| THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO EMPLOYMENT |
| :-: |
| An Analysis of the Labour Market Careers of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Belgium |
| Summary |

## INTRODUCTION

An increase in the numbers of spontaneous asylum seekers in Belgium since the late 1990s has led to a series of restrictive legislative changes of the procedure in the last 14 years (2001, 2007). In 2003, a new law was introduced with the intention of improving the labour market rights of asylum seekers in order to increase their labour market participation. However, between 2007 and 2010, this integration was hindered because of the contradiction between the 2003 Act and the 2007 Act. Even though the rate of recognition of asylum seekers is low (between 10 and 20%), the increase of foreigners from third country nationals holding a permanent residence permit in Belgium results mainly from this specific category of migrants. Therefore analyzing the socioeconomic integration of this population has become crucial in the current situation.

In the field of migration studies little research has been dedicated to asylum seekers and refugees in particular, and especially not to their socio-economic integration. This is the case in Belgium and in Europe in general. Some recent Belgian research (Martiniello et al. 2010; Mussche et al. 2010; Timmerman et al. 2012) investigates the integration of all newcomers in the labour market without paying specific attention to (former) asylum seekers. Other Belgian research focused on labour market integration of irregular migrants or regularized migrants (Wets 2009; Marx et al. 2008).

International studies on the employment integration of asylum seekers and recognized refugees shows that the employment rates of refugees are relatively low. These rates are lower than those of the indigenous population, second generation immigrants and other immigrants who migrated under a different status (Piché et al. 2002; Piguet and Wimmer 2000; Bloc 2007; Bevelander 2011). Thus in Sweden the employment rate of people who entered the country on grounds of family reunification is higher than that of refugees (Bevelander 2011). The factors which account for employment integration are generally of three kinds: individual factors (age, gender, family situation, nationality, etc.), factors relating to access to the labour market (length of stay, language skills, level of education, social capital, etc.), and structural and institutional characteristics (opportunities available in the labour market, barriers to employment, local unemployment levels, legislation relating to asylum seekers, etc.).

The research we carried out for this book aims on the one hand to map the labour market integration of asylum seekers, refugees and people who were granted the status of subsidiary protection between January 2001 and December 2010, and on the other hand to create socioeconomic profiles (based on legal status, family situation, labour market position, gender, age, etc.). The research also tries to clarify how structural conditions (employment opportunities, region of residence, etc.), institutional conditions (length of the procedure) and individual characteristics (age, sex, family situation) determine their socioeconomic integration careers.

Following the ROUTE project[1], which focused on foreigners who were regularized, the CAREERS project is based on the analysis of the same kind of database (National Register and Crossroads Bank for Social Security). An additional objective of the research project is to widen the scope and improve on the methodology of the ROUTE project. This research drew on an analysis of data on all (former) asylum seekers who submitted an asylum application between January 2001 and December 2010 and who are still residing in Belgium, regardless their actual legal status.

## 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main focus of this research is to investigate the socio-economic integration into Belgian society of asylum seekers who are still waiting for a decision on their asylum application, recognized refugees and people who have received subsidiary protection. This focus leads us to pinpoint four complementary research questions:

> 1. What are the socio-economic integration pathways of these people?
>
> 2. What are the socio-economic profiles of the families of these different categories of (former) asylum seekers?
>
> 3. To what extent do the integration careers differ for these different categories of (former) asylum seekers?
>
> 4. Which are the factors that foster or hinder socio-economic integration in the labour market?

The CAREERS project attempts to go beyond mere description of the integration paths of this population. We propose to use the concept of "migratory careers" (Martiniello and Rea 2014) as a theoretical framework to analyze the data collected. We take the three elements that contribute to the construction of "migratory careers" into account: (1) first, the political opportunity structures, (2) second, individuals' characteristics, like age, gender, citizenship, marital status and level of education; (3) the mobilization of resources, notably social capital.

Since this project is not based on a survey, we needed to adapt the proposed theoretical framework to the available variables for the quantitative part of this study. In particular, data regarding the social network are not included in any of the datasets used. This research needs to be completed by a qualitative analysis through which data could be gathered on variables that are usually absent in existing databases such as levels of education, vocational training, and mobilization of social networks.

## 2. THE USE OF OFFICIAL DATA

Several databases record information that can be used to describe the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants. The main data source for demographic data on migration, foreigners and populations with a foreign background is the National Register of natural persons. It is a centralized population register under the responsibility of the Federal Public Service of the Interior. The information is primarily collected for administrative purposes. However, the data can also be used by other public

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[1] http://www.belspo.be/belspo/fedra/proj.asp?l=en&COD=AG/JJ/141

services to produce statistics (Perrin and Schoonvaere 2009). The National Register contains several sub-registers. Belgian citizens are registered in the population register as are foreigners having a settlement permit. Foreigners who are admitted or authorized to stay – whether on a temporary or permanent basis – are registered in the aliens register. Asylum seekers are included in the so-called "waiting register" and are not considered as a part of the "official" population. An asylum seeker, who is granted the status of refugee, is then registered in the population register. Legal variables such as name, age, gender, nationality and place of residence are recorded in this register. Since the Program Law of December 2006, a variable on the legal status of immigrants was added. The National Register thus contains information on asylum seekers. For this project, data on all former asylum seekers who submitted an asylum application between January 2001 and December 2010, regardless of their actual legal status, were requested. This dataset contains information on personal characteristics like age, gender, nationality, nationality history, place of residence, history of place of residence, etc. A database containing information on 108,856 individuals was put together.

