

# Chapter 5

## Unequal Access to Support and Privileges



*When we travel, we hold a physical document that tells us of our chosen destination. We hold a general wish and try to follow that path, but uncertain obstacles may meet us along the way. We cannot control the unexpected which continuously shapes our destination.*

Chiharu Shiota, Accumulation: Searching for Destination, 2014–2016, text accompanying a sculpture at Basel Art 2016

This chapter focuses on the situation and experience of immigrants, and more specifically, on the support that they receive when they relocate to Switzerland. By analysing survey data and biographies, I examine the “resource environments” (Levitt, Lloyd, Mueller, & Viterna, 2015) that individuals moving under different circumstances have access to. In this way, I seek to further deconstruct the notion of “highly skilled migrants” by showing how different migration trajectories can lead to very different outcomes in terms of individuals’ social positioning and opportunities, regardless of education level or professional experience.

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Section 5.1 is based on a chapter written in collaboration with Fabian Santi for the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey book. See: Sandoz, L., Santi, F. (2019) Who Receives more Help? The Role of Employer Support in Migration Processes. In: Steiner L, Wanner P. (eds) Migrants and Expats: The Swiss Migration and Mobility Nexus. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. I wish to thank Fabian Santi for his support with the data analysis.

A modified version of Section 5.2 was published by Taylor and Francis on 24 July 2018. See: Sandoz, L. (2018). Understanding access to the labour market through migration channels. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (Published online: 24 Jul 2018), 1–20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1502657>. I also presented an earlier version in collaboration with Metka Hercog at the 24th World Congress of Political Science. See: Sandoz, L. (2016). Understanding Migration Policies from Migrants Perspective. 24th World Congress of Political Science, Poznań, 23–28 July 2016, <http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/view/50601>. The research design was developed in collaboration with Metka Hercog, who also conducted some of the interviews for this section. The analysis and writing were carried out entirely by the author.

While several authors emphasise the importance of the interplay between individual stories and institutional structures in migration research (Cranston, Schapendonk, & Spaan, 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen & Nyberg Sørensen, 2013; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), few of them go so far as to compare various migration situations and institutional embeddedness. Most studies focus on one type of mobility (e.g. intra-company transfers, mobility through recruitment agencies, mobility through ethnic networks), thus limiting the possibilities to compare access to support between immigrants with different characteristics and migration reasons. Moreover, the research on migration intermediaries tends to focus either on high-level professionals moving within a company (Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, & Hall, 2010; Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Hall, & Hewitson, 2009; Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2015) or on immigrants moving under precarious conditions, sometimes on the margins of legality (Baird & Van Liempt, 2016; Salt & Stein, 1997). Other categories have received less attention, even though they constitute an important share of international migration flows. Finally, although an increasing number of refugees arriving in Europe tend to have a high level of education (Sandoz, 2016b), refugees are rarely the focus of studies on highly skilled migration, nor are “highly skilled migrants” the focus of studies on asylum (Sontag, 2018). Yet I argue that a comparison of contrasting cases enables a better understanding of the way migration situations structure different opportunities and obstacles for individuals. Such comparisons underscore the constructed nature of the categories used to describe immigrants because they show that these categories rely more on immigrants’ institutional environments than on their individual characteristics.

Levitt et al. use the concept of “resource environment” to describe the social protection that mobile individuals can access based on their personal characteristics and support from both formal and informal institutions. According to these authors, people on the move rely on four main sources of support: support from states (which can include a person’s country of origin and of residence, as well as supra-national institutions); support from profit-oriented actors (for instance employers and service agencies); support from third-sector actors (such as non-profit NGOs, associations, and networks); and support from individual social ties (relatives, friends etc.). Different individuals have access to different forms of support:

An individual’s resource environment would include all of the possible resources available to [the migrant] from the four potential sources of protection [the state, the market, the third sector, and individual social ties] based on his or her individual characteristics. These individual characteristics include his or her nation of origin, where he or she resides, the breadth and depth of his or her social networks, in addition to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, and education. (Levitt et al., 2015, p. 6)

One of the advantages of this concept is that it takes into account the complex relations between analytical levels (economic, legal, societal etc.) while maintaining an actor-centred perspective. It also highlights the important role played by institutions in individual trajectories. Finally, it enables a consideration of “how at least some individuals are embedded in transnational social fields, and how multiple state and non-state actors protect and provide for them” (p. 3). This concept thus brings

together several of the ideas developed so far and provides a framework for discussing the impact of intermediaries on immigrants' experiences and trajectories.

"Migration channel" is another interesting concept for analysing the interplay between intermediaries and immigrants. First developed by Allan Findlay (1990), who later explored specific case studies with co-authors (e.g. Findlay & Garrick, 1990; Findlay & Li, 1998; Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013), this concept focuses on the role of private-sector actors in structuring migration opportunities for professionals in different labour markets. More recently, the term "migration channels" has been used extensively in the context of the so-called "migration crisis", as thousands of people try to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean, often dying on the way (Sandoz, 2016a). Various organisations, researchers, and activists have criticised the lack of protection for people who seek refuge in Europe, and have advocated for the creation of safe "migration channels" (Collett, Clewett, & Fratzke, 2016; European Commission, 2016; OHCHR, 2016). In this context, "channel" has come to refer to the legal pathways that regulate access to territories. The German term *Migrationskanal* also conveys the idea of migration opportunities structured by state policies (Panagiotidis, 2015; Parusel & Schneider, 2012). This concept thus reflects the impact that both private-sector actors and state policies and practices have on immigrants' trajectories.

In this chapter, I use the term migration channel in a broad sense to include all the different actors that Peggy Levitt and her co-authors mention in the construction of resource environments. I compare the situation of individuals moving under different circumstances in order to analyse the impact of these channels on their experiences. I define migration channels as mobility pathways structured by various actors (states, profit-oriented actors, third-sector actors, individual social ties) that provide access to specific resource environments. Of course, I am aware that each individual's mobility story is unique. However, I observe similarities in terms of the support that certain immigrants received from intermediaries, as well as the opportunities and obstacles they encountered. Speaking of migration channels thus enables further analysis of the role of intermediaries in the stories of the interviewees. My main question for this chapter is:

How are support and privileges distributed among migrants, and how do they affect mobility experiences and trajectories?

## 5.1 A Statistical Approach to Relocation Support

The resource environment of immigrants relies to a large extent on the support that they can obtain from institutional actors and from their private social network (Levitt et al., 2015). Access to support, however, is unevenly distributed between groups. Among other variables, personal characteristics such as gender, nationality, race and class structure the way individuals are perceived by others, build their network, mobilise resources and develop strategies to solve their problems (Crenshaw, 1991).

I have already discussed in this book the idea that “immigrants” are typically represented as poor, ethnically marked low skilled people, while “expats” tend to be imagined as white, wealthy, highly skilled individuals who easily travel from one country to another according to their job (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cranston, 2017; Favell, Feldblum, & Smith, 2006). I will now show that these stereotypical representations, although problematic in many respects, reflect nonetheless the global inequalities and power relations that currently structure migration processes.

This section uses data collected as part of the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey on recent immigrants from the main immigration countries in Switzerland to analyse differences in the way relocation support is distributed between immigrants. I build on the observation that relocation support not only facilitates adjustment to a new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015) but also motivates and enables a move (Groutsis, Van den Broek, & Harvey, 2015; Harvey, Groutsis, & Van den Broek, 2017; Van den Broek, Harvey, & Groutsis, 2016). Support is particularly important for the non-EU and non-EFTA nationals who want to migrate to Switzerland because the restrictive admission system limits access to residence permits for this category of people. Labour migrants from these countries can only be admitted if they are supported by an employer. In addition, candidates for family reunification need support from a family member with a right to stay in Switzerland (Amarelle & Nguyen, 2010). Analysing the role of support agents for recent migrants in Switzerland thus enables us to better understand how opportunities and obstacles to mobility and social inclusion are constructed.

I focus in particular on the support of employers because these actors have so far received little attention in migration research. Despite a huge body of literature on the impact of social ties on migration processes (Haug, 2008; Massey & España, 1987; Ryan, 2011), the important role of employers has so far been largely overlooked. Yet, Many countries, including Switzerland, currently use demand-driven systems and partly delegate the task of selecting migrants to employers (Chaloff & Lemaitre, 2009; Parsons, Rojon, Samanani, & Wettach, 2014). In these systems, the employers are responsible for applying for the admission of the candidates they want to hire, and they thus contribute to defining the “wanted” migrants who can obtain access to the national territory and labour market (Gelatt, 2017). Hence, examining the type of support that different groups of migrants receive from their employer is an interesting approach to assessing who obtains more-privileged access to migration in the context of a demand-driven system such as that of Switzerland. It indicates whom the employers are most willing to attract in spite of the administrative hurdles of the admission process. Furthermore, such an examination hints at who obtains smoother access to Swiss territory because the relocation support provided by employers also aims to facilitate transitions between places and to ease adjustment processes (Ravasi et al., 2015; Tissot, 2018).

The statistical analysis presented in this section shows that the employers who actively support the relocation of their (future) employees tend to prefer highly educated men from rich anglophone countries over highly educated women and

people from other countries. These findings highlight great differences in the kind of resource environment that immigrants can access depending on their personal characteristics. They add to the argument already developed in the previous chapter that, contrary to economic discourses that conceive skills as marketable products (Urciuoli, 2008), representations of “highly skilled migrants” involve more than a simple evaluation of a person’s competences. Beyond what a person can do, what a person is or looks like and the social, political and economic contexts in which this person moves influence the kind of resources and privileges that s/he can access. Moreover, the research stresses the central role of employers in structuring specific migration channels for some workers.

As already mentioned in the introductory part to this book, the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey was conducted during the autumn of 2016 and focused on people from German, French, Italian, English, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries who arrived in Switzerland after June 2006. One of the main objectives of the survey was to include a sufficient number of highly educated immigrants to enable representative statistical analyses of their situation, while also enabling comparisons between and across education levels. Although the survey is not limited to highly educated people, it includes nationalities with a high share of immigrants with a tertiary-level diploma in order to ensure the presence of a sufficient number of respondents with a higher education among our data. All the respondents are foreign-born people who migrated to Switzerland as adults. The survey only includes holders of a resident permit (B), settlement permit (C), short-term permit (L), as well as diplomats and international civil servants. It excludes asylum seekers and temporarily admitted persons, mainly for practical reasons because the questionnaire was not adapted to their type of migration trajectory and life situation, and because this population was more difficult to reach. Nevertheless, I analyse the situation of people seeking protection in the second section of this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

Although supported by the ethnographic study, a quantitative analysis serves as the basis for the discussion in this section. To ensure the validity of my results I collaborated closely with a statistician, Fabian Santi, who coached me on methodological issues and created the tables that support my analysis. The survey is representative, meaning that it is weighted to represent the whole migrant population in Switzerland that is within the scope of the survey. The numbers and ratios presented are computed taking these weights into account. They thus represent the expected values based on the whole population within the scope of the survey.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A detailed description of the survey methodology and development is available in a report written by Ilka Steiner (2017).

<sup>2</sup>We applied chi-square tests of independence after re-weighting the data using normalised weights in order to confirm the relevance of the differences observed between groups. P-values are reported at the 5%, 1% or 0.1% level. Since the results of the statistical tests using this method are approximate, a conservative approach should be taken in evaluating the power of the statistical tests.

The analysis draws on two main sets of questions about forms and sources of support received by immigrants. Already existing surveys served as the basis for formulating the questions so as to enable comparisons. In the present case, several of the questions I used for this analysis are similar to those present in the survey conducted by Claudio Ravasi, Xavier Salamin and Eric Davoine about the relocation practices of multinational employees in Switzerland (Ravasi et al., 2015). The questions included:

When moving to Switzerland, did you receive any support in one of the following areas?  
(Multiple answers are possible)

- Allowance for or payment of moving costs
- Housing
- Dealing with administrative issues
- Allowance for or payment of language courses
- School/childcare
- Spouse/partner employment support
- Information about Switzerland
- Other support

From whom did you receive support? (Multiple answers are possible)

- Relatives in Switzerland
- Friends in Switzerland
- Business relations/colleagues in Switzerland
- Your employer
- A private institution (e.g. relocation agency)
- A public institution (e.g. federal, cantonal or communal administration)
- An online social media/website/blog
- Other<sup>3</sup>

The analysis enables me to discuss the impact of various actors on the relocation to Switzerland of recent immigrants. It complements the previous chapters by providing a broad and representative overview of the impact of market actors and personal contacts on relocation support, with a focus on the impact of employer support. Moreover, it helps situate my ethnographic data within a wider context. Based on the existing literature, on my ethnographic observations, and on a preliminary exploration of the survey data, I consider four main variables for analysing differences in terms of access to support between groups: education level, gender, nationality and professional sector. More specifically, I seek to understand which categories of people are better supported when they relocate to Switzerland. I start by describing the results of the analysis for each variable before discussing them in detail.

