Chapter 4
Switzerland and the Two Faces of Integration

Maria M. Mexi

4.1 Introduction

Historically, migration has played an important role in the Swiss economy, while foreign population recruitment has contributed to the economic growth of the past century. Today, Switzerland has one of the highest percentages of foreigners in its population. In 2020, about 38 per cent of the permanent resident population had a migration background (SLFS, 2019), 0.3 percentage points more than in 2019 (SLFS, 2020). As with other European countries, Switzerland saw a refugee inflow in the outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By April 2022, more than 33,000 of the 40,000 Ukrainian refugees who had arrived in Switzerland since February 2022 had been given a special legal status called a "S status," which permitted them to avoid the typical asylum process and live, work, and attend school in Switzerland for a year or up to 5 years depending on how long the war lasted. Holders of Status S are entitled to family reunion and employment rights, which are not available to other asylum seekers with provisional permits. Asylum seekers from Arab, African, and Asian nations, who had also escaped bloody conflicts, expressed mixed feelings about the Swiss government's decision to offer Ukrainian refugees special protective status, alluding of "legal inequity" and "double standards" (Kamel, 2022). Overall, examining the history of Swiss migration policy reveals that the country has driven active economic recruitment policies, opening doors to foreign labour forces when needed while being quite restrictive in its integration and naturalisation policies.

M. M. Mexi (✉)
Albert Hirschman Center on Democracy, Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland
e-mail: maria.mexi@graduateinstitute.ch

© The Author(s) 2023

I. Isaakyan et al. (eds.), *Immigrant and Asylum Seekers Labour Market Integration upon Arrival: NowHereLand*, IMISCOE Research Series,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14009-9_4

This pragmatic approach to integration (driven largely by economic considerations rather than the enactment of normative understandings of integration) has evolved gradually over time and has been strengthened by the divisive debates around foreigners that surrounded the 2014 initiative against mass immigration (Ruedin & D'Amato, 2015). The initiative requesting the re-establishment of quotas for all categories of foreigners, including European citizens, was supported by 50.3 per cent of Swiss voters. In 2016, Parliament approved the amendment to the Foreign Nationals Act concerning implementation of Article 121a of the Federal Constitution. The aim of this amendment is, in particular, to prioritise use of the domestic labour market potential. Migration policies since then have become more restrictive, with increased focus on integration presented as a responsibility to be shared between individuals (the migrants themselves) and institutions.

Drawing on the findings of a series of interviews with actors at the governmental level (confederation and canton), political actors, and members of integration support services conducted within the framework of the three-year SIRIUS research project, we have found that generally policy actors view Switzerland as performing well in terms of the labour market integration of its migrants when compared internationally, attributing the favourable picture mainly to the overall good domestic labour market conditions, but also to the various interventions and policy reforms implemented (Mexi et al., 2019).

Strikingly, the findings of a set of biographical interviews we conducted (last interviews conducted online in early July 2020) with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (MRAs) who arrived in Switzerland between 2014 and 2019, shed light on a different story. MRAs consider themselves not well integrated in the labour market and there are several signs that the labour market outcomes of certain groups of migrants are diverging, with some disadvantaged groups, particularly migrant women, running the risk of being left behind. Such evidence points to overall divergence between the realities of policy actors and the experiences of MRAs, exposing Switzerland's two *contrasting faces* of integration. Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to highlight MRAs' individual biographies, experiences, and perceptions of integration against the backdrop of the complex dynamics between structural factors and agency and how their interplay enables or constrains integration. Emphasis will be placed on MRAs' epiphanies and turning points and sensemaking in shaping the course of individual action within the contested discourse of integration that can provide valuable information to policy actors and practitioners to design effective policies tailored to the needs of migrants and foster cooperation and trust between migrants and the localities in which they settle (Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

We begin by outlining our methodological considerations in conducting the biographical interviews with the MRAs, followed by a brief overview of the Swiss socio-political and policy context, focusing upon specific critical barriers and enablers of MRAs' labour market integration that were raised during the 3 years of our research. We then discuss how the complex interplay of structural and agential factors is crucial in explaining migrants' integration, emphasising the extent to which structural conditions determine how to gauge effective integration or

Table 4.1 Demographic information on MRAs

Pseudonym of interviewee	Date of interview	Age	Gender	Family status	Country of origin	Migration year	Education (primary, secondary, tertiary)	Current occupation in host country	Occupation in country of origin	Languages the individual speaks
Interviewee 1 Alicia	February 2020	55	F	Married	Brazil	2014	Tertiary education	Project coordinator in an NGO	Police officer and project coordinator in the department on the Defence of minors	Portuguese, French, Spanish
Interviewee 2 Maud	February 2020	58	F	Married	Peru	1995/ 2016	Secondary education	Secretary and employee in the administration department (bank and hotel)	Housekeeper	Spanish, French
Interviewee 3 Omar	February 2020	36	M	Married	Turkey	2014	Tertiary education	Intern as coder in a data processing enterprise	Mechanical engineer	Kurdish, Turkish, French, English
Interviewee 4 Nathan	February 2020	30	M	Single	Nigeria	2015	Primary education	Street artist	Artist	English, French, Italian
Interviewee 5 Daner	March 2020	34	M	Single	Syria	2014	Primary education	Intern as gardener	Plumber and electrician	Kurdish, Arabic, Italian, French
Interviewee 6 Mohamed	March 2020	48	M	Married	Syria	2014	Primary education	Hairdresser	Hairdresser	Arabic, Italian

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Pseudonym of interviewee	Date of interview	Age	Gender	Family status	Country of origin	Migration year	Education (primary, secondary, tertiary)	Current occupation in host country	Occupation in country of origin	Languages the individual speaks
Interviewee 7-Subi	March 2020	18	M	Single	Syria	2014	Professional training/ education	Intern as electrician	Student	Arabic, Italian
Interviewee 8 Lucia	February 2020	33	F	Married	Colombia	2018	Tertiary education	Unemployed (occasionally working as baby-sitter)	Project manager	Spanish, English
Interviewee 9 Diana	February 2020	40	F	Married	Costa Rica	2014	Tertiary education	Unemployed	Project manager	Spanish, English, French
Interviewee 10 Elias	March 2020	38	M	Married	Eritrea	2014	Tertiary education	Consultant	Researcher	Tigrinya, English
Interviewee 11 Eddie	February 2020	46	F	Married	USA	2011	Tertiary education	Self-employed in the area of interior design	Fabric director in design studios	English, French

Table 4.2 Typology of the actors and factors

	Personal/ friends/ family (micro)	State policies/ support (macro)	Civil society support (meso)	Educational/ training institutions (meso)	Professional contacts (meso)
Interviewee 1	Husband (−) Personal resilience (+) Personal exhaustion and vulnerability (−)	Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	Local NGO (+)	Training coach (+) French language (−)	Local NGO (+)
Interviewee 2	Personal resilience (+) Personal exhaustion and vulnerability (−) Friends (+)	Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	Local NGO (+)	–	Local NGO (+)
Interviewee 3	Close ethnic community (+) Personal resilience (+) Friends (+) Personal exhaustion* (−)	Municipality contact person (+) Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	Local NGO (+)	New skills training programme (+) French language (−)	Local NGO (+)
Interviewee 4	Personal resilience (+)	Swiss strict legislation (−) Access to support and aid programmes (−)	Local NGO (+) Political activism movement (+)	Internship programme at local cultural institutions (+) French language (−)	Local NGO (+) Political activism movement (+)
Interviewee 5	Friends (+) Personal resilience (+) Personal exhaustion (−)	Lack of administrative support (−) Integration office contact person (−)	Local NGO (+)	Local NGO member (+) Occupational programs for not recognised asylum seekers (+) Internship programme at local organisations (+) French language (−)	Local NGO (+)