A unique personal identification number – National Register number – is created for each person registered. This key allows the possibility of linking the data from the National Register to other official data sources. Technically, it is possible to link all kinds of information, but in practice this is regulated by privacy legislation. Access to individual data is subject to approval by the privacy commission.

In accordance with the privacy rules, the data of the National Register were linked to socio-economic information from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (KSZ/BCSS). The KSZ/BCSS itself does not contain substantive data, but consists of references to the decentralized databanks of the various social institutions using the national register number as a key. For the sake of easy access, the 'Data Warehouse Labour Market and Social Protection' was created, containing data originating from the different participating social security institutions. Linking the records of these various institutions allows the creation of tailor-made statistical series on individuals and their socioeconomic histories. The Data Warehouse is a collaboration between the Multisectoral Individual Account (CIMIRe), the Fund for Employment Accidents (FAO/FAT), the Fund for Occupational Diseases (FBZ/FMP), the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (KSZ/BCSS), the National Intermutual College (NIC/CIN), the Federal Public Service: Social Integration (PPS/POD) Social Integration, the Pension Service Government Sector (PDOS/SdPSP), the National Institute for Sickness and Disability Insurance (RIZIV/INAMI), the National Office for Family Allowances for Employees (RKW/ONAFTS), the National Institute for Social Security of the Self-Employed (RSVZ/INASTI), the National Office for Social Security (RSZ/ONSS), the National Security Office for Local and Provincial Administrations (RSZPPO/ONSSAPL), the National Employment Office (RVA/ONEM), the National Office for Pensions (RVP/ONP) and the regional Employment and Vocational Training Agencies (VDAB/FOREM/Actiris).

The Data Warehouse contains labour market information (wages, employer, social security contributions, working hours (full time / part time), unemployment, etc.), information about old age pensions (benefits/ fees, kind of pension, starting date, etc.), information about sickness/ invalidity/incapacity for work (benefits/fees, cause [illness, industrial accident, occupational disease], starting date and [potential] final date, etc.), information about child allowances, personal data (birth date, gender, nationality, etc.). For all 108,856 former asylum seekers, supplementary socio economic information was requested. It should be noted however, that for many (former) asylum seekers, there is little or no information in the Data Warehouse Labour Market. This explains why

residual categories like 'other' and 'others' are often the largest category in the further socio-economic analysis.

## 3. A FOUR STAGE APPROACH

The time series that can be constructed based on the official databases depict changes in positions in the social security system and on the labour market. The social reality however also changes. The labour market opportunities for asylum seekers before and after the change of the asylum procedure in 2007 are completely different. To interpret the time series and trends adequately, the social, economic, legal and institutional context should be taken into account and the changes in this context over the years studied should be documented in order to draw a complete picture and fully understand the mechanism behind the integration trajectories.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the description of the changing context. The following aspects will be dealt with in turn:

1. Changes in legislation (asylum application procedure);
2. Changes in the institutional setting (i.e. civic integration policy in Flanders, NGO initiatives aimed at new migrants, growing involvement of welfare centers…);
3. Changes in labour market conditions (supply and demand, unemployment…) and
4. Changes in labour market rules (labour market shortages, rules of entry to the labour market …).
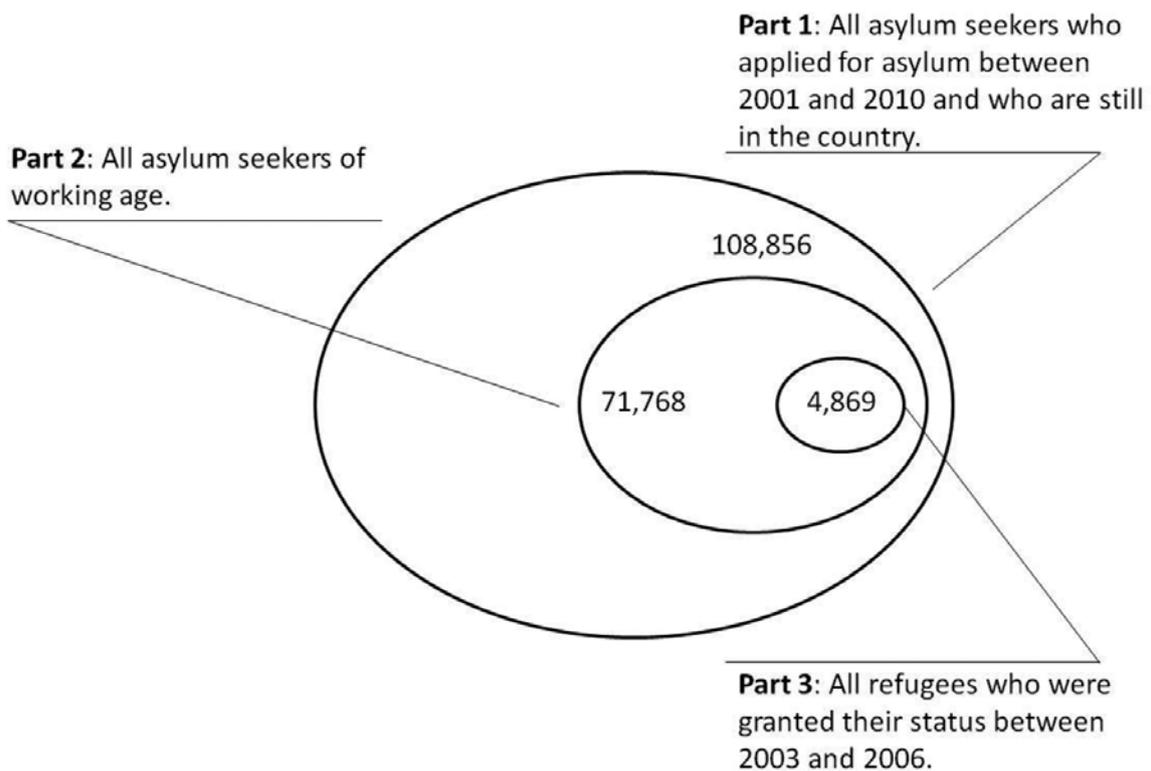
The quantitative analysis is based on data from the National Register that were linked to other administrative datasets. The analysis consists of three sections: (1) a descriptive section, (2) an analytical multivariate section and (3) a longitudinal section. Each section is described in a separate chapter.