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<sup>3</sup>The first question (“Did you receive any support in one of the following areas?”) was asked to all the survey participants (5973 respondents). However, only the respondents who replied “yes” to at least one support category in the first question (60.1%) were asked the second question (“From whom did you receive support?”). Hence, we considered the 39.9% of filtered respondents as having replied “no” to the second question. Moreover, in the first question, the respondents had the choice between “yes”, “no” and “not applicable” for each support category. A certain number of them chose “not applicable”, in particular for the questions regarding school/childcare and spouse employment support. We assumed that they answered “not applicable” when they did not feel concerned by the question (e.g. because they had no children or partner) and we thus decided to recode these answers as “no”.

### 5.1.1 Important Variables

Not all immigrants have access to relocation support when they come to Switzerland. In the nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey, although a majority of the respondents declared that they had moved to Switzerland for professional reasons (61.6%), and more than half had obtained a job or a job offer in Switzerland before coming (52.2%), only a third reported support from an employer and nearly 40% reported no support at all. Table 5.1 shows that the employers nonetheless clearly constitute a major source of support for recent migrants in Switzerland. Respondents also relied on other actors to help organise a move, in particular personal contacts such as friends, relatives, and colleagues.

To understand better the effect of employers on relocation support, I compared people who had received support from an employer with people who had not. Table 5.2 shows that those who could rely on their employer had, in general, access to more services than those who relied on other sources of support, in particular with regard to financial support for organising their move, support for finding accommodation and dealing with administrative issues, allowances for language courses, and access to schooling or childcare. This first analysis shows that support from employers provides access to specific resources and services that are less available to immigrants who rely on other forms of support.

















**Table 5.1** General overview of the main sources of support received by immigrants to Switzerland, 2016


Did you receive any support in one of the following areas?		Percentage receiving support
Percentage declaring no support	39,9%	
Information about Switzerland	39,6%	
Dealing with administrative issues	31,6%	
Housing	23,5%	
Allowance for or payment of moving costs	17,6%	
Spouse/partner employment support (among couples n=3957)	11,8%	
School/childcare (among parents, n=3152)	11,5%	
Allowance for or payment of language courses	10,8%	
Other support	10,3%	
From whom did you receive support?		Percentage receiving support
Your employer	32,3%	
Friends in Switzerland	17,0%	
Relatives in Switzerland	11,7%	
Business relations/colleagues in Switzerland	11,6%	
A public institution (e.g. federal, cantonal or communal admin.)	9,2%	
An online social media/website/blog	7,6%	
Other	5,4%	
A private institution (e.g. relocation agency)	3,5%	


Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

Note: Few respondents mentioned private-sector institutions as a source of support. Support from relocation agencies and other private institutions, however, is often offered and financed by employers, so it is possible that some respondents who received such support mentioned their employer instead of an agency. Moreover, some employers use the services of external agents for various tasks (e.g. to obtain work authorisations from the state administration, to find an accommodation, to deal with insurance and tax issues), without the relocating employee necessarily knowing about it. Hence, it is difficult to quantify within the scope of this survey how much support really originated from private agencies

**Table 5.2** Effect of employer support: comparison between immigrants who did and did not declare support from an employer, 2016

When moving to Switzerland, did you receive any support in one of the following areas?	Percent		P-value
<b>Allowance for or payment of moving costs</b>	47,9%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=3265)
	12,5%		
<b>Housing</b>	53,0%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=3315)
	28,7%		
<b>Dealing with administrative issues</b>	65,4%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=3440)
	41,5%		
<b>Allowance for or payment of language courses</b>	29,8%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=2847)
	14,8%		
<b>School/childcare</b>	20,6%		<0.05 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=2047)
	16,4%		
<b>Spouse/partner employment support</b>	17,7%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=2474)
	26,0%		
<b>Information about Switzerland</b>	68,9%		- ( $\chi^2$ ; N=3464)
	67,1%		
<b>Other support</b>	23,5%		- ( $\chi^2$ ; N=2732)
	20,9%		

 Declaring support from their employer  
(can include other forms of support as well)

 Declaring no support from their employer  
but received support from another source

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author



















Although these findings highlight the important role played by employers in providing relocation support, they also show that such support is not available to every immigrant. It is therefore important to understand whom this support prioritises and what other resources are available to people on the move.

A comparison between these findings and a study by Ravasi et al. (2015) – who focused exclusively on relocation services for employees offered by 12 multinational companies in the French-speaking part of Switzerland – suggests differences in terms of education level, professional sector, and types of companies. Support availability is indeed much higher in their study than in ours (financial support for moving costs was available to 94.1% of respondents in their study, against 17.6% in ours). This points to a significantly higher degree of relocation support in multinational companies, which encourages examining differences between specific professional sectors. Moreover, both my ethnographic observations and the literature in this field point to the effect of nationality and gender on selection processes within companies.

I thus propose analysing the differences in access to relocation support for various categories of immigrants according to education level, gender, nationality, and professional sector. In the following paragraphs, I discuss the potential effect of different variables in terms of descriptive statistical analyses. I then use a logistic regression model to test my hypothesis.



**Table 5.3** Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by level of education, 2016

What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?	Percentage receiving support from relatives in Switzerland		Percentage receiving support from their employer	
No formal educational qualification	36,5%		12,5%	
Compulsory education	22,8%		11,8%	
Higher secondary education not giving access to universities (or similar)	15,9%		16,0%	
Vocational education and/or training	18,6%		18,9%	
High school-leaving certificate giving access to universities (or similar)	13,5%		21,0%	
Advanced technical and professional training	13,0%		28,1%	
Bachelor or equivalent	10,1%		33,9%	
Master or equivalent	5,9%		46,1%	
PhD or equivalent	3,7%		52,8%	

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

### Education

The analysis of the impact of education level on access to relocation support depicts a clear trend. Table 5.3 shows that highly educated people are more often supported by their employer than less educated people, whereas less educated people receive more support from relatives in Switzerland.<sup>4</sup> These data indicate a stronger dependency of less educated immigrants on kinship networks, whereas highly educated people more often rely on professional networks. Further analysis shows that support from friends and colleagues, however, is evenly distributed between categories and indicates no clear correlation with education level.

Nonetheless, approximately 12% of respondents without any formal education or with only primary school education received some form of support from an employer. The majority of these are men from Portugal who work in the construction sector. This suggests a demand for non-specialised workers in some sectors as well as a willingness from employers to support their relocation.

Despite these few exceptions, the analysis clearly highlights the impact of education level on the type of support received. However, I will now demonstrate that this is not sufficient to explain all differences regarding the availability of mobility support. Gender and nationality in particular play a role that is partly independent of qualifications. Furthermore, the analysis based on professional sectors reveals differences that rely more on employers’ recruitment practices than on the characteristics of relocating employees.

<sup>4</sup>For this section, given that I have to use the categories predefined by the survey, I chose to define highly educated people as people with either advanced technical and professional training or academic education. Less educated people are people with high school education, vocational training, or less.

## Gender

Gender is without any doubt indispensable to the analysis of access to support from employers. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between differences that rely on structural factors and differences that rely on direct discrimination by employers.





Although many authors have noticed an increase in the number of female-led relocations and dual-career couples over the past decades (Brookfield, 2016; Crompton & Lyonette, 2006; Harvey, Napier, & Moeller, 2009; Salamin & Davoine, 2015), our survey data clearly show that the dominant model in Switzerland is that trailing spouses of relocating employees are usually women. Although both men and women reported professional reasons to be a main motivation for migrating to Switzerland, I observe that more men migrated for professional reasons (70.4% vs 50.4%), whereas more women migrated to accompany family (29.3% vs 7.5%). Moreover, 62.9% of men already had a job in Switzerland before migrating, compared to 38.5% of women.

Of course, this situation has implications for the type of support received by men and women. In fact, the data show that men received more support than women in all of the surveyed categories except for “spouse/partner employment support”, “school/childcare”, and “other forms of support”. Women reported support from relatives in Switzerland more often than men (13.7% vs 10.2%), whereas men reported support from an employer more often than women (37% vs 26.4%).

These data clearly indicate the existence of structural gendered norms within heterosexual couples that prioritise the man’s career. This points to the importance of the intersection between gender and relationship status for structuring access to relocation support. However, it says nothing about processes of direct discrimination by employers. In fact, the descriptive analysis shows no significant difference between single men and women reporting support from employers, suggesting an absence of gender-based discrimination in this regard (Table 5.4).

Nevertheless, the literature on gendered recruitment and skill valuation processes encourages further examination of potential discrimination towards women by employers. A recent study in Sweden showed that employers are reluctant to hire women who live a long distance from the workplace, whereas men in the same situ-

**Table 5.4** Support received by immigrants from employers according to gender and relationship status, 2016

Did you receive support from your employer?	Yes		P-value
Married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland	38,9%		<0.001 ( $\chi^2$ ; N=3973)
	23,7%		
Not married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland	33,5%		- ( $\chi^2$ ; N=1999)
	32,8%		



Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author

ation encounter no such obstacles (Brandén, Bygren, & Gähler, 2018). In addition, many studies highlight the tendency of employers and other actors to evaluate skills differently depending upon whether they are stereotypically associated with men or women (Boucher, 2007; Daune-Richard, 2003; Jenson, 1991; Kofman, 2014; Phillips & Taylor, 1980; Steinberg, 1990).

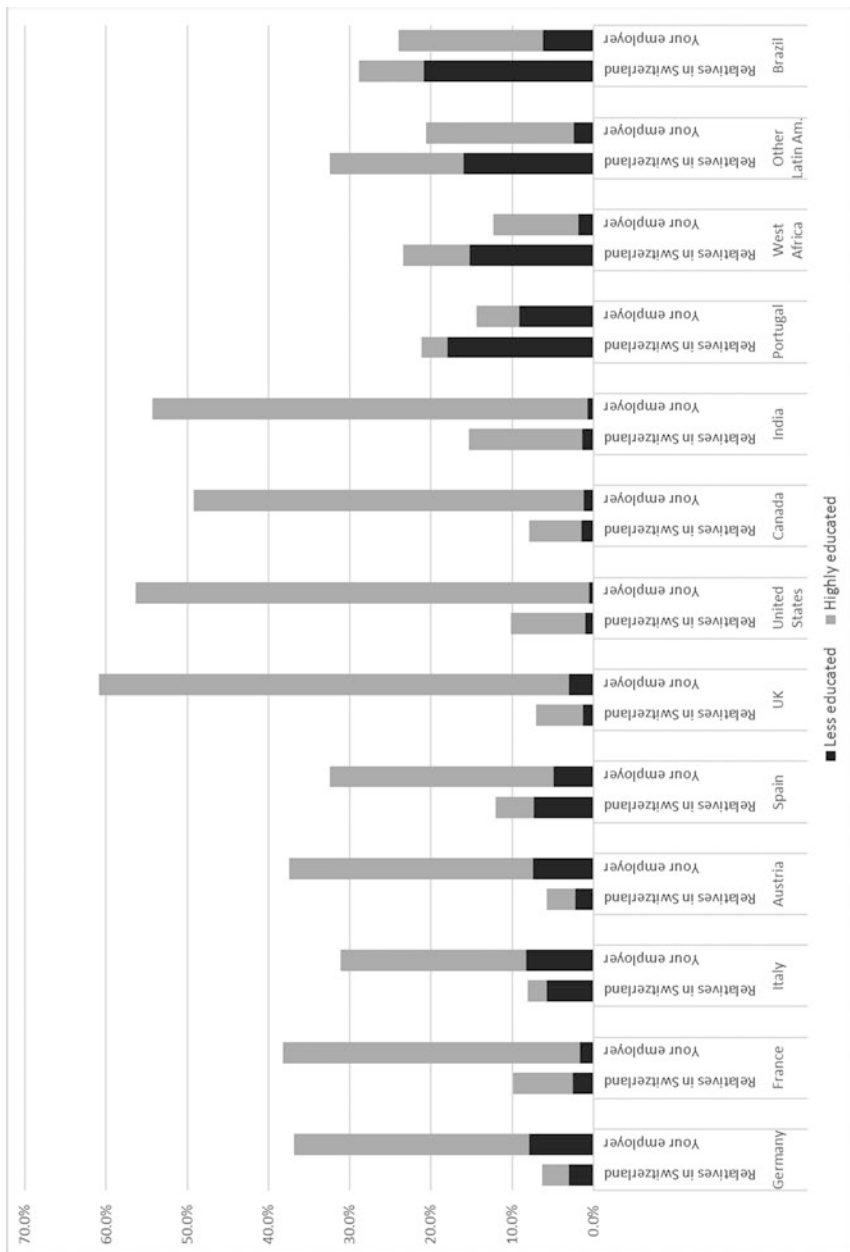
I am thus particularly interested in observing the effect of gender on employers' relocation support in a regression model that controls for other important variables. I hypothesise a difference that is more strongly connected to the interaction between the relationship status and gender than with gender alone because a large part of the observed differences between men and women appears to rely on the interaction between relationship dynamics and structural gender norms. In light of the literature, however, I would not be surprised to observe differences that suggest more direct forms of discrimination towards women from employers.

