

## Combining administrative data to study school trajectories of young asylum seekers and refugees in Switzerland

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The main purpose of this paper is to analyse the educational transitions and trajectories of young asylum seekers and refugees in Switzerland. More specifically, the impact of cantonal (local) differences in terms of integration measures and the school system on the educational path of these young people. The transition to adulthood is a pivotal period in their life course and involves significant changes in their educational, professional and family trajectories (Arnett 2000; Coleman 1974). Asylum seekers and refugees are particularly vulnerable due to their uncertain status, their pre-arrival experiences, and in some cases the lack of parental and emotional support as well as their entry into a critical phase of social development (Arnett, 2000; Sullivan and Simonson, 2016). However a successful transition into adulthood including integration into a post-compulsory school curriculum is crucial for the long-term social and professional integration of young refugees (Frey, Ertelt and Balzer 2012; Felouzis 2009; Falter, J. M, Flückiger, Y., Meunier, M., & Flückiger, Y. 2009; Granato et al. 2011; Eulenberger 2013; Buchman et al. 2016 and others).

Many factors on individual, school or regional level influence educational success of young refugees in the host country. Learning the local language (Hecker 1984, p.42) and the age of migration are important, especially in highly selective school systems (Lemmermann and Riphahn, 2016). Educational institutions have a considerable impact because they reproduce and reinforce social and cultural inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964; Pincus 1994; Felouzi 2009; Gomolla and Radkte, 2009; Crul and Vermeulen, 2003; Wanner and Fibbi 2009; Bader and Fibbi 2012). It therefore seems particularly important to consider particular arrival conditions and reception arrangements. Indeed, the integration and reception of migrants is always a process of reciprocity between the host country and migrants (Bader and Fibbi, 2012). The attitude of the local population can have an impact on their social integration in a positive or negative sense because the openness or closure of the native population towards newcomers will play a role in social integration, particularly in language learning (Crul 2000a cited in Bader and Fibbi, 2012).

How do individual and institutional settings influence the educational transitions of young asylum seekers and refugees?

### Method

To address the research question, we opt for a mixed method approach combining exhaustive register data on students in Switzerland with detailed analysis of cantonal integration programs on political, social and educational aspects.

By using administrative register data we can (1) identify the main reason for arrival, (2) track individuals over time and (3) have a complete picture of the particular population through the exhaustive characteristic of the data. To measure the transition from Secondary I to Secondary II, three different data sources are used: (1) a comprehensive database of students in Switzerland since 2012 (LABB) linked to the population register (STATPOP) and SYMIC, (2) data on cantonal integration measures and

transition training programs. This mixed approach makes it possible to identify the integration paths of young people and the impact of cantonal differences.

Using logistic regression models, we analysed the differences in the transition from compulsory to secondary II education of people who entered Switzerland through the asylum procedure and other migrants (only the first generation).

Model 1: Reason for entering Switzerland

Model 2: + control variables (Sexe, age at arrival, Origin, Language correspondence, Transition year)

Model 3: + educational institution (class form in Sec. I, type of school)

Model 4: + cantonal (local) context (integration indicator (Manatschal 2013), population attitude towards migrants, residence characteristic (urban and rural), language region)

### **Preliminary results**

The study shows that compared to other immigration reasons, asylum seekers are at a higher risk of not entering upper secondary education. Socio-economic and legal differences between individuals play an important role in educational trajectories. People with more unstable residence permits such as N (asylum seekers) or F (provisory admission) permits are more than twice as likely not to enter post-compulsory education compared to people with a permanent resident status.

Different individual characteristics can reinforce inequalities in a very selective system (early tracking): master the local language and age at arrival are even more important because they will be decisive for the classification of pupils (regular class, special class, basic requirements or extended requirements) before the transition which is highly correlated with a successful transition. We observe that placement in special classes increases the risk of leaving the school system (7 times more likely compared to regular classes). Placement before transition also has a mediating effect on the effect of the residence permit.

For the cantonal characteristics we do not observe a significant impact of the population's political attitude (votes) or the integration indicator (Manatschal 2011, 2013) on the non-entry into secondary II, however for the direct entry into upper secondary education the two indicators are highly significant and explain the negative effect of the French-speaking region: than young migrants living in a German-speaking have a significant higher probability to enter post-compulsory education without a delay (this association disappears after adding the cantonal indicators). The Italian region seems to favour direct entry into Secondary II, an effect that is not explained by integration measures and political attitude.