Chapter 2 describes the population of all asylum seekers (including those who have been granted the status of refugees) who applied for asylum between 2001 and 2010 and who are still residing in the country. The database used was based on the aforementioned extract from the official registers in Belgium (National Register and Crossroads Bank for Social Security). A univariate and a bivariate analysis shows the changes in socio-economic status, e.g. on the labour market, dependent on welfare, etc. In this section, the whole population is taken into account, regardless of variables like age.

In Chapter 3, some research questions are answered such as what factors contribute to the inflow to the labour market (be it employed, self-employed or unemployed). This chapter looks only at a subsection of the population: only people of working age were considered in these analyses. After some more data cleaning, this resulted in a subset of 71,768 single persons between the ages of 18 and 65. In order to answer the research questions, multivariate techniques were used such as analysis of variance, correspondence analysis and logistic regression. Comparisons were made between the socio-economic integration of asylum seekers, refugees and people granted subsidiary protection.

In Chapter 4, the careers of refugees only were studied using other multivariate techniques such as optimal matching and – to explain some differences – again logistic regression. In order to compare similar periods of activity, the population was limited to only those people who obtained the status of refugee between 2003 and 2006. These data provide a quarterly employment history calendar with a four-year observation period for all individuals studied in this section.

*Figure 1. Graphical presentation of the research population*

Part 1: All asylum seekers who applied for asylum between 2001 and 2010 and who are still in the country.

Part 2: All asylum seekers of working age.

108,856

71,768

4,869

Part 3: All refugees who were granted their status between 2003 and 2006.

## I- A Changing context

- The integration in Belgian society and the careers in the social security system depend on the opportunity structure, shaped by the institutional context, the legislation and socio-economic possibilities and the characteristics of the asylum seekers.
- Asylum seekers are people who apply for the status of refugee as defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention, the European directives (Asylum Procedure Directive, Qualification Directive, and Reception Conditions Directive) and national laws. The procedure a refugee status is however based on national and supranational legislation. Some important legal changes have altered the procedure over time and also during the research period.
- During the course of the study, several changes were introduced in the law and in the procedure for acquiring refugee status. These changes affected the research population in several ways:
    - The status of subsidiary protection was introduced into Belgian law in 2006, in the middle of the research period (2000-2010).
    - The changing asylum procedure and the introduction of the status of subsidiary protection have had a direct impact on the research population.

- The 2007 reform had a direct impact on the procedure and on the possibilities for asylum seekers to enter the labour market. Between the introduction of the new act and the 2009 Decree, the labour market was closed to asylum seekers.
- Regularization policy in the research period had a direct impact on the asylum seekers studied. As result of the LIFO policy (Last In, First Out), many asylum seekers experiencing a long procedure were regularized.

- Reception of newcomers and integration are considered as two separate processes. Residence in the country and the reception of asylum seekers are federal competences. Fedasil is the federal agency responsible for managing the reception of asylum seekers during their procedure. Integration policies are since the state reforms of 1988 and 1993 organized on regional level (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels). The three linguistic communities (French, German, and Flemish speaking) have responsibilities with respect to integration policies.
- Local authorities, through the Public Social Welfare Centers, are important actors in the reception of asylum seekers. The legislation with regard to the role of PSWC's has evolved during the research period. The 2007 act changed the support from a larger range of measures including financial support to material support.
- The different regional socio-economic situations (e.g. more job opportunities in Flanders than in Wallonia and in Brussels) had an impact on the integration on the labour market of asylum seekers and refugees.

## II- A Descriptive analysis: the studied population

- This description considered all 108,856 individuals who appeared in the database in the period 2001-2010 and were still present in the last quarter of 2010
- The population is quite young: in their twenties and thirties. There is also a large share of young or new born children.
- More than one in three (35%) of the children (aged less than 18 years in 2010) were born in Belgium. The largest share of the studied population originates from Eastern Europe (29%) and Sub- Saharan Africa (29%). Almost 1 out of five of the research population was born in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa).
- In the research population, men (57%) are overrepresented compared to women (43%). This is mainly due to the large number of single males in the studied population.
- Family composition is unknown for a large part of the population (37%). Singles are apart from the residual category 'others', the largest subgroup (13.8%), followed by traditional families composed of married couples (11.32%) with children (11.90%).
- When the population is studied based on the year of application, it becomes clear that despite some slight differences all applicants of a given year (called a cohort) seem to follow the same socioeconomic trends.
- The labour market position of the research population at working age changes gradually. The picture is more or less the same for all cohorts, though some catch up faster than others. The share of the research population employed – measured by year of arrival – ranges from 0.63% (after one year) to 37.36% for the 2002 cohort in 2010.
- The low participation in the labour market of the people who arrived after 2007 is most probably due to the legal change, introducing restrictions on the labour market access of asylum seekers