## Nationality

Opportunities to migrate, be recruited, and receive relocation support greatly vary amongst nationalities. One reason for this variation is the existence of national border regimes that discriminate between countries and regions. In Switzerland, the dual admission system that grants special rights to EU/EFTA citizens compared with citizens of the rest of the world contributes to structuring migration flows. On the one hand, people from non-EU and non-EFTA countries need special assistance from an employer if they want to come to Switzerland as labour migrants; on the other hand, this system encourages employers to prioritise recruitment from within EU/EFTA member states and only to attract specialists that they need the most from so-called third countries.

However, beyond immigration policies, the effect of social and economic processes on migrants of different nationalities must also be considered. The transferability of skills is never neutral because it reflects power relations at a global level that enable characteristics associated with certain regions and countries to be perceived as internationally more valuable than others (Sommer, 2016; Wagner & Reau, 2015). For instance, the privileged position of the English language in international environments reflects the leading economic and cultural influence of the United States (Wagner, 1998).

Consistent with this observation, the descriptive analysis of our survey data presented in Fig. 5.1 clearly shows that nationals from anglophone countries and Switzerland's neighbouring countries generally receive more support from employers than people from less economically powerful countries. This does not mean that the latter receive no support at all, but they tend to receive it more from kinship networks in Switzerland than from employers. At the same time, I observe that the recent emergence of certain developing countries as major global economic players and workforce providers in specific fields – for instance, science and information technologies in India (Hercog, 2014; Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2017; Xiang, 2007) – has produced new groups of well-supported profes-



**Fig. 5.1** Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by level of education and nationality, 2016. (Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Figure designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author)

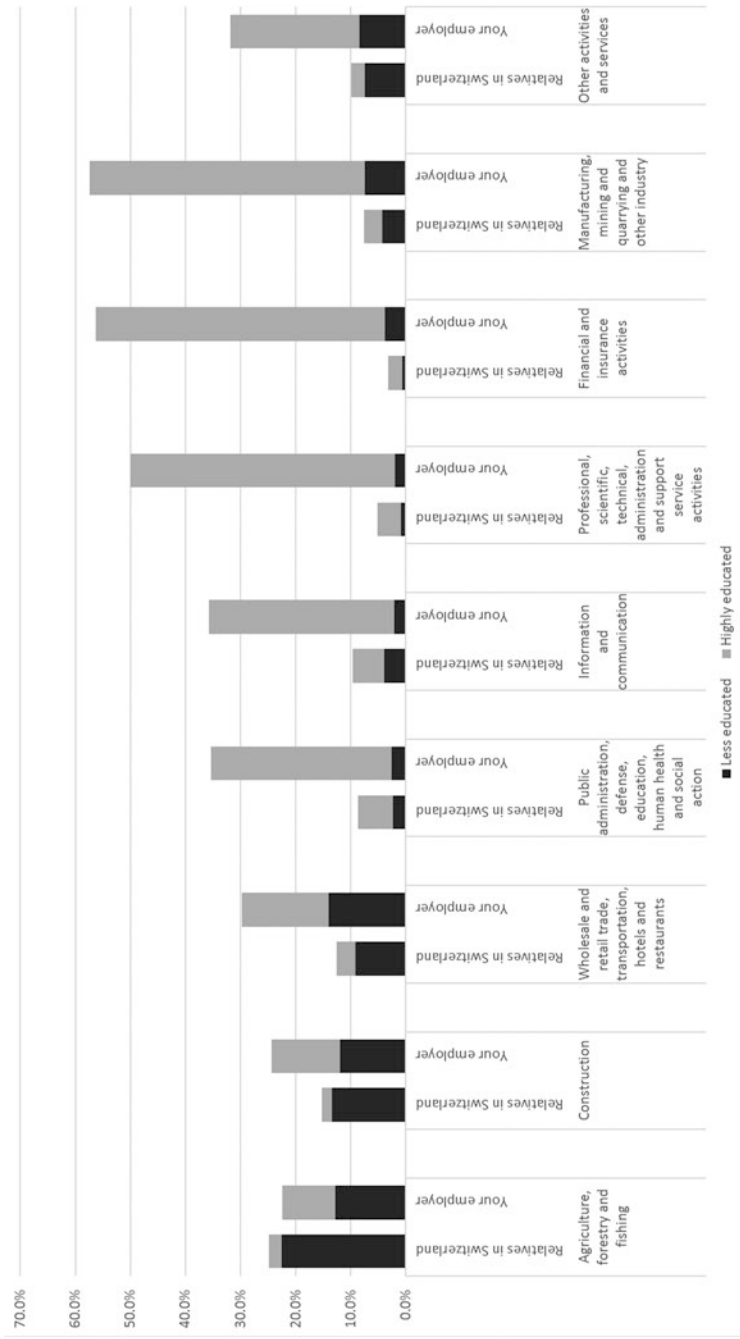
sionals moving to Switzerland. In this sense, the strict Swiss admission system for third-country nationals interacts with economic dynamics and global power relations to create new opportunities for supporting migrants of different nationalities.

The logistic regression model presented at the end of this section will go one step further and test the influence of nationality on access to support from employers while controlling for the effect of other important variables. Consistent with the previous discussion, I expect people from the United States and other anglophone countries to be particularly well supported by employers in comparison with people from less economically powerful regions such as West Africa and Latin America. However, I would also expect people from Switzerland's neighbouring countries to receive less relocation support than people from non-EU countries due to both geographical proximity and bilateral agreements regarding the free movement of persons within the region.

### Professional Sector

A final aspect that must be considered when analysing access to relocation support concerns the recruitment practices of employers in specific professional sectors. As the migration researcher Robyn Iredale notes, "The type and level of regulatory mechanisms, the level of internationalisation and the relative influence of the market, the state and the profession, and the global labour market demand/supply situation are all very significant factors in explaining migration" (2001, p. 20). In particular, how economic actors define needs and shortages in certain sectors influences the amount of resources that they are willing to invest to attract workers (Findlay et al., 2013; Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). In addition, access to support relies on the companies' internal relocation policies, which often depend upon their degree of internationalisation and/or dependence on a foreign workforce (Iredale, 2001). I thus expect to observe differences between professional sectors that have more to do with internal management decisions and priorities than with clearly identifiable economic factors.

To illustrate these aspects, Fig. 5.2 suggests that some differences in support rely on specificities within professional sectors, although I also observe a relationship between the level of education and the support received from either employers or relatives in the various sectors. For instance, respondents working in information and communication reported less support from employers than those in the manufacturing, mining, and quarrying industries, although 84.1% of people in the former have a higher education against 74.3% in the latter. Moreover, further analysis highlights specific recruitment channels within some activity sectors. For instance, nearly one third of all Indians surveyed work in the "information and communication" sector and report very high degrees of support from their employer. I also noticed that a surprisingly high share of less educated immigrants from Portugal working in construction and agriculture reported support from an employer, which indicates that specific recruitment channels connect Switzerland and Portugal in these sectors.



**Fig. 5.2** Support received by immigrants from relatives and employers by professional sector and level of education, 2016. (Source: ncer – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Figure designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author)

The logistic regression model that follows will consider different variables to analyse the impact of various professional sectors on support from employers, including the employee's hierarchical position, level of responsibility, and type of occupation within a company. I will thus control inter alia for the effect of the occupational status in the model to observe whether differences in support between professional sectors persist and, if true, which sectors offer more support to employees.

### 5.1.2 *The Preferences of Employers*

A logistic regression model enables me to further discuss the role of employers' support on relocation to Switzerland. The dependent binary variable in the logistic regression is whether respondents received support from employers when moving to Switzerland. The independent variables are education level<sup>5</sup> (highly educated (reference category), less educated), gender (men (ref), women), relationship status (married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland (ref), not married or in a relationship when coming to Switzerland), nationality,<sup>6</sup> and professional sector.<sup>7</sup> The control variables are possession of a job or a job offer in Switzerland before migration (or not), age,<sup>8</sup> presence of children (or not), and occupational status.<sup>9</sup>

To choose the categories of reference, I imagined a person who corresponds to a stereotype of an "expat" receiving particularly high degrees of support. I refer to the previously discussed critique about the construction of differences between "immigrants" and "expats" based on race, class, nationality, and gender, and examine to what extent employers reproduce these stereotypes when attributing relocation support. In light of the literature on discrimination and social inequalities, I expect the most "wanted" immigrants to be highly educated married men from anglophone

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<sup>5</sup>I define highly educated people as people with either advanced technical and professional training or an academic education. Less educated people are people with a high school education, vocational training, or less.

<sup>6</sup>The nationality includes people from Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Spain, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, India, Brazil, West Africa (Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Saint Helena, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and Principe), and other Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Guyana).

<sup>7</sup>The professional sector includes the following categories: agriculture, forestry and fishing; construction; wholesale and retail trade, transportation, hotels and restaurants; public administration, defence, education, human health and social action; information and communication; professional, scientific, technical, administration, and support service activities; financial and insurance activities; manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and other industry; and other activities and services.

<sup>8</sup>The age is taken as 2018 minus the year of birth, as given in the survey, and as a whole number.

<sup>9</sup>Occupational status includes the following categories: self-employed workers; company owners; relatives employed in a family business; directors or board members and/or with managerial responsibility; people employed without managerial responsibility; people employed in a protected workshop (except support staff); apprentices; and PhD students.

countries working in socially valued sectors and occupying managerial responsibilities. I am particularly interested to observe how these parameters influence access to employers' support in a model that controls for all other variables.

The results of the logistic regression are presented in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5** Support received by immigrants from employers by education level, gender, relationship status, nationality, and professional sector, 2016

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
<b>Level of education</b> (ref = highly educated)			
Less educated	-0.80***	0.09	0.45
<b>Gender</b> (ref = man)			
Woman	-0.43***	0.10	0.65
<b>Relationship status</b> (ref = in a relationship)			
Not in a relationship	-0.17 <sup>+</sup>	0.10	0.84
<i>Interaction term (gender * relationship status)</i>	0.55***	0.15	1.73
<b>Nationality</b> (ref = US)			
Germany	-1.35***	0.32	0.26
France	-1.54***	0.32	0.21
Italy	-1.17***	0.32	0.31
Austria	-1.36***	0.36	0.26
Spain	-1.20***	0.35	0.30
Portugal	-1.83***	0.33	0.16
UK	-0.40	0.36	0.67
Canada	-0.74	0.48	0.48
India	-0.13	0.43	0.88
West Africa	-2.12***	0.53	0.12
Other Latin American Countries	-1.23**	0.40	0.29
Brazil	-1.21**	0.44	0.30
Other	-2.06***	0.52	0.13
<b>Professional sector</b> (ref = financial and insurance activities)			
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	-0.37	0.32	0.69
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry	0.27	0.17	1.32
Construction	-0.45**	0.18	0.64
Wholesale and retail trade, transportation, hotels and restaurants	-0.29 <sup>+</sup>	0.17	0.75
Information and communication	-0.81***	0.19	0.45
Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities	-0.19	0.17	0.82
Public administration, defence, education, human health and social action	-0.61***	0.16	0.55
Other activities and services	-0.38*	0.16	0.68

<sup>+</sup> p < .1. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001

Model controlled for possession of a job or a job offer in Switzerland before migration, age, presence of children and occupational status. The accuracy of the model is 71.3%, for 4347 observations. The Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> is 0.259

Source: nccr – on the move Migration-Mobility Survey 2016. Weighted results. Table designed by Fabian Santi in collaboration with the author



The effect of the education level is, as expected, highly significant. With all other variables being equal, the probability of receiving support from an employer is approximately halved for less educated people compared with highly educated people. However, the model also shows that education level is by far not the only relevant variable to explain access to employers' support. In particular, the effect of most nationalities is higher than the effect of the education level, indicating that a low educated US American has, for instance, a higher probability of receiving support than a highly educated West African.

The effect of gender is significant and indicates a clear disadvantage for women concerning access to employers' support. According to the model, women have an approximately 35% lower probability of receiving support than men. However, this disadvantage is specific to women in relationships who relocate with a partner; men in relationships who relocate with a partner experience no significant disadvantage. Single women and men report similar levels of relocation support from employers. Hence, when all other variables are equal, women in relationships receive less support from employers than single women or men in general.