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

	Personal/ friends/ family (micro)	State policies/ support (macro)	Civil society support (meso)	Educational/ training institutions (meso)	Professional contacts (meso)
Interviewee 6	Personal resilience (+) Local employer (+)	Strict permit system (−)	Local NGO (+)		Local NGO (+)
Interviewee 7	Family (+) Personal resilience (+) Personal trauma (−) Friends (−)	Strict asylum and permit system (−)	Local NGO (+)	School teacher (+) NGO member (+) Employer (−) French language (−) Professional training (+)	Local NGO (+)
Interviewee 8	Husband (−) Personal resilience (+) Personal trauma (−)	Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	–	French language (−)	Lack of network support (−)
Interviewee 9	Husband (−) Personal resilience (+) Personal trauma (−) Close ethnic community (+)	Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	Local NGO (+)	University studies (+)	Local NGO (+) Swiss development cooperation organisation (+) Lack of network support (−)
Interviewee 10	Family (+) Personal resilience (+)	Lack of administrative support (−)	–	French language (−) Internship programme (+)	Personal network (+)
Interviewee 11	Friends (+) Personal resilience (+) Personal trauma (−)	Municipality support (−) Swiss lack of skills profiling mechanism (−)	–	French language (−)	Personal network (+)

otherwise, as well as the manner in which the MRAs feel they have agency to challenge the barriers to labour market integration. We conclude by exploring how MRAs exercise agency and, in particular, how epiphanic moments events – especially critical events related to motherhood, political self-affirmation, trauma, or

marginalisation experienced by our interviewees – have affected what they think the society and context in the host country allows them to achieve.

4.2 Methodological Considerations

We conducted a total of 11 biographical interviews involving MRAs of various ages, genders, religious or spiritual backgrounds, educational and socio-economic backgrounds: five women and six men. The respondents were from the following countries: Peru, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, USA, Turkey, Syria and Eritrea. They arrived in Switzerland between 2014 and 2019. Three interviewees from Syria were temporarily admitted persons who arrived under the asylum framework, two were recognised refugees (from Turkey and from Eritrea) and the six others came through family reunification. Their professional situation was diverse; they were active either as students, interns, employees or self-employed persons in the sectors of construction, horticulture, electricity, healthcare, informatics, social work, art, development, human rights and research. Four of our interviewees were actively seeking a job at the time of the interview. Most of the interviewed MRAs could not continue to work in the sector in which they were trained in their origin country; those who did had to study for it again or turn to self-employment.

To identify interviewees, we relied on our 'personal networks' and the snowball sampling method (e.g. friends of friends, connections of colleagues etc.). Given the sensitive nature of the fieldwork, particular safeguards were taken. Each subject was treated with care and sensitivity and in an objective and transparent manner. All the information provided by the interviewees was anonymised and data protection precautions were taken, following the ethics standards applied by the SIRIUS project. Several of the interviews could not be recorded so as to reassure the interviewee and allow him or her to talk about his or her background more freely. In general, during fieldwork, we avoided sensitive and potentially re-traumatising topics, such as sexual violence and torture. The biographical interviews were conducted in-person and face-to-face by a team of trained researchers, recorded and transcribed 'intelligent verbatim' (which involved transcription with detailed editing and sometimes omitting certain elements that were found to add no meaning to the script). When it was not possible to record, extensive notes were collected by the researcher and reorganised in a document after the interview.

In designing and conducting the fieldwork a 'relational ethics' approach was taken (Kaukko et al., 2017), that implies the lack of any possible stigmatising/discriminating attitude and behaviour during the research work. In particular, we aimed to promote a trust-based relationship by adopting a transparent, voluntary-based approach to research participation. In accordance with this approach, research participants are free to consider whether their participation in the research would benefit or harm them, while ensuring that no compelling participation, no misunderstanding or false expectation are generated by researchers' behaviour. Hence, all the researchers involved in the fieldwork adhered with their ideas, language – both

verbal and body-conveyed – to an ethics of research that contrasts stigmatisation and prejudicial assumptions about the research participants. To ensure that potential harms are correctly understood by potential participants, the researchers-interviewers illustrated them during the first contact/meeting, both verbally and with a written information sheet; moreover they asked participants to repeat these principles and conditions.

In addition, we adopted in full the codes of conduct and the prescriptions of research ethics documents provided by international organisations (e.g. the EC European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Guidance Note—Research on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants, the UNHCR Guidelines for Good Research Practice). Particular attention was thus given to the informed consent by stressing a voluntary agreement to participate. To ensure the confidential nature of the research, all personal data were fairly and lawfully processed according to consent procedures followed, and no sensitive data were published. Finally, questions and items within the guidelines and questionnaire allowed respondents to abstain from answers in sensitive issues. It should be mentioned that during the interviews, the researchers did not experience moments where participants revealed particularly sensitive information nor came to terms with any incidental findings (involving evidence of ill health (mental/physical/contagious or not), violence and other forms of illegal/immoral behaviour).

An in-depth analysis of the interview data following biographical interviews approach was undertaken. In writing up our research results we took extra care to remove or edit particular details that might have made our research participants recognisable.

Overall, key questions guiding our research were: what do MRAs mean by ‘integration’? How do they experience integration? How do MRAs perceive the barriers and enablers of labour market integration? What were the ‘turning points’ and ‘epiphanies’ that helped MRAs identify these needs? How has the reality of labour market integration met MRAs’ aspirations of what life would be like in their host country and their resilience to adversity? To what extent do MRAs feel they have agency to challenge the barriers to labour market integration? To what extent do their perceptions (related to labour market integration) differ from the discursive representations of their policymakers and civic actors?

Critical life-changing events or ‘turning points’ that are crucial to MRAs’ life/professional trajectories in Switzerland – provoking them to re-think their attitudes and expectations and to develop their own theories or ‘epiphanies’ (Hanks & Carr, 2008; Nico & Van der Vaart, 2012) about life more broadly and adjustment to the host society – were selected and organised across themes, as presented below. We analysed those critical events in their connection to specific labour market integration barriers and enablers with which MRAs interacted.

Overall, by looking into the narratives and experiences of MRAs, our research sought to empower MRAs themselves, particularly those who may have been victimised (Couttenier et al., 2016) or relegated to marginalised spaces within the host society. As Maillet et al. (2016) stress, if research is to be a form of resistance, then it must be used to challenge dominant (native) narratives around ‘vulnerable’

populations, including those which (re)produce violence through the creation and enforcement of social hierarchies. Our research was thus driven by the aspiration to have these migrants' stories and experiences included within the current discourse on human migration and labour market integration, illuminating the reciprocal relationship between their agency and the socio-political and policy context.