- The largest share of the research population enters the labour market as a blue collar worker (up to 94%). Over time however, the share of white collar workers rises to 21% of the paid employment positions in 2010.
- The number of former asylum seekers that were employed by a local authority at the end of the research period was extremely limited: only 27 people were employed by a local authority.
- Time apparently plays an important role. The longer (former) asylum seekers are in Belgium, the more likely they are to appear on the labour market (as being employed or as unemployed) and the bigger the chance that they are no longer dependent on social welfare.

## III- Multivariate analysis: Factors influencing the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Belgium

- The analysis considered 71,768 unique persons between the age of 18 and 65.
- For the multivariate analysis, the position in the social security system (employed, unemployed, self-employed, welfare or a residual category others) was the dependent variable. Other variables used in the analysis were gender, age, family situation, place of residence, region of origin, moment of application (or year of arrival in Belgium) and legal status.
- The research population still present in the country in 2010 is heterogeneous: different regions of origin, different family positions, different ages, different legal statuses, different regions of residence and different positions in the social security system.
- A quarter of the studied population is employed at the end of the examined period (24.95%). Another quarter (24.62%) receives welfare benefits. Only a small share can be found in the unemployment statistics (5.75%) and an even smaller proportion of the population is self-employed (1.48%).
- The largest subgroup of the studied population (43.21%) is a group for which there is no specific information in the database. They are labelled 'others' in the database.
- The time spent in the country is an important variable. It correlates with the position in the social security system and defines to which category the research population belongs. But sometimes in the database information is missing and the real legal status of a few people is unknown at the beginning of their stay.
- Based on a correspondence analysis three 'profiles' or clusters can be found: a labour market cluster, a welfare cluster and an undefined cluster. These clusters are based on gross effects of the variables used (gender, region of residence, region of origin, years in the country and status) on the reference variable social-economic status.
- More men, more people living in Flanders, more residents originating from poor countries (Low Human Development Index) and more people living already for more than 7 years in the country can be found in the labour market cluster.
- The welfare cluster is constituted by people living relatively more in Wallonia, being women, and originating from a Middle Human Development Country. The people in this cluster tend to have lived a shorter time in Belgium than the people in the labour market cluster.
- The undefined cluster contains the residual social security category 'others', the legal categories 'unknown' and 'refused' and the people originating from High Human Development countries.
- To finally find out what variables contribute to the odds of being employed, unemployed or depending on social welfare, logistic regressions have been used. Subsequently, employment,

dependence on social welfare and unemployment have been used as dependent variables. We used age, gender, family composition, legal status, region of origin, place of residence and period of arrival as explanatory variables or predictors. The effects of the logistic regression analysis are net effects.

- The *age* group of persons aged between 26 and 40 is – compared to younger and older people – more likely to be found on the labour market, as workers or as unemployed. Dependence on social welfare gives the opposite image: the groups of (former) asylum seekers aged 41 or more and under 26, are more likely to depend on welfare.

- *Gender* has a similar effect. Men and women don't have the same probability of entering the labour market: for every woman, almost two men can be found working or unemployed. Dependence on social welfare is less biased, but women still have a 13% higher chance of depending on welfare.

- *The family situation* of the (former) applicants plays a crucial role. People living in a family situation (as a couple or as parents with children) are more often working than singles and are less often unemployed. Single parents however, have a 17% higher chance of being unemployed than singles, and a 20% smaller chance of being employed. The odds of being dependent on social welfare are for single parents almost twice as high as for singles. People living in a family situation (couples and especially parents with children) rely 57% to 67% less on welfare than singles. For every (former) asylum seeker living in a family situation (partner and children) that relies on social welfare, there are almost 6 single parents who depend on it.

- The most striking finding in relation to the *region of origin* is that citizens from rather poor (mainly African) countries tend to be found more often on the labour market (working or unemployed) than Eastern Europeans. The probability of finding an African employed is almost 2.5 times higher than finding an Eastern European (former) asylum seeker employed.

- A determining factor – as already illustrated in the descriptive part – is the *time people are in the country.* The longer they are in Belgium, the bigger the odds of being on the labour market (employed and certainly unemployed) and the less likely it is to find these people depending on social welfare

- The *region of residence* plays a less significant role in relation to unemployment: the odds of being unemployed are – compared to Wallonia – 11% higher in Brussels and 8% higher in Flanders. The big regional differences relate to employment and social dependency. The likelihood of finding a person employed in Flanders is almost twice as high as finding a person employed in Wallonia. Compared the latter to, the probability to find a person employed is 7% higher in Brussels. The dependency on welfare is almost a mirror of the employment situation. For every person who depends on welfare benefits in Flanders, there are 1.6 persons who depend on it in Wallonia. The probability of finding a (former) asylum seeker who depends on welfare benefits in Brussels is 3.5% lower than finding one in Wallonia.