Nationality strongly affects access to employers' support. As expected, US nationals occupy a particularly favourable position because they receive more support than any other nationalities except for people from the United Kingdom, Canada, and India, for whom the results are not significantly different. The more disadvantaged nationalities with respect to employers' support are West African and Portuguese citizens, who appear to be six times less likely to receive support from employers compared to US Americans even if their qualifications, field, and occupational status are similar. It is interesting that the model does not clearly differentiate between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals. As expected, people from Switzerland's neighbouring countries receive relatively little support, but this is also true for people from West Africa and Latin America. In contrast, English-speaking people from both EU/EFTA and third countries (except West Africans) have a clear advantage in accessing employers' support.

Differences between professional sectors are less pronounced than for the other variables. However, people working in the financial sector occupy a particularly favourable position for accessing employers' support. In contrast, people with state-related professions (public administration, defence, education, human health and social action) and jobs that necessitate specific local skills (information and communication) are approximately 50% less likely to be supported by their employer. The sectors that most notably rely on low qualified migrant workers (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and construction) also appear to invest less in relocation support.

### ***5.1.3 The Mechanisms of Inequality***

The statistical analysis presented above investigated the role of employers in providing support to immigrants. To the extent that relocation support is a tool that enables employers to attract economically profitable employees, observing which

categories of people receive more support gives us information about who has more power to negotiate advantageous relocation conditions and, in this sense, represents a more “wanted” category for profit-oriented actors.

One important finding is that employers grant less relocation support to women in relationships compared with men and single women. Traditional representations of gender roles thus interact with corporate systems and mobile ways of life, influencing the type of resources that certain individuals can access. This finding reinforces the argument introduced by Brandén et al. (2018) that employer recruitment choices contribute to the trailing spouse phenomenon by favouring the relocation of men over women. It adds to this argument by pointing to the crucial importance of the interaction between gender and relationship status and by suggesting the existence of a dynamic that specifically disadvantages partnered women.

These results encourage a closer look at the relationship between gender, work, and mobility. In the previous chapter, I described the type of extremely mobile and flexible lifestyle that some companies impose on employees. In this context, dual careers and family life can become very complicated to manage. Similarly, Florian Tissot (2016) concludes from his research that most highly mobile couples make a choice at some point between the career of one partner and the time they invest in their family. Reconciling both is nearly impossible, because equally investing in two careers in a context of high mobility necessitates time-consuming transnational arrangements that leave little time for family life. For this reason, many families choose to promote the career of one partner, generally the man. The intersection between international corporate practices, gender norms, and mobile lifestyles thus contributes to reproducing gendered divisions of domestic tasks.

Yet the findings of the logistic regression suggest that employers’ preferences contribute to exacerbating this phenomenon. During my ethnographic research, I observed that employers tend to worry that a relocation will fail if a spouse is not satisfied with their new situation (Salamin & Hanappi, 2014). The human resources manager of a bank illustrates this situation:

The man who works for us, if his wife is not happy, the children are a bit lost at school and everything, it’s not going to work. So you know that if you want to keep them, you have to organise a complete relocation of the family with all the proper rules. It costs you an arm and a leg, you’re not sure that it will succeed. (personal communication, 11 April 2015)

The interviewee explicitly refers to a situation in which the man leads and the woman follows. He mentions the difficulty of keeping a new employee if their partner remains unemployed. He also explains that the costs of moving both partners are particularly high and tacitly suggests that if employees leave shortly after relocation, the company loses their investment. In situations where the candidate for relocation is a woman and the trailing partner is a man, employers might be even more reluctant to invest in relocation because the risk that an unemployed male partner would be unhappy and want to leave are higher due to gender norms (Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Mancini-Vonlanthen, 2016).

This is problematic because employers who are reluctant to support partnered female employees also increase the risk that the relocation will fail. As other authors have shown, corporate support has a positive effect on accompanying partners' adjustment and well-being (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001; Mancini-Vonlanthen, 2016). By providing less support to accompanied women, employers create a self-fulfilling prophecy by lowering the probability of a successful relocation, compared with male-led relocations. This finding calls for more awareness about this phenomenon as well as for more research on couples in which the woman leads the relocation (Cangià, 2017; Punnett, Crocker, & Stevens, 1992).

Furthermore, the data clearly show that employers do not treat all nationalities similarly. This is not surprising, since the Swiss migration system creates different admission requirements for EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals. Nevertheless, the differences are only loosely connected to immigration regulations. For instance, although both North America and West Africa are considered "third regions" in Switzerland, the probability of receiving support from an employer is approximately eight times lower for West Africans than for US Americans, even when they have similar levels of education, work in similar professional sectors, and have similar occupational status. Furthermore, the fact that workers from West African and Latin American countries have on average a similar likelihood of receiving support from employers compared with most EU/EFTA nationals is surprising because the former category of people is supposed to be more strictly selected by employers than the latter in the current admission system. The absence of clear differences between these categories thus suggests a disadvantage for nationals from these regions because the support of an employer is much more crucial for them than for Europeans due to the restrictive dual immigration system.

Finally, the analysis points to the importance of considering differences between activity sectors. It shows that people with similar characteristics receive different forms of support depending upon their job. The resource environment of immigrants is thus connected to some extent to the field in which they work. Moreover, the survey analysis highlights a preference for certain nationalities in some fields. This finding is in line with my ethnographic research, which showed that the search methods, contacts, and preferences of professional recruitment agents directly influence the selection of employees in some sectors. Specific recruitment channels make professional migration more accessible for some categories of people than for others based on nationality, biography, professional background, and social characteristics rather than on skills.

To conclude, the analysis indicates the existence of migration channels structured by global economic relations, national admission systems, corporate practices, and social representations. If employers appear to be the central drivers in these channels, other forms of support should not be overlooked. In particular, personal networks can play an important supporting role. Furthermore, the analysis draws attention to the importance of interactions between state policies and employ-

ers' practices for structuring migration channels and defining more or less "wanted" categories of immigrants. This indicates the prevalent influence of political borders on individual choices, as well as the equally prevalent importance of business practices and representations. While globalisation has in no way created a "borderless world" (Ohmae, 1999), this analysis shows that the internationalisation of companies have created new possibilities for firms to recruit abroad, while those who are perceived as less valuable have more difficulty accessing corporate relocation support.

## 5.2 A Migration Channel Approach to Privileges

The previous section discussed the role of employers in providing support to some categories of migrants based on individual markers of difference such as level of education, nationality, gender, relationship status, and professional sector. This section follows a similar line of thought: it focuses on migration channels that are first defined by state policies but that also involve intermediaries from the private sector. In contrast to the previous section, however, I do not focus here on individual markers of difference. Rather, I add another layer of complexity to the analysis by investigating how different institutional contexts structure different opportunities and obstacles for individuals. I examine the resource environments associated with these institutional contexts and show how they construct categories of "highly skilled migrants" with access to different forms of support and privileges. I am aware that these institutional contexts interact with individual markers of difference, but I argue that it is fruitful to conceive them as specific units of analysis, which contribute to the construction of differences between individuals.

The analysis in this section builds on the stories of tertiary educated individuals who migrated for different reasons and sought employment after their move. Selecting my interviewees, however, raised conceptual issues during the research process, since I did not want to define "highly skilled migrants" a priori. I wanted to remain as open as possible to different situations in order to show the effect of resource environments on individual experiences. I eventually decided to focus on people in a relatively marginal situation upon arrival in Switzerland, namely, unemployed people who wanted to find a job. I thus intentionally selected borderline cases, that is, people who are highly educated, but who encounter difficulties being recognised as "highly skilled" and integrating into a new professional environment. I also selected people with different reasons for migrating in order to highlight the plurality of situations. I thought that analysing situations of potential rupture, conflict, or self-reassessment for the people involved would enable a better understanding of the limits of the notion of "highly skilled migrants", as well as the social mechanisms behind its construction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>I wish to thank my colleague Metka Hercog who contributed to the field research by conducting some of the interviews and who supported me during the definition of the research design. I also wish to thank my colleague Katrin Sontag for sharing one of her interviews with me.

The data analysis focused on correlating the support structures the interviewees had access to during their job searches with their personal situations and migration histories. Moreover, I tried to connect my interviewees' stories with the mechanisms already analysed in the previous chapters. This process led me to define and characterise four migration channels associated with different types of support structures and obstacles, which influence the kinds of opportunities that individuals can access after migrating to Switzerland: the family-oriented channel, the company-oriented channel, the study-oriented channel, and the protection-oriented channel (Table 5.6).

**Table 5.6** List of biographic interviews

Year of arrival	Age	Sex	Country of origin	Field of study	Occupation upon interview	Migration channels involved
2011	~30	M	Brazil	Engineering	R&D project manager	Study-oriented channel
2006	~40	M	Germany	History; anthropology	Professional recruiter	Study-oriented channel
2010	~30	M	Italy	European studies	Unemployed	Study-oriented channel
2014	~40	M	Colombia	Finance	Senior financial analyst	Company-oriented channel
2013	~40	F	Greece	Medicine	Medical affairs manager	Company-oriented channel
2014	~50	M	United Kingdom	Environmental sciences; business	Contractor through a temporary staffing agency	Company-oriented channel
1990	~50	F	United States	Architecture	Head of a relocation agency	Company-oriented channel
2006	~30	F	Brazil	Linguistics; media	Coordinator of a radio programme	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
2013	~30	M	Italy	Engineering	Unemployed	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
1982	~70	F	United States	Philosophy	Self-employed communication coach	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel
2014	~40	M	Eritrea	International law	Writer and editor in an NGO	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel; protection-oriented channel
2008	~30	F	Sri Lanka	Business; marketing; tourism	Unemployed	Family-oriented channel; study-oriented channel; protection-oriented channel
2015	~30	M	Iran	Engineering	Ongoing study	Protection-oriented channel; study-oriented channel

### 5.2.1 *Channelling Privileges*

Many studies in Switzerland and elsewhere focus on the reasons why substantial numbers of highly skilled migrants lose their qualifications and become unemployed after moving to a new country. The obstacles most often mentioned are a discrepancy between migrants' skills and local needs (Boswell, Stiller, & Straubhaar, 2004; Jey Aratnam, 2012; Massey et al., 1993), a lack of recognition for foreign qualifications (Andersson & Guo, 2009; OECD/EU, 2015), difficulties accessing information and support, especially when they do not speak the local language (Raghuram, 2004; Riaño, 2003, 2011), discrimination against specific social groups (Kofman, 2014; Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016), and legal situation, which often positions migrants unfavourably when attempting to access jobs and negotiate labour conditions (Berthoud, 2012; Lowell & Avato, 2014).

Many researchers have used an intersectional approach to analyse migrants' access to the labour market. They have focused on the interrelationship between gender, race, and class to understand social actors' positions in the labour market (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Kofman, 2014; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Raghuram, 2004; Riaño, 2003, 2011). They have shown that, when brought together, different disadvantages intersect and create cumulative systems of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991). Eleonore Kofman, for instance, has analysed how European policies regarding highly skilled migrants construct and value skills, knowledge, and educational qualifications differently depending on the characteristics of the individuals involved. She demonstrates in particular that these systems reinforce inequalities between women and men in intersection with other markers of differences (Kofman, 2014). However, the authors working on intersectionality have also shown that disadvantages are contextual and can be compensated by other factors, meaning that even if general tendencies exist at the statistical level, automatic rules do not always apply at the individual level. Despite a limited range of opportunities, social actors can use their agency to find solutions and overcome obstacles.

While the research on intersectionality focuses mainly on how different disadvantages intersect, there is less research on how migrants access highly skilled jobs. An economist would probably argue that companies recruit foreign employees when the pool of local candidates is small or non-existent, thus creating an over-representation of foreigners in sectors with the highest labour demand. However, this explanation hides the complexity of social mechanisms by presenting access to privileged positions as automatic and unproblematic. Throughout this research, I have argued that the possibility for individuals to be rewarded if they are perceived as "valuable" not only depends on objective factors such as a neutral evaluation of their skills, but is also connected to the institutional context in which these individuals are embedded, the way their various individual features are perceived, and the interest that others have in supporting them. The previous section highlighted several of the variables that structure the ways employers recruit migrants and develop migration channels. This section looks more closely at the role of state policies in defining such channels and shaping resource environments for migrants. I start with

an approach inspired by the work on intersectionality, but then focus on different aspects. Rather than looking at individual social characteristics such as gender, race, and class, I address the role of external support structures in migrants' trajectories. This does not mean that I dismiss other factors as unimportant but rather that I have chosen to focus on other equally relevant elements.