4.3 The Swiss Policy Context: Barriers and Enablers for MRAs' Integration

The dialectic interplay of structure and agency has long been discussed in the literature (Jessop, 1996; Giddens, 1984; Hay, 2002). Structure can create, but also hinder, opportunities for 'agency' (defined as 'one's capacity to shape one's life and exploit opportunities or indeed open up new possibilities for one's self and their family', Triandafyllidou, 2019, 8). As put by Hay (2002, 254), 'actors make outcomes but the parameters of their capacity to act is ultimately set by the structured context in which they find themselves'. The overarching national policy context in Switzerland clearly gives rise to both barriers and enablers for integration across all different groups of MRAs. The Swiss policy of integration of migrants into the labour market focuses on, amongst other things, enhancing the employability of those migrants who need it, preparing those who can't be taken over by ordinary structures by preparing them to engage in education measures or to engage them in other ordinary measures, or supporting them to enter the labour market.

Over the years, the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities have made concrete efforts to promote a more pragmatic approach to fostering MRAs' integration, considering the social tensions and additional costs of the non-inclusion of the MRAs into the labour market. As our review of key policies and services for MRAs' labour market integration and the findings of a series of interviews with actors at the governmental level (confederation and canton), political actors, and members of integration support services conducted as part of the SIRIUS project reveals, the integration of MRAs into the labour market, and more particularly the integration of refugees, provisionally admitted persons and recently arrived young persons, has been an increasingly important element in recent Swiss policymaking, leading to major reforms. Our interviewees mentioned the Integration Agenda[1] as a rather promising policy in terms of successfully promoting MRAs' integration as an individually tailored process. In particular, the Integration Agenda aims to support

[1] The 'Swiss Integration Agenda', advanced in spring 2018 and implemented from 2019 provides for binding measures and strengthens individual support and case management for refugees and temporarily admitted persons. Additionally, it increases the lump sum paid by the Confederation to the Cantons to fund integration measures from 6000 to 18,000 Swiss francs per refugee or temporarily admitted person. As explained in SEM's Migration Report (2019, 38), the Integration Agenda foresees certain clearly measurable targets that the Confederation and the cantons should abide with.

the integration of refugees and temporarily admitted persons, with faster implementation of measures and by strengthening individual support and case management (BFH and Social Design, 2016). Until 2018, there has not been access to real integration measures for asylum seekers. Some cantons have opened some integration measures, but this has not been foreseen by federal policies. In the framework of the new Agenda, migrants coming from the asylum procedure will also have access to an integration assessment with an integration plan. Our interviewed policymakers and practitioners see the integration plan resulting from the assessment, alongside the support and coaching to achieve it, as a valuable tool that should be expanded. Case management was also cited by many stakeholders as a key tool that needs to be expanded to better support migrants in their integration into the labour market. Federal actors are implementing measures to strengthen the tool and provide useful guidelines to the cantons (Mexi et al., 2019).

Another positive development mentioned by the interviewees is the Foreigners' legislation that implements Art. 121a Cst. and places refugees and temporarily admitted persons into the category of 'native workers' that, from a legal point of view, ought to be considered as having priority access to the labour market. Positive enablers, in this respect, are considered the pre-apprenticeship programmes initially aiming to enable (through a ten-month apprenticeship that combines theory at school, practice in a workplace, and local language courses) refugees and temporarily admitted persons to obtain the basic skills required in order to participate in vocational training (Moreno Russi et al., 2020).

Yet, alongside positive appraisals concerning policy development and implementation, we have found that there a set of restrictive contextual factors hindering further progress remains. These include anti-migration discourses scapegoating MRAs for labour market downsides; lack of adequate psychological support for people who have suffered psychological trauma (this especially concerns refugees who have followed a difficult migration path and, as a result, become less resilient vis-à-vis the barriers they encounter as they seek to integrate in the labour market); discriminatory practices and inadequate institutional support.

In light of these contextual barriers we can say that there are various challenges the MRAs must overcome to be able to gain a foothold in the labour market: they must learn to cope with negative or difficult administrative experiences and prejudices often held by both employers and native workers and the resulting feeling of not being welcome; they must face an overall low appreciation of their skills and capabilities, as skills acquired in third-countries are often considered as being of lower standard; and they must be resilient enough to cope with prejudice or discrimination. All these are elements that can critically affect MRAs' sense of legitimacy and self-confidence in their path toward employment.

Moreover, as stressed elsewhere, over the years, the increase in the number of migrants in Switzerland has given rise to several direct democratic votes (Sciarini, 2017). According to the Migration-Mobility Indicators from the NCCR, there has been a significant restrictive effect of referendums and popular initiatives on migrants' rights (Arrighi, 2017; NCCR, n.d.). Direct democratic instruments have, therefore, provided important disabling barriers to migrant integration as they have

re-affirmed 'Fortress' actualities and exclusionary trajectories of boundary construction in the host labour market and society. These observations are crucial in understanding how the MRAs tackle the integration challenge. Our research shows that, overall, migrants operate as 'frame articulators' (Benford & Snow, 2000) of their approach taken to integration, and the processes and resources mobilised to achieve their outcomes. In effect, examining how contextual barriers and enablers become tangible and meaningful for the MRAs as they experience specific turning points and develop their own epiphanies about life more broadly and about their own access to the host labour market, in particular, can help bridge the divide between evidence and policy in the field of migration and integration and change the current negative narrative on migration. This requires that the narrative on migration must tell the true story – successes and failures – of what it means to leave one's home, make the journey and settle into someplace new.

4.4 Migrants' Stories of Integration and the Dynamics of Structural and Agential Factors

The biographical stories reveal how structures (general policy contexts and related services to support MRAs' labour market integration) can be enabling or difficult in their integration process. They also highlight the role of individual agency and the extent to which migrants were effective in using their capacity to act, offsetting obstacles (i.e., effective agential action). Structural conditions can create opportunities for agency, for individual actors to interpret and understand the nature and value of integration and to apply it in different contexts. At the same time, the biographical interviews uncover a major tension or 'gap' between the extent to which migrants were able to exercise their agency and the ways in which a number of critical structural factors had come together to largely constrain MRAs' efforts to achieve effective integration. This complex dynamics between structural and agential factors (engendering tensions or facilitating empowerment in other cases) are observed and captured in five themes: *motherhood, social or political activism; the fear of deskilling; informality and labour market marginalisation; and trauma*. These five themes are key elements in understanding how actors were able to shape 'the depth and breath'' (Glasby, 2005) of their integration outcomes and provide a *common thread* to the different MRA life-stories we studied.

All interviewed MRAs had a common desire to achieve a better future and a safe life, and migration was the only strategy. The themes of motherhood or building a family, and of political or social activism, were mentioned as important triggers for migration and critical drivers shaping their life and aspirations for migration in the host country. At the same time, their perceptions of 'work' and 'integration', their attitude, professional choices, and how they cope with the difficulties related to labour market integration, were shaped or constrained in various ways by both structure and actors' experiences before migration, having an important influence on learning, adaptation, and their decisionmaking toward the overall integration process.