- A final striking but nonetheless obvious finding relates to the *legal status* the (former) asylum applicants have. After applying for asylum, the status of refugee is the 'final' status. Refugees have all civil and working rights. The hypothesis could be formulated that the odds of finding them on the labour market are much higher than the probability of finding a person in another less favourable status. This is to some extent true. The probability of being employed is for people granted subsidiary protection 7% higher than for refugees and the odds of finding a person labelled 'refused' on the labour market is 18% lower. But the residual category 'others' has a 9% higher chance of being found in employment than the refugee category. The other

categories "ongoing", "undetermined" and "unknown" only have respectively 7%, 4% and 2% smaller chances of being employed. Refugees tend to be found more often in unemployment statistics than all other legal categories used in the analysis. And the same is true (with the exception of people granted the status of subsidiary protection) for welfare statistics. People under subsidiary protection are 53% more likely to receive welfare benefits than refugees. All other categories are less inclined to depend on social welfare ranging from 4% less for the "undetermined" to 46% less for the residual category "others".

## IV- Longitudinal analysis: Typology of refugees' socioeconomic careers

Up to now, analyses of the socio-economic integration of refugees have been made from a static point of view and have offered only a snapshot of the process. The CAREERS project goes beyond such a procedure and uses the concept of "migratory careers" (Martiniello and Rea 2011) as a theoretical framework.

In this approach, integration is analyzed through time series which allow a dynamic point of view, showing occupational transitions or mobility patterns. In other words, the research is based on careers and describes the evolution of refugees' positions in the labour market. The objective of this section is to classify experiences through an understanding of a full sequence of events and not merely of partial elements, as is typical in most analyses. Consequently, the research questions are:

➢ Are there any typical socioeconomic careers among recognized refugees in Belgium?

➢ What is the impact of individual characteristics on the types of careers of recognized refugees?

➢ What is the impact of institutional and economic contexts on the types of careers of recognized refugees?

To classify refugees' experiences of their labour market integration we need to know, firstly, if there are typical careers among them and, if so, how many there are. This stage produces a typology of socio-economic integration paths. As part of the second stage, we need to understand if these typical careers are characterized by a socio-economic and contextual profile.

Unlike in the other chapters, we only took recognized refugees into account. This is because of the requirement of comparability as people with refugee status have access to a larger range of rights (to the labour market, minimum social income, social housing, training, naturalization, etc.) than people who are still in the asylum procedure. To analyze professional careers we need a similar starting point that allows us to compare independent variables, which is the case for refugees when they obtain refugee status.

This section consists of four parts. The first presents the methodology used to analyze the socio-economic integration careers, namely sequence analysis, as well as defining the population and the period covered by this chapter. In the second part, we briefly discuss the sociodemographic characteristics of the selected population. The third section describes all known socio-economic careers in the selected population. The final part demonstrates the results of the sequence analysis allowing us to build a typology of careers. This section allows us to answer the research questions

and evaluate the impact of various individual and contextual factors on integration into the labour market through multivariate logistic regressions.

## Population and methodology

A career is defined as a succession of different positions in the labour market. As presented previously, in the CAREERS project the nomenclature code is derived from the Data Warehouse of the Crossroads Bank Social Security (KSZ/BCSS), which easily determines the socioeconomic position of an individual on the last day of each quarter. To analyze the careers five main categories were identified: (1) employed, (2) self-employed, (3) unemployed with benefits, (4) social welfare (5) and "other" (including unknown)[2]. We limited the divisions of the socio-economic position to these five categories for methodological reasons: in the sequence analysis, the more categories, the higher the number of careers that can be distinguished from one another and the lower the probability of obtaining a significant typology of careers (Robette 2011).

According to different methodological limits related to the data and the statistical tools, the analysis considered 4,869 unique persons who obtained a refugee status between 2003 and 2006. The data provide a quarterly employment history calendar with a four-year observation period.

## Socio-demographic characteristics

- The majority of the population was between 18 and 30 years old when they obtained refugee status.
- Men (55%) are overrepresented compared to women (45%)
- The range of nationalities was very large with more than 70 nationalities, the majority being from Caucasian countries and particularly from Russia, but also drawn from Sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Burundi)
- The gender distinction demonstrates that some of these groups consisted primarily of women rather than men, which is particularly true for women from some African countries, including Rwanda, Congo, Guinea and Burundi.
- Concerning the family situation, men are overrepresented in the single category; women, on the contrary, are overrepresented in the single parent category. Traditional families composed of married couples with children, the "parents" category, form another important subgroup for both male and women.
- The characteristics of the selected population (n=4869) differ slightly from those of all refugees who obtained their status between 2001 and 2010 (n=16524) for most of the variables (sex, gender, age, family situation, region). The main difference relates to the nationality of origin. The selected population contains –compared to all recognized refugees in the research – an overrepresentation of nationalities from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and an under-representation of refugees from the Middle East.

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[2] the vast majority of people with this status had no legal income and we believe this category mainly includes housewives or househusbands

## General overview of the careers

As explained above, the careers are distinguished by five socio-economic statuses (employed, unemployed, self-employed, social welfare and other) over a period of four years (sixteen quarters). At the moment of recognition, 57% of all refugees were in the social welfare category. This proportion decreased until the end of the follow-up period in favour of people who were active on the labour market. While at the moment of recognition of their status 19% were active (employed and unemployed), this was the case for 55% four years later. *The labour market integration improves over time*. Many refugees could be found in the heterogeneous "other" status, showing that refugees also tended to spend time in situations other than employment, unemployment, or social welfare. This "other" category (probably mainly composed of housewives or househusbands) is quite stable over time.