I define and analyse four channels in this section: the family-oriented channel, the company-oriented channel, the study-oriented channel and the protection-oriented channel. Each channel represents a form of institutional embeddedness that is associated with a different resource environment, which describes the kinds of resources and support that individuals may have access to depending on their migration situation. This is a way to make sense of different social positions by focusing on the relationship between individual migration situations and the opportunities and constraints associated with these situations. This does not mean, however, that individuals are trapped in only one channel. Examples will show that individuals often move between channels to increase their options when their situation allows it.

I first present the four channels and then illustrate how they work on the individual level with a concrete example of someone who participates in multiple channels. I do not mean to suggest that these four channels are the only ones that exist. On the contrary, there are probably many more.<sup>11</sup> But based on the empirical analysis, these channels appear to be the most relevant for illustrating my argument.

### 5.2.2 *The Family-Oriented Channel*

In my data, the family-oriented channel applies to people who moved to Switzerland to join a spouse or partner already living in the country. Five interviewees experienced this situation: two men and three women from both European and non-European countries. To describe this channel, I combine data from their interviews with other information about the social environment in which they are embedded.

One of the main characteristics of this channel is that the people who use it are very heterogeneous in terms of nationality, social background, and resources. In the previous section, I showed that some nationalities have few possibilities to migrate to Switzerland with the support of an employer. Using the support of a partner might thus be their only option. Others, however, have more possibilities to organise their stay without depending on a partner. They may, for instance, find a job or register at a university in the country even if the main reason for migrating is to join their partner. This may lead to the person navigating between channels and combining the advantages and disadvantages associated with the different channels.

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<sup>11</sup> One might think, for instance, of a channel for self-employed immigrants such as start-up founders (Sontag, 2016), or a channel for people who move for lifestyle reasons (Camenisch, 2015). Moreover, the mobility of short-term assignees, for instance as presented in the case of management consultants in the previous chapter, might also be included among possible migration channels. However, I focused in this part on unemployed people, meaning that I did not encounter this kind of situation in my data.

In my data, most of the interviewees combined their wish to live with their partner with other reasons to move to Switzerland, for instance studying, finding a job, discovering a new culture, and suchlike. Moreover, none of the interviewees were married when they arrived in Switzerland, meaning that they could not use family reunification. This did not create any serious problem for EU nationals, because of the free movement of persons system, but non-EU/EFTA nationals had to find another reason to obtain a right to stay in Switzerland. Depending on their personal situation, the interviewees variously registered at a university, applied for asylum, or looked for a job in order to secure their residence status. However, these strategies were not always successful in the long run and getting married eventually appeared to be the safest option in several cases.

The idea of marrying for a permit, however, appeared to be a sensitive topic for some of the interviewees. One explicitly refused to talk about this issue or to give details about her partner. Another one insisted on the fact that she only married once she felt ready for it, and not because it would solve her permit issue. Other interviewees, however, did not mention this issue at all because it was clear from their personal situation that they were not marrying out of self-interest.

These differences highlight another characteristic of the family-oriented channel: although the people who use it migrate with the support of a partner, this support may be perceived as more or less problematic depending on the person's situation and characteristics. Whereas some people fear being accused of abusing the family reunification system, others are beyond suspicion because of their nationality, social background, or personal history. The distinction between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals is particularly important here, as well as the social, cultural, and economic capital, which structure the options that people may have to secure their status independently from their partner.

In addition to the perception of abuse of the system, the legal definition of family reunification may prove problematic for people with limited options. A partner's legal status within a family reunification framework is bound to the status of the first person living in the country, meaning that the residence authorisation of the joining partner may be abrogated in the case of a separation, or if the first person loses their right to stay in the country. This situation may create uncertainties, fears, and even exploitation if the relationship between the partners deteriorates. Therefore, even though securing one's status thanks to family reunification may give access to a safer residence status and better possibilities for accessing the labour market, it may also lead to new difficulties by binding the joining partner to the situation of the person they are reunifying with.

From an institutional point of view, I observe that the support available to joining partners is often limited. In this regard, I interviewed a person in charge of a new municipal project in Bern that aims to support highly qualified foreigners in their job searches. She explained:

We have noticed that there is no support or little support for people who are well or highly qualified but also for people who are not associated with social services or insured by the unemployment fund through a regional employment office, independent of their qualifications. And that there is actually hardly anything for these people when they cannot get into



an occupational field that corresponds to their qualifications because ... all the programs are always somehow linked to being registered as unemployed or receiving support from social services. ... And when we developed the project, we had people in mind who primarily come as part of family reunification.<sup>12</sup> (Personal communication, 21 December 2015)

In line with this observation, my data suggest that people who migrate to Switzerland through the family-oriented channel are first and foremost embedded in networks of relationships connected to their personal situation. Contrary to the people who move with the support of a company, individuals joining a person already present in the country cannot expect any support from their partner's employer. Moreover, the state may take over certain responsibilities only in exceptional and problematic cases.

Although a few programmes such as the one mentioned above have developed in the past few years, they remain rare. Their emergence derives from current debates in Switzerland about shortages of qualified workers and the need to employ the local workforce rather than recruiting from abroad, which are reframing the unemployment situation of long-term skilled migrants as a social problem that requires state intervention. In addition, debates about integration and immigration have created new obligations and responsibilities for both the state and migrants. In some cases this has led to stricter admission rules, for instance in Basel-City, where the extension of residence permits can be bound to an integration contract. Overall, however, so long as they are not identified as socially problematic by state authorities, migrants and their partners rely on their own resources, which vary from one person to another. The lack of state support is partly due to the political expectation that the partner already living in Switzerland is responsible for the joining person, which is illustrated by the fact that the legal status of a reunified family member is directly dependent on the legal status of the person with whom they are reunifying.

Yvonne Riaño, who has studied extensively the situation of highly educated women from South America married to Swiss men, highlights a similar dynamic (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Riaño, 2003, 2011, 2015, 2016; Riaño, Limacher, Aschwanden, Hirsig, & Wastl-Walter, 2015). Upon arrival in Switzerland, these women often lack institutional support. They have no right to unemployment benefits if they have never worked in Switzerland, and they are excluded from most state-sponsored services if their partner earns enough to support them. Moreover, as in our survey, Riaño found that gender norms and family status strongly influence women's professional situations (Baghdadi & Riaño, 2014; Riaño, 2011). For instance, access to day care for couples with children often posed difficulties for her interviewees, because these structures tend to give priority to single women or

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<sup>12</sup>The original text reads: "Wir haben festgestellt, dass es keine Unterstützung gibt oder kaum Unterstützung gibt für Personen die gut bis hochqualifiziert sind und aber auch unabhängig von der Qualifikation Personen, die weder beim Sozialdienst angehängt sind, noch beim RAV versichert sind bei der Arbeitslosenkasse. Und dass für die Personen, wenn sie hier den Einstieg in ein ihrer Qualifikation entsprechendes Tätigkeitsfeld nicht finden, eigentlich kaum etwas gibt, weil ... alle Programme sind immer irgendwie gekoppelt an, man ist arbeitslos gemeldet oder man hat Unterstützung vom Sozialdienst. ... Und wenn wir im Hinterkopf hatten, als wir das Projekt konzipiert haben, sind Personen die vor allem im Familiennachzug kommen." All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

women with economic difficulties (Riaño, 2011). Several of the interviewees also reported that, as married women and mothers, they were neither expected nor encouraged to work. In addition to other disadvantages – such as insufficient proficiency in the local language and difficulties having their foreign qualifications recognised – they lacked support from acquaintances to access professional opportunities. Riaño speaks of “marginalised elites” (Riaño, 2016), because these university-educated women from middle- to upper middle-class families, after having been professionally active and independent in Latin America, went through a process of dequalification in Switzerland and, in many cases, remained trapped in the domestic sphere despite their original intention to work.

If joining partners can expect little direct support from the state, and if nationality and gender certainly constitute disabling factors for non-EU/EFTA women, I observed nevertheless that the people using this channel can mobilise other resources. Someone with a partner already living in the country may have indirect access to local information, knowledge, and contacts, which may help them build a local social network. Furthermore, facilitated access to a stable residence permit through the partner may suppress or at least alleviate legal obstacles to the labour market. These elements may form the basis for long-term plans and be a motivation to acquire new forms of capital such as the local language, further qualifications, friends, professional networks, and so forth.

At the same time, the interviews revealed that partners and their social networks are not always the best-equipped people to inform and support newcomers, especially if they have not experienced a similar situation. For example, one interviewee explained that a few months after her arrival from the US, her partner recommended that she register with immigration officers. However, since her visa had expired the interviewee did not have any legal right to stay in the country, and she was immediately told to leave when she contacted the authorities. Until that moment, neither she nor her partner had fully considered the constraints associated with her status as a foreigner. She recalls that after this first experience, they faced several unexpected difficulties due to their lack of knowledge about administrative procedures. She regularised her situation by registering at a Swiss university, which enabled her to obtain a student permit, and then later by marrying her partner.

If accessing relevant information often proves difficult for newly arrived foreigners, the place of residence may influence the types of resources available in the environment: in some places – in particular cities – non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations, and private networks enable newcomers to meet other people based on origin, language, social situation, or personal interests. I observed, for instance, that some of the “expat” organisations present in larger Swiss cities not only attract relocated employees and their families, but also joining partners who intend to settle in Switzerland, students, and sometimes refugees. In addition, some of the offerings developed at a local level to promote the integration of relocated employees and their families are available to other immigrants as well (e.g. language courses, counselling and integration workshops). In that sense, highly educated immigrants in the family-oriented channel may indirectly benefit from the interest of local authorities and profit-oriented actors in internationalised companies

and their employees. This may enable them to access relevant information and get useful contacts.

At the same time, a person's social background, as well as the languages they speak and, in some cases, their nationality, influence the kind of organisation that they may want to join. As part of my fieldwork in Basel, I attended Swiss-German language courses at a non-profit organisation officially open to anybody who can communicate in English, but that in practice mainly attracts middle- to upper-class non-working migrant women. These people meet regularly to exchange information, learn new languages, and do group activities such as reading, meditating, wine-tasting, knitting, attending cultural events, and visiting the city. However, I noticed that some interviewees were very critical of this organisation, describing it as "a British place where people can go to feel safe" (personal communication, 18 November 2015) or as a place where "people were very introverted" and where "I didn't find anyone to be attached to" (personal communication, 15 April 2016). Similarly, one interviewee described another organisation specifically targeting North American women as a place for "rich, gilded, caged women who have no idea about what it is to live here, who don't speak a word of German and just live in this ghetto of very wealthy expats" (personal communication, 1 October 2015). These remarks highlight the fact that access to this kind of organisation relies on the acceptance of certain cultural and class-specific norms and values, which, when they are not shared, may lead to feelings of exclusion or to the impression that one does not have anything in common with the rest of the group.

In this sense, the family-oriented channel provides access to resource environments that largely rely on personal characteristics and networks. Because family migrants are associated with their partner from the perspective of state authorities, institutionalised forms of support are limited to socially problematic situations. Hence, personal resources play a central role in shaping opportunities and constraints in this channel, but the state is present as a controlling actor that regulates immigrants' rights and status based in particular on nationality, family status, and social situation.

### ***5.2.3 The Company-Oriented Channel***

The company-oriented channel applies to people who have relocated to Switzerland with partners who are employed by a company in the country. In my data, the stories of four interviewees correspond to this situation, two men and two women from the EU and third countries. Moreover, I build on the data already analysed in the previous chapters about the selection, attraction, and retention practices of state-related and private-sector actors.

In the company-oriented channel, the employee and the partner relocate together, meaning that usually neither of them has a local network of relationships upon arrival. Nevertheless, the employee is immediately integrated into a professional network from which the unemployed person may indirectly benefit. In addition, the employed

partner guarantees in most cases a certain degree of financial security for the unemployed partner. Finally, the partners of the people who migrate through this channel have been recruited by a company through a process of social selection, which creates a certain homogeneity in terms of symbolic capital within this channel.