4.4.1 Motherhood as a Driving Force and a Turning Point

Motherhood was a central theme in the narrative of our female interviewees. It was at the core of their motivations to leave their origin country and influenced their identity formation and integration path in the host country, as well as their professional ambitions. Willingness to migrate for their children represented a turning point for the interviewed women. The decision to migrate changed their own lives and moreover made them realise that even if they were attached to their career, the well-being of their children represented a priority. The desire to provide better life conditions and future opportunities or the need to be close to their own children who previously migrated to Switzerland in fact pushed some interviewed women to leave a well-established career.

The story of Alicia, a 55-year-old woman from Brazil, is exemplary. Alicia grew up in a humble household in a close-knit family where a certain conception of morality, commitment to her own family, and work represented the most important values. These values determined many of the choices in her life. Following the path of her father, she started to work at the age of 15, pursuing the career as a police officer. In her mid-20s she was already a mother of three, a recognised police officer as well as a graduate student in criminal law. She had worked for almost all her life in the judiciary sector and in the department of the protection of minor victims of sexual abuse. When her ex-husband moved to Switzerland to start a 'better' life and their children decided to move with him to Geneva, she had to decide if she would leave her life and her work in Brazil to follow them. Since she noticed during her first visits that she was losing intimacy with her children, she decided to migrate to be close to them, even if it implied leaving her career to be a mother in Switzerland who at first didn't or couldn't have any meaningful professional ambition.

Alicia described her decision to move abroad and stay home as something that came as life-changing event, restricting her in moving her professional life forward. In this case, motherhood was the driving force for migration and had an impact on Alicia's ambitions for her own life. In fact, she underlines that since her focus was to reconnect with her children, she didn't have any professional ambitions and was prepared to take any work that enabled her to have enough money to live on. Alicia developed professional aspirations only later, after she had re-established a strong relationship with her sons, and as she got the residency permit and felt legitimate in looking for a job that corresponded to her professional profile. Yet, for the first 3 years, since she didn't have a permanent residence permit, she had been going there and back, working in Geneva occasionally as part-time cleaning lady and as a care assistant. She says:

> When you accept working as a house-cleaner, there is something that moves in your head. Your values, your emotions, your dignity are touched and questioned. In my country I am someone. I had a job, a higher education. I belonged to my society. Here I was no one, I didn't know anyone and I didn't know anyone. I didn't speak the language. I started to feel depressed and lost. I also had to adapt to my children, who meanwhile became young free men used to live in Switzerland.

Overall, her change of legal status (mentioned as an enabling factor for labour market access in the stories of other MRAs too) in conjunction with the context in which the motherhood decision was taken at the very beginning of her migration journey – namely, that of supporting her ex-husband's career ambitions and life plans – played a major role in hindering the realisation of her agency for pursuing a fully rewarding and meaningful professional life.

Like Alicia, Eddie, a 46-year-old woman from the United States, and Maud, a 58-year-old woman from Peru, also claimed that since they decided to move to Switzerland for their children, they were ready to take jobs in the informal sector or underqualified jobs such as a house cleaner, since the priority was providing a safe environment for their families. Switzerland represents a country that can offer a safe environment as well as better educational and professional opportunities compared to those offered in the different countries of Latin America such as Brazil and Peru. To be able to provide this security for their children, they had to choose to give up work and careers they loved as well as the opportunity to improve their social status through career advancement.

In sum, considering the biographical interviews of the women where the subject of motherhood was central, it is important to notice that their discourse about motherhood and family was strictly related to the subject of work and career. Also, that gender differences in opportunity identification have led to different and distinct enablers for and constraints on their decision to migrate and the usage of resources within this process. In their narratives about their lives before their arrival in Switzerland, the participants underline how important it was to work and provide for their families. It was especially clear in their cases that the importance/sense of work as 'a must' was part of their primary socialisation – it had been transmitted by their own family and was a central subject for them. Since childhood, work had been essential for survival.

For these women, combining their private and professional lives represented a challenge, but at the same time was considered as an experience that rendered them more resilient towards challenges in the pre-migration life, as well as in their new country. It gave Alicia in particular a way to cope emotionally with the struggles she encountered in the labour market and the integration process. For the last few years, she has been working for an association that supports the orientation of migrants and undocumented migrants; she works on several projects and is responsible for the beneficiaries from the Brazilian community. Concurrently, for Alicia, getting in touch with an association had an impact on her self-confidence, but also on her relationship with her professional project and the strategy she would later adopt. Hence, a loophole of the state integration policy, which represents an obstacle in the professional integration of migrants, is the absence of an effective psychological support system for people who have suffered psychological trauma; this especially concerns refugees who have followed a difficult migration path.

4.4.2 Social or Political Activism as a Cause of Migration and a Coping Strategy

Social or political activism represents another central theme that accumulates in the biographical interviews of several refugees, as well as other migrants, and on different levels. It thus provides evidence on the question of the interconnectedness of the various processes of 'identification', such as political, ethnic, gender, class or occupational identity (see Nandi & Platt, 2012). Considering that identification can be contextually specific (Nandi & Platt, 2015, 2016) and has implications for others through processes of inclusion and exclusion (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the relationship between political identity, ethnic identity, and 'integration' cannot be ignored. As our biographical research reveals, in many cases, social or political activism had an impact on MRAs' aspirations for inclusion into the host society, and on how they coped with the new reality after their arrival in Switzerland.

For example, Omar, a 36-year-old man of Kurdish origins from Turkey who was granted political asylum in 2014, shared how he eventually came to join a Kurdish association in Switzerland, with the aim to support Kurdish rights – as he has done in the past and prior to his migration journey. Omar, a highly active political activist in Turkey, experienced various forms of oppression there and was forced to flee to preserve his freedom. This experience –being an activist and becoming a refugee – is understood as relating to how life is managed before and after the refugee journey, how political identity determines life-changing choices and aspirations of 'being included' in the host country, but also how political self-affirmation and related actions can be considered as enlightening moments and turning points. He says:

> In my family, being Kurds wasn't a big matter, we weren't religious and we didn't have existential discussions about the Kurdish identity. It was at the university that it changed: everyone starts to ask you "who are you?", and you have to decide which ethnic or religious group you want to belong to. I began to reflect on my identity, to do some research on politics and history. I opened their eyes on what was happening around me, to the Kurdish people in Turkey.

During his first years of university, Omar launched with some university colleagues a leftist democratic association that supported the Kurdish people and was politically engaged against the government's oppression of them. This had an impact on who he wanted to be, and the decision to mobilise himself determined the course of events that forced him to look for asylum in Switzerland. As with other interviewed migrants arrived under the asylum framework, after becoming a migrant in a foreign country his priorities changed. In the first period he had to put aside political engagement to focus on himself. Political activism lost its importance, priority, and in some moments its meaning; surviving and becoming included in the new society seemed more important, as Omar among others explained:

> We live in an individualistic world where everyone thinks to themselves. Which is sad but true. I come from a rich culture, where relations among people are strong. Thanks to this relation we could fight against the power and the oppression, but here I had to adapt to this system in order to survive, I become in some moments an individualist person as well. On

> the other hand, I still think that everyone has a social responsibility and has to dedicate some of their own time to a social cause.