*Figure 2. Distribution of socio-professional statuses per quarter*
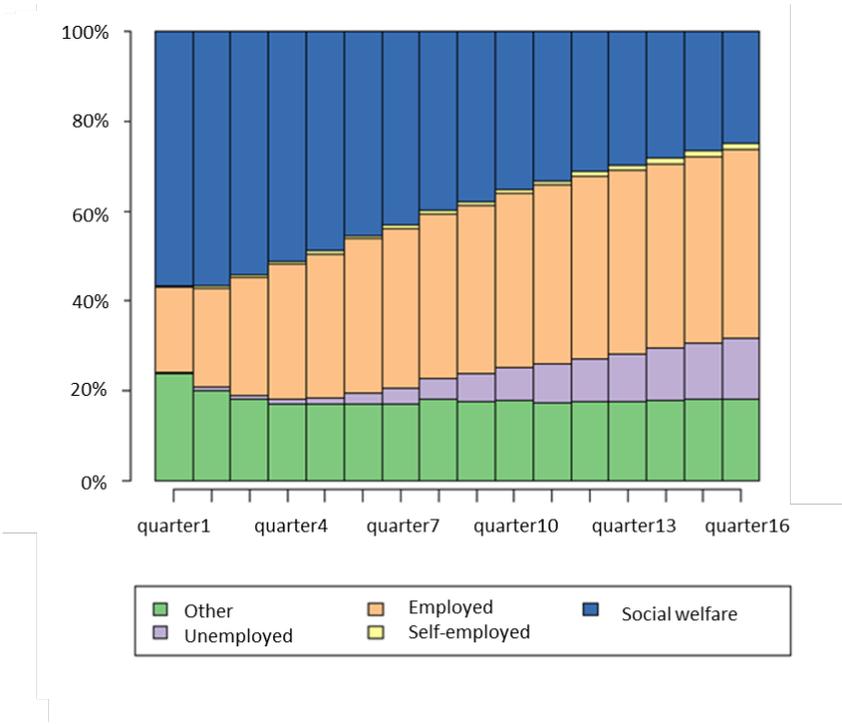


## Career typology

The production of a *typology of refugees' socio-economic careers* is based on a sequence analysis with optimal matching and cluster analysis as methodological tools.

Taking the period before and after obtaining refugee status into account, we had a typology of four different socio-economic integration careers: active career (cluster 1); gradually becoming active career (cluster 2); social welfare career (cluster 3); and an "other" career (cluster 4).

**Table 1. Socio-economic career sequences according to cluster membership**

| Cluster | | Frequencies | Female proportion | Average number of years of the asylum procedure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Active career | 34% | 34.5% | 2.3 years |
| **2** | Gradually-becoming-active career: social welfare at the beginning with employment at the end | 29% | 35% | 1.8 years |
| **3** | Social dependence career | 25% | 55% | 1.8 years |
| **4** | The "other" career | 12% | 73.5% | 1.9 years |
| | Total | 4869 | 45% | 2.years |

### *Description of the careers*

The first type is characterized almost solely by active careers, i.e. employees, self-employed or unemployed. This cluster contains 34% of the refugee population and is the largest of the four. Although for some refugees their early career involves the transition to the «other» status, on average they remain active for 79% of their career. Reliance on welfare is almost entirely absent from their career. On the other hand, this profile is also characterized by an increase over time in the proportion of unemployed. While we consider the status of receipt of unemployment benefits as an active status on the labor market (as one must have worked to receive unemployment benefit), a minority of people who have paid employment did not keep it. Indeed, on average over the last four quarters, 12% of people who had this type of career were unemployed.

The second cluster, containing 29% of the refugee population, is characterized by an active process of integration into the labour market after obtaining refugee status, which seems to be a catalyst for employment. People of this cluster began their careers primarily with social welfare but as time went on, the proportion of those who worked increased. While at the beginning of their careers 76% received social welfare and 10% were active workers, four years later the proportion of social welfare recipients was only 5%, and 90% were active workers. This profile is also characterized by an increase in the proportion of unemployed.

The third type, *social welfare career,* covers people who were not active in the labour market, either before or after obtaining refugee status, and are characterized by an almost complete dependency on social welfare. On average, the refugees in this cluster were welfare dependent during 89% of their observed careers. This type of career is experienced by 25% of the selected population.

The fourth type of career is a kind of residual category, *other career*, and includes those refugees who were neither active in the labour market nor dependent on social welfare. This type is characterized by a quasi-unique "other" status. On average, the refugees in this cluster had this status for 82% of their careers. Some people may have received welfare benefits during parts of their careers.

### *Description of the profile*

The differentiation between these careers is strongly influenced by *individual characteristics* and the Belgian institutional context.

First of all, women are more likely than men to find themselves in an inactive labour market career (clusters 3 and 4). This outcome also corresponds to the difference in activity rates between men and women on the labour market for Belgians and other foreigners. Men on the other hand are more likely than women to have an active career (cluster 1) and experience gradual integration into the labour market (cluster 2).

Age also has an impact on active careers (cluster 1) and social welfare (cluster 3): the probability of having an active career increased until a certain age and then decreased until retirement (a curvilinear relationship); similarly the probability of a social welfare career decreased with age and increased until retirement.

The *family status* of women strongly influenced their type of career, which is mainly due to the fact that there were very few single men with children among the studied refugees. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that a single woman was much less likely to have a fully active career on the labour market than a woman in a couple. Once refugee status had been recognized, single women were more likely to find a job or to experience progressive integration into the labour market: the stabilization of their legal status facilitated their active integration. Single women with children occupy the worst position. They are more likely to receive welfare throughout their careers than women in couples with or without children and single women without children.