During the field research, I was in contact with several organisations that showed interest in supporting the partners of newly arrived employees and that have developed specialised services for that purpose. These organisations include the previously mentioned chamber of commerce in Vaud, which is supported by the cantonal department for economic promotion, several multinational companies, and service providers based in Switzerland, and an international network of companies and migrants whose aim is to connect unemployed partners with employers to foster access to jobs.<sup>13</sup>

Companies that employ immigrants are one of the main sources of support in this channel (Ravasi et al., 2015; Tissot, 2016), and we have shown that some employers invest considerable resources in attracting foreign employees to Switzerland. For example, relocation packages are among the tools that some companies use to improve their competitiveness. Services for partners and other family members are legitimised by the fact that adequate support may reduce the risk of an employee's unexpected departure due to their family's difficulty adjusting to the new environment (Ravasi et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, not all employees have access to the same advantages: while some companies that largely depend on a foreign skilled workforce use clear guidelines to define the support that relocated employees can receive based on their hierarchical and qualification level, other companies provide minimal support or negotiate relocation packages on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, the relocation packages promised before a move can prove to be less generous than expected, and some trailing spouses experience significant disappointment when they realise that finding a job in Switzerland is more difficult than expected. For instance, a British man who followed his wife at the age of 50 and who was still searching for a job when I met him nearly 3 years later spoke to me about his negative experience:

If my wife is offered a job, and I was told that it will probably take me two years to find a job, we wouldn't have done it [to relocate to Switzerland]. But I was told a very good story: eight to twelve months [to find a job]. ... Obviously they are interested: the business wants to keep their employees; the headhunter, the recruiter wants to keep the commission. There was less information about that. They said: "You find a job, no problem, we can help you" and things like that. (Personal communication, 19 April 2016)

The differences between promises and results, the inequalities in treatment between companies, as well as the general tendency among businesses to reduce the costs associated with relocation packages (Cartus, 2014) help to understand why other actors have developed services specifically targeting the unemployed partners of relocated employees. For instance, we have already seen in Chap. 3 how a chamber of commerce in Vaud initiated a project together with the cantonal authorities in

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<sup>13</sup> See IDCN (International Dual Career Network): <http://www.idcn.info/> (last consulted 29 January 2018).

charge of economic promotion and a group of multinational companies to support the integration of relocated employees' family members. Furthermore, the International Dual Career Network (IDCN) is a growing organisation of volunteers sponsored by corporate actors that aims to connect unemployed partners with employing companies in Switzerland and abroad. The president of one of IDCN's local branches in Switzerland, who is himself a job-searching trailing spouse, describes the aims of the organisation:

It was founded on the principle that says that job-seeking corporates are becoming more and more normal. No one is coming to a job by himself anymore. They are coming with a partner or with a family. We searched a strategy and the principle is that the success of an international assignment is the success of someone coming to work for a company abroad, and it highly depends on how the plus one, the spouse integrates into the profession, into the society. When the person comes and doesn't integrate, the international assignment fails in 90% of times. And therefore companies invested a lot of money to get someone into that job, and they lose that investment. ... It [what we do] is trying to protect the corporate and also protect the spouse. So that is the whole fundamental idea. (Personal communication, 19 April 2016)

We see here that the logic for supporting people who move through the company-oriented channel differs from that in the family-oriented channel: both spouses are seen as contributors and the risk that they may leave is perceived as an economic loss, so their well-being is given an economic value. In some cases, companies that employ a large number of foreigners may directly take over responsibility for supporting partners through relocation packages. They may also sponsor other institutions, such as the IDCN, to indirectly enhance the resources available to employees' families. This situation is favourable to the individuals interested in taking action to improve their situation, because it gives them the possibility to use an economic line of argumentation strategically to obtain support from corporate actors. In addition, state authorities at the local level may support specific projects, but it is striking that the department involved in the cases I observed was primarily concerned with economic promotion rather than immigration or integration. This suggests that both state authorities and corporate actors in the private sector perceive this category of immigrants as valuable actors who provide economic services to the places they go to. This perception has consequences since it enables them to be treated as "clients" to support (Wagner, 1998) rather than as "others" to control (Fassin, 2011), as can happen with the other channels.

### ***5.2.4 The Study-Oriented Channel***

The study-oriented channel primarily applies to immigrants who studied in Switzerland and then sought a job in the country. However, it also includes people who came to Switzerland for reasons other than education and subsequently enrolled in an institute of higher education because this increased their chances of being able to stay and work. In my data, eight interviewees went through this channel, five men and three women, all of whom except two were from non-EU/EFTA countries.

Affiliation with an institute of higher education may include several benefits for immigrants. Legally, it may give them a right to stay in the country because it is relatively easy to obtain a study or research permit. To apply for such a permit, a person must be admitted to or affiliated with an institute of higher education, and they must prove that they have sufficient resources to support themselves. This second requirement, however, may prove difficult since it implies having access to a certain degree of economic capital, usually through relatives, which contributes to social selection based on this criterion. At the same time, tuition fees in Switzerland are relatively low compared to other countries, in particular anglophone ones, and Swiss universities generally do not charge international student fees, which contributes to attracting foreign students. In fact, almost one third of all tertiary students in Switzerland are foreign nationals who obtained their secondary degrees abroad, representing the second highest share of international students among OECD countries (OECD, 2016; Riaño, Lombard, & Piguet, 2018).

Once the initial administrative obstacles have been overcome, an academic affiliation may provide time and space for recently arrived people to build a social network and acquire local competences and knowledge that may be useful when seeking employment. In addition, it may give them a Swiss diploma, which is an advantage compared to other immigrants whose foreign diplomas are not recognised or valued on the Swiss labour market. Finally, access to the services offered by many institutions of higher education, such as language classes, career and legal counselling, and alumni networks may help a person expand their resources.

In my data, few people came to Switzerland with the main intention to study. However, some chose this option after realising that it would provide new opportunities. This is obvious, for instance, in the case of a young Iranian man who came to Switzerland to seek asylum and is now taking classes at a Swiss university while waiting for a response from the migration authorities regarding his asylum application:

The university is the best part of my life. Really, it's the best part of my living in Switzerland. ... Some people care about us ... and I see we are important for some people. ... It gives me ... energy. (Personal communication to Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017)

Although he had not yet officially registered as a student at the time of the interview, he had submitted an application to start a new master's degree and was participating in a support programme initiated by students for refugees wishing to enter a Swiss university. According to him, being accepted at the university was "the last chance for me to get back my life, to start making my life".

In another interview, an Italian engineer who came to Switzerland to live with his girlfriend – a postdoctoral researcher at a Swiss university – eventually decided to expand his qualifications after realising that finding a job in his area of expertise would be much more difficult than expected:

So the thing is that in Italy, probably, I am overqualified, and here I am underqualified. That's what I think. Because of the language. Because in Italy my international experiences are well seen ... while here my international experiences are quite... relatively below average. ... Now I do a course. Because here ... the network is very much more important than in Italy. ... I am now taking a course of sustainable energies to complete my profile, but also to try to build up a network. (Personal communication to Metka Hercog, 18 March 2016)

Although studying can provide a respite for developing one's professional profile, competences, and network, difficulties are likely to arise again upon graduation, in particular for non-EU/EFTA nationals whose residence permit is bound to their institutional affiliation. For a long time, non-EU/EFTA citizens had very limited opportunities to work in Switzerland after the end of their studies. Since 2011, a new policy allows non-EU/EFTA foreigners to stay in Switzerland for 6 months after graduation to search for a job. In addition, unlike other foreigners, former students are no longer subject to the precedence criterion, according to which "foreign nationals may be permitted to work only if it is proven that no suitable domestic employees or citizens of states with which an agreement on the free movement of workers has been concluded can be found for the job" (Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals, art. 21.1). However, recent graduates may only be allowed to stay if they find a job that corresponds to their field of study and is perceived as being "of high academic or economic interest" (art 21.3).

EU nationals are not subject to these strict rules, but if they remain unemployed and Swiss authorities determine that they are no longer able to support themselves financially they will be asked to leave.<sup>14</sup> A delicate financial situation is therefore likely to affect whether both EU and non-EU students and researchers maintain the right to stay in Switzerland after they graduate or leave academia.

The end of an academic affiliation can therefore place migrants in a precarious position and force them to find a job quickly, which may be more or less difficult depending on their personal situation and field of study. In addition to the fact that some qualifications are more in demand on the labour market than others, my interviews suggest that the administrative procedure for acquiring a work permit represents an obstacle for non-EU/EFTA nationals because either the employer is unwilling to engage in the procedure, or the canton refuses the permit. The administrative setbacks described in the case study of Luca, a Brazilian engineer (see Chap. 2), illustrate these difficulties. In another interview, a local radio station offered a job to a Brazilian woman who had just completed a master's degree in communication, but the canton initially refused to grant her a work authorisation. The employer insisted and she was eventually given a short-term permit, but this was precarious because it required annual renewal. Even after 10 years of living in Switzerland, she could not access permanent residence status.

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<sup>14</sup>As stipulated in the Free Movement of Persons Agreement of June 2002 between Switzerland and the European Union (FMPA), EU/EFTA citizens can freely stay in Switzerland up to 90 days, after which they need to apply for a residence permit. If they are unemployed and do not have any other legally valid reason to stay in Switzerland (e.g., family reunification or studies), they need to prove that they have health insurance and sufficient resources to support themselves (see annex I, art. 24 FMPA). Moreover, EU/EFTA nationals can only access unemployment benefits if their last employment was in Switzerland. The definition of "sufficient resources" varies between Swiss cantons, but it is usually around CHF 2000 (EUR 1760)/month. Unemployed EU/EFTA nationals who do not fulfil these requirements can in principle stay in Switzerland without a residence permit, but they are likely to experience various limitations due to the fact that they cannot officially register as residents. For instance, they may have trouble finding housing or receive regular letters from the municipality asking them to leave.

People who have migrated through the study-oriented channel thus occupy an ambiguous position. On the one hand, foreign students are officially presented as important to the “scientific, technical and economic development” (Political Institutions Committees, 2009) of Switzerland, as has been particularly acknowledged by the parliamentary initiative that led to the relaxation of admission rules for former students. On the other hand, the fear of abuse is very present in policy discourse, in this case the fear that foreigners may register as students for the sole purpose of circumventing the law, or that they may take the jobs of local residents after their graduation (Riaño et al., 2018). There seems to be an institutional tension between measures that seek to enhance higher education and measures that seek to control residence permits. This tension may lead to serious disappointment when people who were treated equally to other students realise at the end of their academic affiliation that there are barriers preventing them from accessing similar opportunities to their colleagues.

### 5.2.5 *The Protection-Oriented Channel*

The protection-oriented channel primarily applies to people who flee their country of origin and seek protection from the Swiss state. In my data, two people officially went through this process, one man and one woman from non-EU/EFTA countries. As we will see in the following portrait, a third interviewee navigates between this channel and others, although he has not officially submitted an asylum request in Switzerland. However, his conflictual relationship with his country of origin, as well as the fact that he is requesting family reunification with a person who is a recognised refugee in Switzerland, mean that he has to deal with some of the specificities of this channel.

The Swiss Secretariat for Migration is officially responsible for asylum request procedures and it first decides whether the state should consider the request. If so, the applicant is assigned to a canton and given an asylum-seeker permit. The Swiss Secretariat for Migration then undertakes a more detailed examination to determine whether to recognise the person’s refugee status. If their status as a refugee is recognised, then the person receives a residence permit. If not, the person is either asked to leave the country or granted temporary admission. Temporary admission may only be granted if the Swiss authorities determine that “the enforcement of removal or expulsion is not possible, not permitted or not reasonable” (Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals, art. 83). However, since the asylum process can take years between the first application and the final decision, some people manage in the meantime to expand their options and find other ways to stay even if their application is rejected.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>According to a recent study, refugees who arrived in Switzerland between 1994 and 2004 waited on average 665 days to obtain an asylum decision, with a standard deviation of 478 days (Hainmueller, Hangartner, Lawrence, & Dufresne, 2017).



This channel is strongly structured by national and international laws. The Geneva Convention of 1951 defines states' obligations towards refugees, the Dublin regulation determines the responsibility of EU member states and affiliated members to examine asylum-seekers' applications, and a specific domestic policy regulates the asylum procedure in Switzerland.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, people who seek protection in Switzerland are the direct responsibility of the state unless they have already transited through another Dublin-affiliated country, in which case Switzerland can send them back to the first country of transit.<sup>17</sup> In addition, various NGOs that defend human rights and provide refugee protection are active in the asylum field, as well as some profit-oriented institutions operating under the mandate of the state. The strong position of the state in the protection-oriented channel produces many constraints for people using this path. While in the other channels, the general tendency over the past decades has been towards an extension of rights, the fight against abuses of the system has become a central objective with regard to asylum and this has legitimised numerous legal revisions towards more restrictive practices since the 1980s (Frei, Gordzielik, de Senarclens, Leyvraz, & Stünzi, 2014).

Several disadvantages are associated with the protection-oriented channel. First, individuals in search of protection in Switzerland usually have a limited local social network or locally valued skills and experience upon arrival. This situation, as well as the complexity and duration of the asylum procedure, contribute to making newly arrived individuals highly dependent on support from state institutions and NGOs.