Even if they are put aside at times along the way, political ideologies affected the majority of refugees in a positive and empowering way, and they represented a driving force even after migration. Political ideologies provided a narrative to help the refugees accept new challenges and a new reality in Switzerland as the host country. For some who had to leave a well-established career, they learnt to accept their past because they believed that giving up their professional life for a political or social cause is more important than money and social status. Their engagement can be a source and a way of coping with the difficulties related to their professional integration process.

The story of Nathan, a 30-year-old from Nigeria, shows how he gained political consciousness after his migration and how a political reading of his own reality can have an impact on his own life choices, on the 'integration process' and on his path in Switzerland. Nathan grew up in extremely poor conditions in a marginalised neighbourhood in Nigeria. As he turned 18, he was pushed by his family to follow the path of his older brother and migrate illegally to Italy to send home some money that would allow the survival of his brothers and his parents. His arrival in Europe strengthened his disillusionment with the idea of Europe as an 'Eden', the sense deception and dissolution were stronger than expected. When he arrived in Europe he was young and full of aspirations; he carried on the dream to become a well-recognised and rich artist. Being a street artist in Nigeria was often considered as a real vocation. His aspirations were destroyed rapidly since being an artist is not a real 'job' or a respected vocation in Italy and he was, overall, simply 'a black kid from a poor African country'. He had to change his expectations and adapt to the new reality. To earn money, he had to become first a street seller and then a drug dealer. After one year of working on the street, he was arrested in Italy and sentenced to 18 months in prison. In this regard, he identified his detention as playing an epiphanic role that changed everything in his life as a migrant as well as his expectations:

> Everything changed in prison. . .I don't want to go back but I miss the prison, the people who I met, the situation in which I decided who I wanted to be. I started to meet people and discover their stories. In prison I started thinking. I asked myself what brought me here? I looked around me and I saw black people, Arabic people, a few Italians from the margins. And I saw a pattern. I started to see races. I started to see myself. I understood what kind of artist I wanted to be. I started to change my way of writing and my plans. At first my choices and my purpose were always related to money. But there my work and my thoughts became political.

Reflecting on colonialism and the power relations among white and black people, Nathan reports that he began to understand the meaning of structural violence and racism. He realised that he did have and still has the right to look for a better life in Europe after all Europe had done to African countries; he began to believe there is no such thing as economic migration because migration is always driven by political relations. On one hand, this new consciousness triggered epiphanies that fostered his resilience and determination, empowering him with a sense of new legitimation that

in turn affected his expectation of a better and equal life. This expectation pushed him to leave Italy and search for better life conditions in Switzerland. On the other hand, Nathan decided that he would never become part of the official integration system nor of the formal labour market system because for him it reproduced structural racism and inequalities. He decided to become politically active by joining militant associations and he looked for support in alternative communities that occupied, for example, squats. Political consciousness shaped his main ambitions (to become a politically active artist) and his professional choices, respectively, to look simply for informal work to have the minimum to survive.

4.4.3 The Fear of Deskilling and Labour Market Marginalisation

The possession of certain basic skills has an impact on a person's integration process in the new country and the possibilities of acquiring them may influence their trajectory and generate epiphanies that lead them to think they need to downskill to have a chance to be selected for a job position. As we have seen, the lack of recognition of skills can lead people who find it difficult to find work aligned with their skills to move to other fields or accept jobs requiring a lower level of qualification. For Alicia, the moment when she took the step of accepting a lower-skilled job was epiphanic and instilled in her a sense of despair and a moment of crisis that could be described as an existential crisis. While this choice may stem from a need to earn a living, it can also be a strategy for coping with other difficulties along the way, such as frustration or a feeling of not being useful, as in the case of Lucia. In her own words:

> So I said to myself, I have to look for alternatives to occupy my time while I find a job, because it's full of frustrations, so it's doing things as a volunteer, reconciling myself with the academy, so I'm seeing if I can publish something from my thesis in a journal, I'm learning French. I think having patience is what has cost me the most so far, and also reconciling with the idea that doing jobs that are less qualified for me, like babysitting, well, it's not bad. In the end, it's a job, I can earn some money, but for me it's hard, you know. It's not a shame but it's a little bit, why did you study so much if you're going to end up babysitting someone else's kids. But maybe it's more my ideas than people's. I think that if I tell people that I'm working there, nobody will judge me, because they are also aware of how difficult it is to find a job, even for Swiss people.

The choice to accept less skilled work was not easy for Lucia, who has a PhD. Although she feels that it will be beneficial morally – and to some extent financially – she is not comfortable with the idea that people can judge this choice. She herself feels that those years of education would be wasted. However, this factor generated an epiphanic awareness for Lucia about the importance of deskilling, which she did strategically. The information received on public policies, such as sound advice, encourages Lucia to move towards undeclared jobs for fear of then being forced to remain locked into a field if she enters an unskilled but declared job:

> I can't get a job as a waitress, or a job that will be reported [declared] to the unemployment. The people I've met here tell me, if you get a job as a waitress, unemployment services, officially are going to label you in this kind of jobs, because you opened the door to do that. It doesn't matter if you have a master's degree or a PhD. So, I have friends who work in the restaurant business etc. and they say, here they give you a job, but I say, no I can't because until I get past the unemployment story etc., I don't know what can happen. I told myself that I had to find an undeclared and flexible job so that could adapt to my time (French classes etc.) in the meantime, even if it's babysitting.

All such experiences were epiphanic in the way they made her question her choice of building her life in a country where her skills and education are not appropriately recognised. Interviews with other highly skilled migrants, such as Elias, a PhD researcher from Eritrea, have shown us that this fear was justified. Taking a low-skilled job that was very different from their field of expertise had been beneficial in terms of improving proficiency in the local language, integration, and the need to have an activity, but it had been a major obstacle for them when it came time to benefit from public services to help them return to work. In particular, they found themselves obliged to seek or accept a job in the same field since according to unemployment policies only experience in Switzerland counts and thus found that this was a policy that could foster deskilling.

At the same time, the subject of recognition of skills, experiences, and qualifications was a central focus of the interviews related to major epiphanies and turning points for their personal development and professional growth. Most of the interviewees expressed that they had faced a lack of recognition or low valorisation of their competences, experiences, and qualifications by public institutions, potential employers, and sometimes even their close circle of acquaintances. This negative judgement of their abilities played an epiphanic role in our interviewees' migration experiences affecting their access to the labour market and contributed to their labour market marginalisation. In some cases, these blows to self-confidence or to the feeling of legitimacy can even lead to problems or traumas at the psychological level, thus dragging the person into a vicious circle where the various problems are intertwined and feed into each other.

4.4.4 Labour Market Informality and Discrimination

Lucia's decision to first enter the labour market through an undeclared job has been part of her strategy to fight administrative and policy barriers. However, most interviewed migrants legally entitled to work who entered the informal labour market did so because they could not find work in the formal labour market, even though they were looking for jobs requiring few or no qualifications. Maud is a 58-year-old trained secretary and administrator, who moved back and forth between Peru and Switzerland until she decided to relocate permanently in Switzerland as she thought Switzerland could offer herself and her family more opportunities for a better life. She attributes this difficulty to competition in the labour market:

> Today it is much harder to find work at once. During my first stay I found a job straight away. I felt safer as well. But now the demographic reality has changed. There are too many people, too many requests. My age represents as well an obstacle. I am forced to work informally and not declare because any employer is ready to offer a contract.