A closer look at post-compulsory education reveals differences between the two sub-populations depending on the section chosen: Out of 100 asylum seekers who started upper secondary education, only 9 entered baccalaureate schools (compared to 31% of pupils with other residence permits on arrival). The choice of program influences future labour market integration. However, it is part of another research question dealing with transition opportunities, access to different programs and the impact of the degree on labour market integration. Social pressure to quickly enter the labour market and leave the social assistance system is very high, even for young refugees. This pressure may partly explain the preference for vocational training (Oester and Lems, 2017). But also, the lack of opportunities and knowledge and the pressure to be financially independent may explain the different outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers.

Considering only asylum seekers and refugees and the risk of not entering the post-compulsory level before the end of the observation period, we found that at the individual level an arrival after age 6

significantly increases the risk of not making a successful transition (this effect is almost double for students who arrived after age 13). We also observe that being an unaccompanied minor does not influence non-entry. And for the residence permit, only the N permit seems to increase the risk of non-entry. Persons with an F permit at the time of transition do not seem to be at greater risk than young refugees with a permanent resident status.

At school level we observe a very strong distinction between young people placed in special classes and the rest. Students in special classes are 2.8 times more likely to fail in the transition than students in regular classes. Students in private schools are also less likely to be excluded from post-compulsory education.

The data are supplemented by indicators that take into account cantonal differences (1) in terms of transitional education: access conditions linked to the permit, language proficiency and age as well as the duration of the training and its purpose, (2) in terms of integration policy (Manatschal 2013), (3) the attitude of the population (voting results between 2000 and 2016 on migration issues) and (4) the proportion of foreigners in the canton.

We observe a varied effect of the cantonal political indicators according to the population at risk: the integration indicator clearly has a negative effect on non-entry to Secondary II considering all pupils. However, in order to understand who, despite a delay, nevertheless enters post-compulsory school and who fails in the transition even after 3 years, the effect of the indicator is reversed. And in cantons with a high indicator indicating an open integration policy, pupils are more at risk of not entering post-compulsory school (controlled for transitional training). The other indicators measuring the political attitude of the cantons have no effect on the transition of young refugees and asylum seekers. As for the migrant population, differences between linguistic regions disappear by monitoring for the indicators (in particular the integration indicator).

We also analysed in more detail the delay in the transition: To what extent do the transitional offers allow for reintegration into secondary II despite a delay? Our results show that going through transitional training increases all things else equals the probability of making a successful transition by 50%.

We observe that, independent of the canton's general integration measures, the school system plays a major role in the transition of young asylum seekers and refugees. Access to transitional training is crucial for young people with difficulties in making the transition from compulsory school.

### **Preliminary conclusion**

In addition to individual characteristics, three institutional and environmental frameworks can be considered crucial for the success of the transition: the possibility of accessing transitional training, placement at the end of the Sec. I and the integration characteristic of a canton. As Oester and Lems (2017) pointed out in their qualitative research on the educational and professional integration of refugees in Switzerland, the selective school model is an important factor for failed integration into the labour market. They also highlight the importance of integrative school systems and the difficulties observed in segregating classes for students with special needs. Other studies (Wilkinson, 2002) have shown that regular classroom placement has a positive impact on a student's success. Our analysis confirms their conclusions and adds that asylum seekers are particularly often placed in separate classes, which has a negative impact on the transition. Further research is needed to understand investment decisions, in particular the variances observed between different categories of migrants.

However, placement in non-regular classes (segregation model) depends on the canton of residence (variations from 0 to 100% depending on the canton). This is mainly due to legal and administrative measures: in some cantons, only one integration system is encouraged, in others, both systems are also present. Gomolla and Radtke (2009) have described the disadvantage for some social groups due to an institutional framework as "institutional discrimination" - they lead to inequalities in educational trajectories and therefore in the labour market. Oester and Lems (2017) see particular difficulties for unaccompanied minors who are often completely excluded from public school and placed in separate classes in a refugee centre. Our study does not confirm this hypothesis, but we do point out that people who have arrived in Switzerland as asylum-seekers seem to face difficulties overall when it comes to entering post-compulsory education.

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