In addition, the possibilities of employment during the asylum procedure are limited. Currently, people who are not yet recognised as refugees need authorisation from the canton to work. They can request this authorisation with the support of an employer 3 months after their registration, but people with a Swiss passport or a valid authorisation to stay in Switzerland take precedence. Employed asylum seekers also need to pay a special tax of 10% of their gross salary (Bretschler, 2016). Numerous studies have shown that these administrative constraints, added to the fact that employers are often unwilling to hire someone who may be forced to leave the country at any time, make it very difficult for people seeking asylum to find employment (Guggisberg & Egger, 2014; Kamm, Efonayi-Mäder, Neubauer, Wanner, & Zanol, 2003; Kobi, Gehrig, & Bärswyl, 2012; Lindenmeyer, Von Glutz, Häusler, & Kehl, 2008; Piguet & Losa, 2002; Spadarotto, Bieberschulte, Walker, Morlok, & Oswald, 2014; UNHCR, 2014). This limited access to the labour market may have long-term consequences since the asylum procedure may last several years, during which the applicants remain stuck in a holding pattern with few

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<sup>16</sup> See the Swiss Federal Government Asylum Act of 26 June 1998: <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995092/index.html> (last consulted 31 January 2018).

<sup>17</sup> See the Agreement of March 2008 between the European Community and the Swiss Confederation concerning the criteria and mechanisms for establishing which state is responsible for examining a request for asylum lodged with an EU member state or Switzerland: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/treaties-agreements/agreement/?id=2004082> (last consulted 1 February 2018).

resources to move forward with their lives. Moreover, employers often perceive long periods of unemployment unfavourably, which means that even if the person is eventually granted asylum, finding a job may remain difficult. At least one study in Switzerland has clearly shown that long asylum processes reduce a migrant's chances of successful labour market integration (Hainmueller et al., 2017).

Administrative constraints, however, constitute just one aspect of the obstacles that people in need of protection are likely to face after arriving in Switzerland. A recent study on the labour market integration of refugees and people temporarily admitted to Switzerland called attention to specific obstacles affecting this category of people (UNHCR, 2014). In particular, potential health problems due to trauma associated with a refugee's journey, as well as fear for family members and friends who remain in dangerous situations, may physically and cognitively affect their ability to fully embrace and adapt to new situations.

In addition, highly educated refugees may encounter particular difficulties in having their qualifications acknowledged and recognised (Sommer, 2016; Zoetewij, 2016). This is because actors involved in assessing qualifications tend to view the education level of countries destabilised by conflict with suspicion and attribute a lower value to qualifications originating from refugee-producing countries. Additionally, asylum-seekers are sometimes unable to bring official documents attesting to their qualifications, and it can be particularly difficult (and sometimes impossible) to obtain copies of these documents. Moreover, their precarious financial situations often prevent validation of their existing skills through additional training, since such processes can be expensive.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the support structures offered to asylum seekers and recognised refugees are rarely appropriate for highly educated people (Sandoz, 2016b; Sontag, 2018). A UNHCR study shows, for instance, that its interviewees were systematically directed towards low-paid professional sectors such as cleaning, personal care, hotel, and restaurant services regardless of their personal wishes, qualifications, and previous work experience (UNHCR, 2014).

One final problem worth mentioning is that people who seek asylum in Switzerland are linked to a specific canton at least during the first few years following their registration and are, in principle, not allowed to live elsewhere in the country or move abroad. This means that, contrary to other migrants, their possibilities of mobility are much more limited if they do not find opportunities adapted to their situation in the place where they are registered.

All these constraints limit the possibilities for these individuals to gain autonomy. Without a job, they are dependent on social welfare. They may be forced to live in a centre for asylum seekers with very limited opportunities to develop their competences and meet local people. They may not know when their next interview

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<sup>18</sup>In Switzerland, the exam that enables recognition of a foreign high school diploma costs about CHF 1000 (EUR 880) and additional preparatory courses for this exam are only offered in select cities (Sontag, 2018).

with the authorities will be, or whether they have a chance of being recognised as a refugee at all. This quote from the interview with the Iranian man trying to enrol at a Swiss university clearly illustrates this situation:

For the moment, I can't decide and I can't have any idea for my life. Because every day my life will be changed. Because if the government wants to tell me, "now you have to sleep", I have to sleep; "now you have to stand up", I have to stand up; "now you have to go out of Switzerland", I have to go out of Switzerland. I don't have any [power to] decide, and idea for my life. (Personal communication to Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017)

In her research on the possibilities for refugees to access higher education in Switzerland, Germany, and France, Katrin Sontag shows that the specific constraints that structure the protection-oriented channel hinder opportunities to transfer the social value of migrants' skills between countries. Inspired by a study on refugee youths in Hamburg, she uses the concept of "total space" to describe situations that are "to a very high degree characterised by the fact that structures determine actions" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 380, quoted in Sontag, 2018). In addition to official processes of diploma recognition, various regulations and practices limit asylum seekers' access to support, resources, and mobility. These factors contribute to maintaining a situation of scarcity and precariousness in which their skills become unimportant and disregarded. One man expressed his situation this way: "I was an engineer. But now, here I [look like] a [child] in Kindergarten" (personal communication with Katrin Sontag, 27 January 2017).

Interactions between institutional practices and regulations thus directly affect a person by categorising them as an asylum seeker or refugee even though a different set of institutional structures may have constructed the same person as a highly skilled professional in another channel (Table 5.7).

This overview shows how different migration channels structure various opportunities and obstacles for immigrants. Although this study focused on immigrants' job searches after their arrival in Switzerland, the influence of these channels on other dimensions of people's experiences before, during, and after mobility should not be overlooked. The fact that these channels reflect, to a certain extent, legal ways of entering Switzerland highlights the important role of state policies related to migration. At the same time, the analysis shows that other actors influence support structures, in particular individual networks in the family-oriented channel, employers in the company-oriented channel, educational institutions in the study-oriented channel, and state-related institutions in the protection-oriented channel. In combination, these various forms of support contribute to constructing different categories of immigrants, whose skills are valued and deployed differently depending on how they are perceived and which resources are available to them.

Although migration channels structure opportunities and obstacles, individuals also possess agency within these structures. In the next part, I introduce a case study that illustrates the impact of migration channels at an individual level and the role of agency in this model.

**Table 5.7** Summary of the main characteristics of migration channels

<b>Channels</b>	<b>Enabling factors</b>	<b>Disabling factors</b>
<b>Family-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect access to a local social network</li> <li>• Indirect access to locally valued skills and experience</li> <li>• If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> <li>• Limited access to support institutions</li> <li>• Foreign diploma</li> <li>• Limited locally valued skills and experience</li> </ul>
<b>Company-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect access to a local professional network</li> <li>• Financial security</li> <li>• Access to support from institutions targeting trailing spouses</li> <li>• Potential support from the employer</li> <li>• If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> <li>• Limited local social network</li> <li>• Foreign diploma</li> <li>• Limited locally valued skills and experience</li> </ul>
<b>Study-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibility to build a network during an academic affiliation</li> <li>• Possibility to acquire locally valued skills and experience during an academic affiliation</li> <li>• Local diploma</li> <li>• Facilitated access to a residence permit during an academic affiliation</li> <li>• Access to support associated with institutions of higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precarious residence status at the end of an academic affiliation (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> <li>• Precarious financial situation</li> <li>• Limited possibility to work</li> </ul>
<b>Protection-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal protection framework defining state responsibilities</li> <li>• Access to support from institutions targeting refugees</li> <li>• If recognised as refugee: stable residence status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited local social network</li> <li>• Limited locally valued skills and experience</li> <li>• Foreign diploma</li> <li>• Precarious financial situation</li> <li>• Limited mobility</li> <li>• Rupture with origin country</li> <li>• Limited possibility to work while applying for refugee status</li> <li>• Institutional support not targeted at highly educated individuals</li> <li>• Risk of trauma and health problems</li> <li>• If not recognised as refugee: precarious residence status</li> </ul>

### ***5.2.6 Portrait: The Struggles of an Eritrean Man Towards Family Reunification***

When Joseph<sup>19</sup> was a baby, his parents separated and his mother migrated to the US. Joseph grew up in Eritrea with his maternal grandmother, an elementary school teacher. He recalls growing up in a middle-class environment (by Eritrean standards) and learning many valuable life lessons from his grandmother, most of all a deep sense of justice.

Shortly after obtaining his undergraduate diploma, Joseph left Eritrea for the first time and went to South Africa to study human rights and international law, where he became politically active in a movement advocating for democratic reforms in Eritrea. He was consequently declared an enemy of the state and was not allowed to renew his passport, thus becoming stateless.

At that time, Joseph was completing his PhD. He was subsequently offered a postdoctoral fellowship at a European university and managed to obtain a passport from another African state. This enabled him to travel but, as he realised later, also deprived him of the right to seek asylum in Europe.

Joseph was then employed as a postdoctoral researcher in several European countries. He was also offered a position as an assistant professor in North America but could not take the job because the embassy refused his visa application.

He met his wife while he was travelling for a conference. She also came from Eritrea and had been recognised as a refugee in Switzerland. After being in a long-distance relationship for a while, they decided to live together. At the time, Joseph was happy with his job at a research institute in Norway and would have liked for her to join him, but because of her recently acquired refugee status she was not able to live outside Switzerland.

This convinced Joseph to move to Switzerland. His employer in Norway allowed him to work remotely for 6 months, which provided him with financial security during his first half-year in Switzerland. Joseph also contacted the Swiss embassy and was reassured that obtaining a residence permit would not be difficult in his situation.

This prediction was overly optimistic, however. He encountered his first obstacle when trying to get legally married so that he and his partner could apply for family reunification. This was problematic because a valid birth certificate is required to obtain a marriage licence in Switzerland. Given his political status, he could not apply for a new one in Eritrea, and therefore could not get married.

Joseph then looked for solutions to stay in Switzerland as a legal employee. He contacted several institutes of higher education but had a difficult time finding one that would support him through the administratively cumbersome admission procedure for non-EU/EFTA workers. He was finally offered an unpaid position as a visiting researcher at a Swiss university, which enabled him to obtain a residence permit and to connect with the local academic community. Nevertheless, this

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<sup>19</sup>Research participants' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

solution was only temporary since he was not earning any income and his permit did not authorise him to work outside the university.

Joseph also continued to engage in political activism. He connected with new networks in Switzerland and was invited to participate in different projects as an expert. Through his wife, he also received advice about his legal situation from an organisation supporting refugees.

A year after his arrival, he was offered a fellowship by an NGO supporting his advocacy in Eritrea. Although this eased his tense financial situation, it did not solve his permit problem because he could not obtain authorisation to stay in Switzerland based on the fellowship.

In the meantime, Joseph and his wife had a baby. The birth of their child was not only a happy personal event, but also solved an administrative problem: because the birth dates of both parents were registered on the child's birth certificate, Joseph could finally obtain an official document attesting to his own birth. But his troubles were not over. After their marriage, his wife's application for family reunification was rejected.

At the time of our interview, Joseph and his wife were appealing this decision with the help of a lawyer who thought that the first verdict was a mistake. Joseph was very disappointed with the immigration authorities' attitude. He said:

I think that if I don't get these papers, my family reunification, my best option is to immigrate to Canada or New Zealand or the United States. ... If I don't get my family reunification permit in Switzerland, I don't have any other option because I don't want to remain stuck here. ... I should take my wife. It is not going to be easy, by the way, it is not going to be easy. But me staying here without papers, I become useless! With all my experience, my academic qualifications, it is a nightmare! (Personal communication to Metka Hercog, 30 May 2016)

This example illustrates how an individual may navigate between several of the channels I described above. This case is interesting in the sense that it cannot be assigned one label: Joseph oscillates between the categories of refugee (which is not legally recognised), reunified family member (which is also not recognised), and researcher (which is hindered because of his legal status). This situation gives rise to many problems, but it also enables him to access resources and develop strategies. In this sense, Joseph's choices and decisions were partly framed by the institutional context in which he is embedded, but this does not mean that he has no agency. On the contrary, Joseph was very active in developing solutions and mobilising the resources at his disposal. These resources are obviously connected to his personal characteristics and social competences, but they are also associated with his migratory situation and how it is perceived by others.