Reflecting on the working conditions of women in Switzerland, Maud sheds light especially on the gendered dimensions of informality at work. She considers that women have more 'advantages' than men: they are able to find more easy jobs in the informal labour market, respectively, in the sectors of service, cleaning, and restoration. Processes of labour market informalisation and experiences of informality are a defining feature of MRAs' trajectories in the country of settlement and draws attention to the urgency of understanding the ways in which social practices and cultural prejudices in host communities formalise and conceal the gendered dimensions of informality at work.

The political reality of some sectors of the labour market, especially construction, restoration, and cosmetics where employers prioritize cheaper cross-border labour forces, represents a barrier and challenge for entrance to the labour market. The question of increasing concurrence includes not only a concurrence among the Swiss and migrant labour forces, but also among migrants and cross-border workers, especially in the Italian part of Switzerland. Consequently, according for some of the interviewees, many low-qualified jobs, as for example hairdressers, are occupied by a majority of underpaid cross-border employees who work in Switzerland but still live in Italy or France where life is more affordable. The interviewed migrants, in particular temporarily admitted persons, feel that with this context they are not attractive enough.

Concurrently, six of our interviewees, especially men from Arabic and African countries, claimed that the structural racism and discrimination in the Swiss labour market represent a significant obstacle and barrier to fulfilling their needs. For instance, Subi, an 18-year-old from Syria, claimed that discrimination can affect you even if you arrived in Switzerland at a young age and attended school there. He escaped from war in 2013, arrived in Switzerland when he was 13 years old; he attended the secondary school and professional formation. He had never felt discriminated against either by his classmates nor from the people close to him. However, when he had to look on his own for an internship position, he experienced how his name and his origin became a barrier from entering the labour market:

> I sent plenty of applications to find an employer who was ready to take me as an intern. For months I looked without success. There is for sure a great concurrence among young people, but I think, as many said, that an Arabic name on the applications and my provisory permit will always represent an obstacle. On this matter, the problem is related to how you look for a job and how the employers consider the applications; employers in general get the cv and a motivation letter, they don't meet you. In this case it is normal that on paper I won't ever be prioritised.

Similar experiences were described by eight of our interviewees. Many of the biographical stories of the interviewed migrants highlight that the first contacts

they had with Swiss institutions played a decisive role in shaping their path to integration. Forms of racism or discrimination were sometimes reproduced by the cantonal integration offices, related associations, or orientation offices as well. Some underline that their own social assistance officers treated them with condescension by undervaluing their previous professional experiences and skills. For instance, an interviewed asylum seeker accepted on a provisory basis declared that his own social assistant discouraged him from trying to apply for jobs as an electrician and plumber – professions he exercised for years in his origin country. The social assistant's main argument was that to practice these professions in Switzerland requires a much higher educational level and skills that someone from Syria probably doesn't have.

This first relationship with Swiss institutions is described as an initial factor delegitimising MRAs' migration and their status, triggering the start of loss of self-confidence that conditioned the way they were going to position themselves in the new country. Hence, the discriminatory behaviour and biased perceptions of key integration actors in the local host communities had a negative impact on the path of some interviewed MRAs and determined an epiphanic moment in their professional paths. Some were forced to re-evaluate their professional plans and expectations and choose to pursue a professional path in a sector that they either didn't like or didn't correspond to their profile. The implications of these discriminatory experiences were more acute for those MRAs who already had difficulties entering the labour market because of a missing network, language difficulties, legal status, or lack of recognition of their own diplomas.

Overall, legal status affected the risk of being discriminated, constrained MRAs' agency, and was often considered as a negative turning point that migrants and refugees didn't experience. For instance, several migrants who arrived for family reunification reasons claimed to be discriminated against because they couldn't find any support and help since they weren't refugees. They had to pay for language courses themselves and experienced more difficulties than those benefitting from social assistance. Migrants who arrived for family reunification were also more frequently confronted with the question of legitimacy. Women who moved to Switzerland for familiar reunification or those defined as 'economic migrants' were often considered either as privileged migrants who took advantage of the national resources or as foreigners who didn't have the right or the reasons to be and work in Switzerland – or both. They suffered a more subtle and invisible discrimination that often restrained their professional ambitions. Moreover, migrants who came to Switzerland for familiar reunification or as a result of a personal choice are often not considered in terms of psychological vulnerability and have feel they have less access to the support offered refugees who suffered under more evident and strong traumas. Overall, temporarily admitted persons seem to have encountered more difficulties and structural obstacles that blocked labour market integration.

4.4.5 Trauma and Ways of Coping with Psychological Distress

The emotional state of the MRAs interviewed is a key factor in their journey towards integration. The difficult experiences they (may) have lived through before, during, or after migration are events that leave a trace, giving rise to feelings from simple nostalgia to trauma. In some cases, MRAs have identified specific needs to help them cope with and manage these feelings. The identification and management of these needs have been key steps in their journey towards professional integration. Many migrants suffer from psychological stress, which can slow down or even block the process of integration into the labour market.

The story of Subi, who left Homs in Syria when he was 10 years old because of the violent escalation of the conflict and who had to embark to a long and difficult journey to Europe, shows that to be able to build a new life and to start an integration process, it is necessary to face emotional trauma and find a strategy to cope with the past. It enlightens us as well about how the support of an association and its personal accompaniment can have an impact on this process.

> We told our stories, how we left our country, our journey with the boat ... and how we experienced our arrival in Switzerland. I see now how it helped me. I could free my heart and head, which was full of anger. At the beginning it was hard but after I learned how to talk about everything. By talking I learnt how to cope with my emotions. I don't know where I would be today if I couldn't express myself in this way. I was listened to by the people and I could feel their solidarity, this helped as well.

The sense of emotional liberation was an epiphanic moment for Subi, and an essential step to being able to deal with the challenges and dimensions of his new life in Switzerland. He learnt to cope emotionally with his traumas related to the war and to his own migration path; he felt more accepted by the society of the new country because of the empathy shown by the other young people. He understood, as he said, that only by confronting himself with his 'nightmares' and his past he would be able to handle the new challenges and his path in Switzerland.

For some, working is the only way of coping with trauma. This was the case for Mohamed, a 48-year-old political asylum seeker from Syria who worked as a hairdresser. He escaped from his origin country in 2013 because the daily living conditions had become unbearable. The neighbourhood where his family lived was constantly bombarded as well as the saloon where he was working. Mohamed's family has always been against the Assad government; some brothers and cousins were active members of an extremist rebel group. As some family members started to disappear and after Mohamed was threatened with death several times, he decided to leave the country with his family and the family of one of his brothers. He arrived in Switzerland in 2014 after having stayed for one year in Libya and a difficult illegal journey through the deserts and across the Mediterranean Sea. A few months after he arrived in Switzerland, he and his family – his wife and their 13-year-old son – received the support of an association that helped them find an apartment and a job. Finding work represented for Mohamed his turning point:

> Working in a saloon in the same village where I was living and meeting people every day helped me greatly. I could learn the language by practising it, getting to know the people, and making myself known overcoming the first cultural barrier. I am a Muslim man after all, in a village that, especially a few years ago, didn't have almost any people from other countries [...]The work didn't allow me to become economically independent. But still, by working, I could keep myself occupied. Staying at home, watching all day on television what was happening in Syria, made me feel useless. I would become crazy.

