzerland or to leave are thus influenced by rational elements such as their labor market situation or family constraints.