Table 5.8 shows more clearly how Joseph was able to mobilise various resources: even though he could not be admitted as a refugee, his wife's status gave him access to the counselling services of an organisation targeting refugees and to a fellowship from an organisation willing to support his political activism. He also benefitted to some extent from his wife's contacts in the asylum field. Finally, his position as an academic gave him access to new networks and, perhaps most importantly, provided

**Table 5.8** Summary of the main characteristics of migration channels adapted to the specific case study

<b>Channels</b>	<b>Enabling factors</b>	<b>Disabling factors</b>
<b>Family-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indirect access to a local social network</b></li> <li>• <b>Indirect access to locally valued skills and experience</b></li> <li>• If recognised as a reunified family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</b></li> <li>• <b>Limited access to support institutions</b></li> <li>• <b>Foreign diploma</b></li> <li>• <b>Limited locally valued skills and experience</b></li> </ul>
<b>Company-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect access to a local professional network</li> <li>• Financial security</li> <li>• Access to support from institutions targeting trailing spouses</li> <li>• Potential support from the employer</li> <li>• If recognised as reunified a family member: same permit as the partner and the possibility to work (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residence status dependent on partner (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</li> <li>• Limited local social network</li> <li>• Foreign diploma</li> <li>• Limited locally valued skills and experience</li> </ul>
<b>Study-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Possibility to build a network during academic affiliation</b></li> <li>• <b>Possibility to acquire locally valued skills and experience during an academic affiliation</b></li> <li>• Local diploma</li> <li>• <b>Facilitated access to a residence permit during an academic affiliation</b></li> <li>• <b>Access to support associated with institutions of higher education</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Precarious residence status at the end of an academic affiliation (applicable to non-EU/EFTA nationals)</b></li> <li>• <b>Precarious financial situation</b></li> <li>• <b>Limited possibility to work</b></li> </ul>
<b>Protection-oriented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal protection framework defining state responsibilities</li> <li>• <b>Access to support from institutions targeting refugees</b></li> <li>• If recognised as refugee: stable residence status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited local social network</li> <li>• Limited locally valued skills and experience</li> <li>• Foreign diploma</li> <li>• Precarious financial situation</li> <li>• Limited mobility</li> <li>• <b>Rupture with origin country</b></li> <li>• Limited possibility to work while applying for refugee status</li> <li>• <b>Institutional support not targeted at highly educated individuals</b></li> <li>• Risk of trauma and health problems</li> <li>• <b>If not recognised as refugee: precarious residence status</b></li> </ul>

him with a period of respite during which he was allowed to stay in Switzerland and could investigate new options.

However, Joseph was also affected by many of the disabling factors associated with the channels in which he was embedded. Even though he was unable to apply for asylum and so could not fully use the protection-oriented channel, he represents some of the features associated with this channel. In particular, the brutal rupture with his country of origin as a result of his political activism meant that he could not seek support from his government, even for administrative matters such as a birth certificate. In addition, the fact that his wife is embedded in the protection-oriented channel indirectly affected him: her limited mobility was the main reason that he resigned from a qualified job in another country to come to Switzerland, even though his legal status and lack of connections affected his chances of employment upon arrival.

In this sense, Joseph's situation in Switzerland is closely linked to his wife's. Yet, by denying their applications for family reunification, the Swiss state refused to recognise this connection. To overcome this obstacle, Joseph was able to turn to the study-oriented channel due to his previous experience as an academic. Although this affiliation enabled him to meet new people and to become recognised as a scholar in Switzerland, it did not significantly ease his access to the labour market owing to the university's lack of funding and the rigid admission system that prevented him from working.

This analysis could be developed by examining other factors in Joseph's story. For instance, current political issues associated with his nationality certainly played a role, since several politicians have publicly criticised the open attitude of the Swiss administration towards Eritrean refugees in the past, and reforms are currently underway to tighten their access to Switzerland (Geiser, 2015; Reuters, 2017). Stereotypes and discrimination associated with Joseph's ethnicity could also explain some of his difficulties. At the same time, Joseph's social competences as an academic researcher with substantial international experience, his unusual biography, and his extensive network in advocacy groups helped him to mobilise resources that other people in a similar situation but with a different background would have had no chance of accessing. This shows how different migration channels are connected with specific enabling and disabling factors, though it is obvious that these factors intersect with other categories of difference such as gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, and class.

This section has shown that the possibilities of using one's skills after migration are not only connected to personal social features such as gender, race, or class but also to the conditions under which migration takes place. The kind of recognition and support that a person can receive after arriving in a new place greatly depends on the institutional environment and regulations that structure different migration channels. This does not mean, of course, that all people who migrate using a similar channel end up in exactly the same situation. Yet they are likely to face similar enabling and disabling factors, which may affect their personal trajectory more or



less strongly depending on the intersection between features related to their migration situation, the institutional context in which they are embedded, and their individual characteristics.

### 5.3 Brain Gain or Body Shopping?

This chapter focused on the situation and experience of different groups of people migrating to Switzerland. By comparing contrasting cases, I wanted to understand how access to support and privileges is structured, and who benefits more from them. I also wanted to question the notion of “highly skilled migrant” by showing that this status results from a construction of the way some institutional actors create specific migration conditions for people to whom they attribute particular economic and social value.

In the first section, I used statistical methods to investigate different forms of relocation support received by recent immigrants. I showed that while employers actively attract some people to Switzerland, different categories of immigrants have unequal access to the Swiss territory and labour market. The analysis revealed that, beyond qualifications, social categories such as nationality and gender structure access to migration channels and resource environments. Moreover, observing practices within personal relationships and professional sectors is important for understanding differences in access to relocation support.

A main finding of this analysis is that economic power relations between countries, gendered practices within heterosexual couples, and recruitment practices within professional sectors all interact with immigration policies to create systems of inclusion and exclusion that enable highly educated men from economically powerful countries to access significant corporate relocation support, whereas married women and non-EU/EFTA nationals from less powerful countries more often migrate as relatives with the support of personal social networks. If this finding corresponds to a stereotype of the “highly skilled migrant” as a white man from a rich country, it also shows that white men from rich countries are actively given more opportunities to *become* highly skilled migrants, whereas people with similar levels of qualification and experience but with a different gender or social background have fewer opportunities to migrate. In this sense, the very idea of “highly skilled migrant” is a construction that relies on power dynamics at a global level.

I then analysed migration channels used by highly educated people who migrate to Switzerland without sponsorship from an employer. I discussed the different enabling and disabling factors associated with these channels as well as the distribution of responsibilities between institutional actors for supporting immigrants in each channel. I showed that the way institutional actors construct immigrants in each channel differs, and these differences influence the services that are developed for each group.

In the family-oriented channel, people migrate to join a partner or relative living in Switzerland. Their resource environment on arrival very much depends on the family member's connections and social position. The role of the state is mainly to control admission conditions and to rectify situations perceived as socially problematic. However, the state provides little support to promote the social and economic integration of immigrants so long as their situation remains socially acceptable.

In contrast, in the company-oriented channel, the value of immigrants directly derives from employers that cause their relocation. Some companies invest considerable resources in supporting the mobility and settlement of new employees and their families. Furthermore, state administrations in charge of economic promotion have a particular interest in supporting people who are perceived as conveyers of wealth and economic development.

The study-oriented channel presents more ambiguities. On the one hand, relaxed admission requirements, as well as the supportive environment associated with state-funded institutes of higher education, create attractive conditions for immigrants to study in Switzerland. On the other hand, the fear of competition from foreign graduates and potential abuse of the system has motivated the development of restrictive admission conditions for non-EU/EFTA graduates in Switzerland. There is thus a contrast between a supportive environment during the institutional affiliation and a restrictive one immediately upon completion.

Finally, the protection-oriented channel is characterised by a resource environment structured around legal and political decisions that regulate the admission of asylum seekers to Switzerland. In this channel, the state determines whether a person has a rightful claim to asylum. Qualifications and skills have no significant value in this process. Moreover, the various restrictions and constraints involved in this channel make it particularly difficult for immigrants to build on their existing social and cultural capital.

These configurations of responsibilities and power entail different perceptions of immigrants: while some tend to be defined by their economic potential, others are more likely to be suspected of abusing the system. Such representations influence the forms of control and support present in each channel, thus affecting the opportunities available to immigrants. At the same time, immigrants are not passive agents. They actively develop strategies to adapt to the constraints imposed on them and to achieve their personal aspirations. They are not necessarily stuck in one channel only and they may try to expand their options by navigating between them. Nevertheless, they also depend on the range of opportunities available in their immediate resource environment, and the possibility to navigate between channels relies on their ability to mobilise these options effectively, whether alone or with the support of others.

These findings bring us back to the discussion of the notion of "highly skilled migrant". In the academic literature, a clear distinction is often made between high-skill and low-skill migrants. I tried to show, however, that skills are not all that matter. The deployment and acknowledgement of one's skills is not only linked to a person's characteristics but also to the social, economic, and political context in which they are embedded. Legal and political processes, economic dynamics and competition, societal debates, and power relations all influence representations of

migrants. These also shape interests, practices, and strategies that particularly affect certain individuals: sometimes they provide access to support and resources, while sometimes they trap migrants in Kafkaesque administrative systems. In that sense, the way we see migrants and differentiate between categories has consequences for the personal experiences and biographies of mobile individuals. Categories are not neutral because they can transform someone's life trajectory. For this reason, it is important to be aware of what we mean when we speak of "highly skilled migrants". Although this term is not a legal category in Switzerland, it has the power to define certain people as "wanted", "valuable", "socially desirable", and "culturally close" migrants, while others are defined as "unwanted".

At the beginning of this book, I discussed the idea that the definition of skill levels raises important questions regarding the value attributed to different forms of knowledge. In addition to issues related to the geographical and social distribution of power, I highlighted the discriminatory nature of skills-based policies, as well as the gendered dimension of skills valuation. I then showed through case studies that the value and support that various intermediaries grant to immigrants rely on factors other than qualifications and competences. Sometimes what matters most is the ability of a specific individual to convincingly fit within a specific economic context, other times the power and knowledge of a sponsor may make the difference, or people may have to be in the right place at the right moment with the right set of social characteristics and competences in order to succeed. Individual characteristics are important to the extent that they contribute to structuring access to supportive environments. Gender and nationality, for instance, not only interact with class, they also shape it by influencing the kind of channel that a person may use when migrating and the kind of support they may receive. In each of these cases, however, the social value of skills constitutes only one piece of the equation. Beyond individual characteristics, the way people are embedded in supportive or constraining environments that do or do not enable them to build upon their existing (social, cultural, economic etc.) capital is central to shaping their social status and life options. For this reason, it is important to investigate the way intermediaries involved in supporting and controlling mobility define and create opportunities for their target populations. Improving our understanding of the way migration regimes are structured necessitates a serious consideration of the role of actors who organise and shape the conditions of different categories of mobile people.

Overall, this chapter adds to the debate on highly skilled migration by calling for more nuanced approaches. In the work of Leslie Sklair (1998) and Saskia Sassen (2005), the "highly skilled" are described as a "transnational capitalist class" of cosmopolitan free-movers who transform national structures by positioning themselves as the new "global elite" (Favell et al., 2006). They lead "hyper-mobile international careers" (Hannerz, 1996), are socially and culturally disconnected from the places in which they live (Van Bochove & Engbersen, 2013), and "display highly mobile transnational elite existences and practices" (Beaverstock, 2002). My findings temper these rather extreme representations of highly skilled migrants. They show that reducing this category to a homogeneous elite class obscures the complexity of the social phenomena at stake and does not do justice to the stories of the

individuals involved. In line with other authors (Amit, 2007; Camenisch & Müller, 2017; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Scott, 2006), my work suggests that mobile ways of life are not exclusively available to elite groups but are increasingly becoming part of the experience of some middle class categories of people. Moreover, I show that border-crossing practices still present obstacles and constraints even for more privileged groups of people. In these situations, those who control outcomes are not so much the migrants as those who recruit them and define the conditions of their mobility.

In his book on the migration pathways of Indian IT specialists, Xiang Biao uses the term “global body shopping” to contrast with the more positive notion of “brain gain” and emphasise the fact that even highly skilled workers can be embedded in systems of labour distribution over which they have little control (Xiang, 2007). My research reaches similar conclusions and complements them with further findings. It shows that migration is a highly ambiguous process that can offer opportunities of upward social mobility, but that can also put people at risk: their qualifications may not be recognised, their legal status may exclude them from certain dimensions of social life, or they may feel isolated from their social networks. This creates situations of insecurity that make some migrants dependent on the decisions of more powerful, profit-oriented actors. These migrants have to market themselves as valuable in order to obtain and maintain the support of these actors. For this reason, migration is never solely an individual project but is also an industry in which various actors have invested stakes (Cranston et al., 2018; Groutsis et al., 2015). The business of migration involves major political issues concerning who is allowed to live and participate in a given society (Favell, 2008) and brings into play both state and non-state actors who define and select “wanted” or “good” migrants (Findlay et al., 2013; Hercog & Sandoz, 2018; Van Riemsdijk, Basford, & Burnham, 2015). Mobile individuals can in some cases benefit from these systems but have little control over them and, for this reason, depend on those who do.

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