The nostalgia of home, the distance from some friends and relatives are very present in everyday life; work was the only way for Mohamed to escape, or at least to cope with this suffering. He could see that by working he could also overcome difficulties related to a social and cultural integration. Subi's experience shows us how the resolution of psychological stress or trauma can facilitate a migrant's integration. Mohamed's experience, on the other hand, explains how entering the labour market helped him manage his emotional traumas.

In other cases, positive epiphanic experiences have been created by seeking support from civil society organisations. For some interviewees, asking for support from an association was considered as a moment of action that eventually changed their professional path. Admitting to needing help, and to be able to ask for it, was an active decision and a way of taking control of their own situation that eventually had a positive impact on their psychological and emotional state. For Diana, a 40-year-old trained project manager from Costa Rica, contacting an association had an impact on her self-confidence, but also on her relationship with her professional project and the strategy she would later adopt:

> In September, the association invited women to testify about their successes, and I was very touched by this event and the journey of these women, and I identified a lot with them when they said it wasn't our fault. And I think that this sentence alone, it's not your fault, put the structures and functioning of the labour market into more perspective, and it took some of the weight off my shoulders. It takes some of the pressure off you from putting yourself on the shoulders and also from seeing that you're not the only person going through it. That's when I decided to talk to representatives of the association to look for an alternative. . .they told me, you have the qualifications, the studies, the knowledge about what to do at a job interview etc. What you lack is the network. They proposed actions that I could implement to develop my network and to be able to access what they called the hidden market.

Moreover, many underlined that they were befriended by members of the association; becoming friends with them was an important step. This point was underlined by Daner, a 34-year-old man from Syria who arrived in Switzerland without knowing anyone. After escaping from his country because he was affiliated to a group of militant Kurdish people, he tried to forget his past; he has never wanted to become too involved with other Kurdish and Syrian refugees because he wanted to build a new life, speak the local language, start to work, and socialise with 'Swiss people'. One of the biggest challenges to achieving this was, according to him, a lack of knowledge about the culture and customs. Becoming close to Swiss people allowed him to get a better look and understanding of the local culture, which in turn is essential to fit in the labour market:

> Without an inside [understanding] of the culture, it is not possible to relate to the new host country, to make friends and eventually to find a job. Learning how to behave in the

> workplace, how to work, how to relate to the other colleagues and to your own superior are essential to feel confident and to pursue a process of professional integration.

In his case, becoming close and building a friendship with the members of the association not only helped him recover from psychological distress, but represented an important personal turning point leading to epiphanic experiences. Reflecting on obstacles and the support that he started to receive through the association, he reports that what he noticed at this moment was what he missed the most, beside the language courses and an administrative support from the integration office, was an introduction to the local culture. As he experienced this introduction, he felt more comfortable and readier to face specific situations in his private and professional life.

In sum, our findings show that there are various dynamic combinations of turning points and epiphanic experiences at play, with social structural conditions acting as both enablers of and barriers for MRAs' labour market integration, having also consequences for both their identities and the shape of individual lives. Resilience to adversity, associated with specific turning points when MRAs' lives changed direction, seems to be a key factor for several of our interviewees, bringing about an identity-promoting switch in roles from 'victims' driven mainly by the policy, economic, and social barriers and circumstances of the host country to doers, able to exercise reflexive agency. More specifically, their labour market entrance and integration have been found to be conditioned by the 'reflexive competences' (Caetano, 2015) through which they act to address critical barriers related to restrictive institutional and legal frameworks, racism, cultural prejudices, restrictive labour market integration policies and discourses, and distrust. This is shown in the stories of Omar, Subi, and Nathan. How they reflect on earlier life experiences as they battle trauma and seek to redefine and transform their identities and life plans to enter the formal or informal labour market, is also a crucial part of a fundamentally reflexive process, as shown in the stories of Omar, Mohammed, and Nathan.

Yet, resilience, associated with an active process of re-direction, does not necessarily lead to resilient labour market outcomes, as in the case of Diana, not just due to contingent events, but because social structural conditions affect and constrain in cumulative ways MRAs' capabilities to convert those resources into effective agency. As we have seen, some of the resources enabling MRAs to take action to shape their futures are given in their current social situation by ethnic and personal networks, as the story of Daner indicates. Others are deprived after interaction with stereotypes and social institutions, knocking their lives off track, leading them to surrender past professional aspirations, and forcing them to come to terms with continuing 'downward' or negative trajectories. Thus, different structures of opportunity have been identified to exist for different groups of MRAs in the Swiss context, with economic migrants generally enjoying more opportunities than asylum seekers or irregular migrants, and with migrant and refugee women facing a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities and becoming side-lined in the labour market. In this context, legal status provisions, family values and bias, and gender roles have been found to be associated with critical moments or turning points and their interpretations. The latter may take the form of adaptations to external

circumstances, which in several cases involves being forced to accept a deskilling process, abandoning professional aspirations, or entering the informal economy in order to survive. The stories of Alicia, Elias, Maud, Eddie, and Lucia are falling into these categories. For these interviewees the process of adjustment to the host labour market and society more broadly have led them to a greater sense of self-awareness.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Overall, our biographical interviews underscore the dynamic nature of the integration process and the way in which different elements and factors constrain and enable action. Our research provides evidence to the fact that policymaking to support MRAs' labour market integration, and their social inclusion more broadly, can only be effective if it juxtaposes structural and agential factors in a manner that acknowledges their interplay and interdependence. This understanding could be a key missing link in explaining the *two faces of integration* and the underlying *discrepancy* between, on one hand, structural change that does not always deliver on the ground the prevailing perceptions and aspirations of Swiss policy actors for successful and promising policy implementation and, on the other, the realities of migrants' themselves.

As we have seen, MRAs' journeys towards integration were heavily influenced by structure and agency complementing each other – namely, by a combination of experiences, values, perceptions, and reasoning related to the individual and their interplay with contextual factors (e.g. policies, services) and other messages sent from the host society. Crucially, the biographical stories reveal that their journey towards integration in the Swiss labour market was never prescribed – nor always achieved. Some were able to turn integration barriers into enablers. Most of our respondents, though, were not able to reach the final destination (successfully or as they would have aspired to), as structural factors related to the prevailing policy paradigm and embedded biases and prejudice effectively constrained migrants' capacity to realise their (potential) agency, highlighting a major tension between actors' needs and structures that can be *disabling*. As discussed, critical life moments or junctures (Bourbeau, 2015) related to experiences of motherhood or social and political activism, trauma and perceived discrimination, as well as unsuccessful experience in the world of formal or informal work were decisive events affecting their lives and attitudes towards labour market integration. Negative or difficult experiences associated with deskilling, low appreciation of skills, and the resulting feeling of not being welcome, are all domains where contextual factors have played a relevant role and restricted MRAs' ability to access employment opportunities.