Concerning *national origin,* refugees from Sub-Saharan countries had a greater likelihood of having an active career (cluster 1 and 2) compared to refugees from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and from the Middle East, as well as having a career of progressive insertion into the labour market compared to refugees from Central Europe.

The results for the *naturalization* during the observed career are more divided. On the one hand, having the Belgian nationality is not significantly related to an active career. For these refugees active on the labour market, naturalization will not offer additional opportunities as other factors such as having worked during the asylum procedure explain the fact of having this type of career. On the other hand, the acquisition of the Belgian citizenship is an important factor related to the other types of career and interacts with gender: having Belgian nationality is positively related to a career of progressive insertion into the labor market for man but is negatively related to a social income career for man and an "other" career for women. To explain these results, obtaining the Belgian nationality could promote progressive integration into the labor market and decrease the chances of having an inactive career as naturalization would be both a source of stability to employers and would remove some of the barriers to the labour market.

The *duration of the asylum procedure*, which as outlined in this chapter is equivalent to the time spent in Belgium in our analysis, affects the type of career that refugees experienced. Indeed, a long time spent in Belgium increased the likelihood of having an active career (cluster 1) compared to relatively short stay. Conversely, a brief stay in Belgium increased the chances of having a gradually becoming active career (cluster 2) and a social welfare career (cluster 3) compared to a longer stay. The results highlighted the critical importance of having worked during the asylum procedure to explain the careers of refugees. In particular, the results demonstrated that having worked during the asylum procedure had a positive impact on an active career (cluster 1) whereas this relationship was reversed for the other three clusters. Further analysis showed that there is a relationship

between working during the asylum procedure and the duration of the procedure. Whereas the duration of the asylum procedure was equivalent to the number of years spent in Belgium for the selected population, we interpret this result as follows: the longer a person has lived in Belgium, the higher are his/her chances of finding a job during the asylum procedure and the more likely he/she was to have an active career in the labour market after being granted refugee status.

*The context* also influences the categorization of recognized refugees' careers. The economic environment in Flanders, with a lower unemployment rate than the other two regions, offers employment opportunities, improving recognized refugees' chances on the labour market. Without having tangible evidence in this research, we can also assume that policies such as *inburgering* (civic integration of immigrants) in Flanders contribute on the one hand to an improvement in language skills through language courses; and on the other hand, through monitoring, to the promotion of contacts with Belgian and Flemish institutions and the development of useful skills in the job search. But the impact of the context is especially important for women. This confirms the very sensitive situation of female refugees and asylum seekers who face difficulties finding a place on the labour market.

Even though refugees still face major difficulties after obtaining their status (finding decent housing, finding a job, following vocational training, learning languages), *they slowly enter the labour market. After four years, the employment rate of refugees rises sharply*. Specific groups however, like single mothers, remain dependent on social welfare. Over time, the research population acquires better qualifications such as better language proficiency, a better knowledge of the institutional setting and they are more able to mobilize their (new) social networks.

## Main conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Migration is a global phenomenon and many countries are struggling to deal with it. One of the gateways to the EU is the asylum procedure, based on the 1951 convention. Although asylum and immigration have been moved under the Amsterdam Treaty from the "third pillar" – where unanimous decisions by all member states through an intergovernmental decision – making process are required – to the "first pillar" where the EU institutions play a larger role, the rules, regulations and practices differ all over Europe. The labour market situation is not alike in the different EU countries and although some counties have similar social security regimes, the daily practice differs among the distinct EU countries. Some member states attract relatively more economic migrants; some attract less economic migrants and relative more asylum seekers, such as Belgium.

The goal of this research project was to study the evolution of the socioeconomic position of people who applied for asylum in Belgium in the period between 2001 and 2010 and who were still residing in the country at the end of the research period. The study compares the integration on the labour market of asylum seekers in procedure to those who have been granted the status of refugees and aims at identifying factors that foster and hinder de socio-economic integration of these populations.

In summary, the analysis of the 'careers' of asylum seekers and refugees towards work in Belgium shows the same wide variation in the labour market position of the different groups of immigrants that can be witnessed throughout Europe and by extension across the OECD (OECD 2009). All over Europe, immigrants' labour market outcomes tend to lag behind those of the native-born and in

Belgium even farther than in other OECD countries. No single aspect seems to be responsible: many factors intervene in the labour market integration process and there is no single policy measure that can be, by itself, a key for success. This study however reveals some key factors in the labour market integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

*Time* plays a crucial role and greatly contributes to the changing socioeconomic position of the new immigrants. The different types of statistical analysis (descriptive, multivariate and longitudinal analysis) that have been used to analyze the distinct (sub) populations of the database are all in line with each other and with other research such as the study carried out by Caritas International (2014) on a sample of refugees in Belgium. The longer a person is present in the country, the more likely that person is to find a job and cease dependence on social welfare. More 'time' implies that the asylum seekers (and refugees) could adapt themselves better to the new environment, to the circumstances. Time is needed to learn more about the country and the labour market. Time implies the possibility that refugee status or a status of subsidiary protection has been granted, which gives a sense of security and more social rights. Time means the possibility to learn the local language and to create and develop a social network.