On the other hand, contact with a specific association and access to these networks were important for MRAs' integration, empowering and catalytic *enablers for using their capacity to act* and determining factors in conditioning their motivations, ambitions, and integration paths. Our research suggests that the role of civil society organisations in the integration of the MRAs into the Swiss labour market is

becoming increasingly encompassing. Civil society organisations possess significant experience and expertise, particularly at the grassroots level, that can help public institutions experiment with innovative actions and formulate policy and strategy effectively. Alongside the above, we found that questions of self-confidence and legitimacy – central to our biographical narratives – generated epiphanies which led almost all of our respondents to re-evaluate their labour integration path and made them feel they have agency to challenge the barriers to labour market integration. These need to be sufficiently taken into consideration in the professional support offered by the various services.

Moreover, the exercise of an activity in which the migrant felt useful and valued, positive feedback from another person or institution, the expression of recognition of the difficulties faced by the authorities, local people or other actors representing the host society, and access to integration support that empowers rather than victimises are among the elements that we found as part of the turning points and which have had a positive influence on MRAs' sense of self-assertation, giving them the resources to cope with obstacles and fight for professional integration in line with their values.

In conclusion, whilst our research might not discover the panacea for effective integration, it does highlights a strong normative understanding with strong implications for policy and practice: the freedom to lead the life one has reason to value, as Sen (1999) puts it, requires that MRAs have opportunities to achieve valuable functionings or, in other words, that policy interventions – institutional and legal channels – do not remain insensitive to MRAs' opportunities and liberties and to the way structure shapes agency in the integration process, and their interdependence. This finding on the synergistic relationship between structural and agential factors is very instructive for policymaking: leaving agential considerations outside the scope of structural reforms can expose migrants to further risks and vulnerabilities, perpetuating or exacerbating inequalities within host societies.

References

Arrighi, J.-T. (2017). *Dataset on migration referendums and initiatives in Switzerland*. NCCR – On the Move.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 611–639.

BFH and Social Design. (2016). *Evaluation du potentiel des réfugiés et des personnes admises à titre provisoire. Rapport final*. SEM. https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/integration/berichte/va-flue/ber-potenzial-va-flue-f.pdf

Bourbeau, P. (2015). Resilience and international politics: Premises, debates, agenda. *International Studies Review, 17*(3), 374–395.

Caetano, A. (2015). Defining personal reflexivity: A critical reading of Archer's approach. *European Journal of Social Theory, 18*(1), 60–75.

Couttenier, M., Preotu, V., Rohner, D., & Thoenig, M. (2016). *The violent legacy of victimization: Post-conflict evidence on asylum seekers, crimes and public policy in Switzerland*. CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP11079.

Glasby, J. (2005). The integration dilemma: How deep and how broad to go? *Journal of Integrated Care, 13*(5), 27–30.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Polity Press.

Hanks, R., & Carr, N. T. (2008). Lifelines of women in jail as self-constructed visual probes for life history research. *Marriage and Family Review, 42*(4), 105–116.

Hay, C. (2002). *Political analysis: A critical introduction*. Palgrave.

Jessop, B. (1996). Interpretive sociology and the dialectic of structure and agency. *Theory, Culture and Society, 13*(1), 119–128.

Kamel, D. (2022). *Reader reaction to Ukraine war: 'I see no difference – they're all fleeing death in war'*. SWI swissinfo.ch. Available at: https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/reader-reaction-to-ukraine-war%2D%2D-i-see-no-difference%2D%2D-they-re-all-fleeing-death-in-war-/47564050

Kaukko, M., Dunwoodie, K., & Riggs, E. (2017). Rethinking the ethical and methodological dimensions of research with refugee children. *ZIP, 1*(17), 16–21.

Maillet, P., Mountz, A., & Keegan, W. (2016). Researching migration and enforcement in obscured places: Practical, ethical and methodological challenges to fieldwork. *Social and Cultural Geography, 18*(7), 1–24.

Mexi, M., Moreno Russi, P., & Fischbach, A. (2019). Policy barriers and enablers of MRAAs' integration to the labour market, Switzerland /Research report. In I. Bontenbal & N. Lillie (Eds.), *Policy barriers and enablers*. WP3 report, SIRIUS project. Available at: https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

Moreno Russi, P., Fischbach, A., & Mexi, M. (2020). Social partners barriers and enablers: Switzerland/Research report. In S. Baglioni & T. Montgomery (Eds.), *Social partners barriers and enablers*. WP5 report, SIRIUS project. Available at: https://www.sirius-project.eu/publications/wp-reports-results

Nandi, A., & Platt, L. (2012). Developing ethnic identity questions for understanding society. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies, 3*(1), 80–100.

Nandi, A., & Platt, L. (2015). Patterns of minority and majority identification in a multicultural society. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(15), 2615–2634.

Nandi, A., & Platt, L. (2016). Understanding the role of contextual factors for the salience of majority and minority ethnic identity. Presentation at RC28 conference 2016, Bern, Switzerland.

NCCR On the Move: Migration mobility indicators (n.d.). Available at: https://indicators.nccronthemove.ch

Nico, M. L., & Van der Vaart, W. (2012). Between an 'undoable science' and a 'new kind of research': Life course methods to study turning points and landmarks. In H. Kunneman (Ed.), *Good work: The ethics of craftsmanship* (pp. 170–182). Humanistics University Press.

Ruedin, D., & D'Amato, G. (2015). Politicisation of immigration in Switzerland: The importance of direct democracy. In W. Van Der Brug, G. D'Amato, & D. Ruedin (Eds.), *The politicisation of migration* (pp. 140–158). Routledge.

Sciarini, P. (2017). Direct democracy in Switzerland: The growing tension between domestic and foreign politics. In R. Saskia, Y. Welp, & L. Whitehead (Eds.), *Let the people rule?: Direct democracy in the twenty-first century*. ECPR Press.

State Secretary for Migration (SEM). (2019). *Migration report 2018*. Available at: https://migration.swiss/assets/inhaltsbilder/migrationsbericht-2018/migrationsbericht-2018-e.pdf

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS). (2019). *Permanent resident population aged 15 or over, by migration status.* Available at: https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/migration-integration/by-migration-status.html

Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS). (2020). *Permanent resident population aged 15 or over, by migration status*. Available at: https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/migration-integration/by-migration-status.html#:~:text=In%202020%2C%2038%25%20of%20the,the%20first%20generation%20(2%2C236%2C000)

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*. Nelson-Hall.

Triandafyllidou, A. (2019). The migration archipelago: Social navigation and migrant agency. *International Migration, 57*(1), 5–19.

Maria M. Mexi is a senior researcher and fellow of the Albert Hirschman Center on Democracy at the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, having previously conducted research at the University of Geneva's Politics Department and leading the SIRIUS (H2020) Project's policy component. She teaches a postgraduate MINT course on global inequalities at the Geneva Graduate Institute and works as an international expert and consultant for the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva, the TASC – Thinking Ahead on Societal Change Platform in Geneva, and the Delphi Economic Forum in Greece, where she serves on the advisory committee. Her research has focused on migration and labour markets, social and solidarity economy, social dialogue and the future of work. Dr Mexi's professional experience includes academic social research as well as employment and social policy advice at national and international levels. She has advised governments in several countries (Croatia, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, and the Caribbean Community) and international organisations, and provided expert opinion in issues related to the harmonisation of national policy and governance tools with EU and UN frameworks.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.