The fact of *having a job soon*, of being present on the labour market in an early stage apparently stimulates further labour market participation.    After a decade of being present in the country, a steadily growing share of the research population finds a job and an increasing number of people are no longer dependent on social welfare, but all new migrants *remain extremely vulnerable*. Research suggests that they still face difficulties finding decent housing, finding a job, finding a job matching their qualifications, following vocational training, learning languages, recognition of their diploma… (OECD 2009).

Not all groups however face the same problems. *Gender and the family situation* are factor to be taken into account. People living in a family situation are apparently slightly better off than e.g. singles, but single parent families (mainly headed by women) are definitely much worse off. They are more dependent on welfare benefits than other groups and have more difficulties in finding their way to the labour market.

A surprising finding was the fact that asylum seekers and refugees from poor, *African countries* have a better chance in finding a job. It is hard to assess why they have higher probability than e.g. former residents from the Balkans or Central Asia. Some hypotheses can be formulated. Language e.g. can play a role. Many Africans speak French (or English) and are in an advantageous situation having probably better communication skills. The fact that there is already a long standing community of Africans in Belgium may also contribute to an explanation. The social network may be beneficial when looking for a job. One should however not overrate its significance. The unemployment rate of the African community in Belgium is in general quite high. The odds calculated above give no information on the quality of the job, nor on the level of employment. It might be possible that many Africans, as is the case in France (Simon and Steichen 2014) are overqualified.

Another striking observation is the fact that the *legal status* of the former asylum seekers is not more differentiating. Contrary to what can be expected, people who were recognized as refugees didn't have much better labour market chances than the other statuses in the research population. Some researches argue that asylum seekers are more to work for 3D Jobs (Dirty, Dangerous, and

Demeaning). When asylum seekers are granted refugee status, they start looking for a job in line with their qualifications. A similar process could be observed in the study *Before and After* (Marx et al. 2008) after undocumented migrants obtained a regularization of their residence permit.

The existing *regional differences* between Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia are mirrored in the research population, but the differences within the research population are bigger than the differences in the general population.

The researched population is on a long and winding road to the labour market. The (former) asylum seekers studied steadily integrate into the labour market. The picture that can be drawn is a picture of a slow but steady integration dynamic. The population is quite heterogeneous; as much in characteristics as in careers. Nevertheless, it is possible – based on the observations made above and the literature used in this project – to make some recommendations that can contribute to further policy development :

1. The impact of *age and gender* on labour market chances in the research population seems to be similar to the impact of age and gender in the whole population.

> *As a consequence, it seems reasonable that this issue is addressed through an inclusive policy strengthened by accompanying measures. The extremely vulnerable position of (female) single parents justifies however also a targeted approach. Single parents can be a priority target group for the federal, regional and local reception and integration policies. Inactive immigrant mothers can be activated in conjunction with childcare.*

2. *Time* plays an important role. The longer a (former) asylum seeker is in the country, the better are the chances of finding a place on the labour market and the bigger the odds of not relying on social welfare anymore. People adapt to the country, they get to know the possibilities, they learn rights and regulations etc.

> *Time cannot be influenced, but the adaptation process can. A rapid integration into  the labour market seems extremely important. The question remains however how much should be invested in integration policies during an asylum procedure for people who most probably will be refused a longer stay in the country.*

3. A rapid integration into the labour market seems advantageous. To increase employment integration of refugees, people must have access to work during the asylum procedure. Facilitating this requires the development of a series of adapted policies on different levels, in different fields. Language proficiency can be attributed a key role. Some suggestions made in the OECD study *The Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and their* children (2009) can be defended on the basis of on the explicit and implicit findings of this study.

> *Link language training with early work experience. Social partners and employers can be involved in this process.*

> *Target wage subsidy schemes to immigrants and promote immigrant employment in the public service. Make sure that there is a follow up to avoid an inflow in unemployment schemes after the end of subsidized employment.*

*Promote temporary employment and temporary agency work as a stepping-stone to more stable employment for immigrants*

4. Another observation is that there are noticeable *regional differences*. The reception policies as well as the labour market policy and labour market conditions vary.

> *Even though we are not able to assess the impact of regional integration policies, there is a necessity to develop accompanying policies during the procedure and moreover after the refugee status has been granted, to assist people in their integration career.*

> *A suggestion might be that – despite the existing initiatives – more Be invested in the social integration of people who received their refugee status (follow up, career counselling) as* requested *by some NGO's. Refugees must be a specific and priority target group in integration policies, vocational training and employment supporting activities.*

5. An important blind spot in the research is the fact that *no data on the level of education or professional experience* was at hand. The level of education is an important variable in relation to the chances of entering the labour market. The research had no data on this issue, but it is clear that even for those people holding a degree, entrance to  the labour market is all too often hampered by the lack of recognition.

> *The development and/or use of a  standardized instrument to assess the qualifications and skills of new migrants would beneficial for the development of a rapid labour market integration policy.*

> *Enhance transparency regarding the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications and skills. A systematic recognition of the diploma obtained in the country of origin is a particularly important for refugees as pointed out by many NGO's (Caritas International 2014). This allows making better use of the skills of migrants and leads thereby to a win-win situation.*

> *Enhance accreditation of prior learning*

6. It is impossible to know – using administrative databases – to what extent new migrants are overqualified, carrying out 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning).

> *Further qualitative research is needed to have a better idea of why certain groups are more inclined to enter the labour market.*

7. Regarding the data collection on asylum seekers: the National Register could improve the recording of data.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY