

This study describes the profile of the Somali population living in Switzerland, as well as highlights their migration histories and trajectories. The analysis is complemented by a detailed insight into the living conditions and asylum policies in Switzerland and other host countries along the route. The aim of this double-layer analysis (micro and meso levels) is to provide a detailed understanding of the motives that prompt Somali refugees to undertake secondary movements from a first country of asylum in the search of better conditions in another one.

This study is part of a wide-ranging, multi-sited project focusing on the secondary movements of Somali refugees in eight countries in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

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Somali Refugees in Switzerland

Strategies of Exile and Policy Responses



*Joëlle Moret in collaboration with
Simone Baglioni and Denise Efionayi-Mäder*

SFM Studies 47

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and Denise Efionayi-Mäder

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Foreword

There are around 5,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Somalia in Switzerland. In comparison to other groups, this is not a very large number but the research process rapidly showed that finding out about a relatively unknown population is as challenging and stimulating as researching bigger groups.

In 2004, the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population (SFM) was commissioned to organize and coordinate an important study on the secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers and on the responses given by states thereto. It was carried out on the initiative of the governments of Switzerland and South Africa, who acted as facilitators for the Convention Plus Initiative¹ strand on irregular secondary movement. This study, conceived as a multi-sited research carried out in countries in Africa, Middle East and Europe, was been financed by the governments of Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

The first phase of this large-scale project consisted in carrying out eight studies in the following countries: Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland and Yemen. The case studies should therefore be considered as part of a wider framework and not as complete works in themselves. They notably provide background information for the final comparative analysis.

The SFM team's mission was to coordinate the overall study but it was also given the opportunity to carry out the Swiss case study that is part of the project. This report encompasses the results of this study. On the basis of in-depth interviews, it documents the journeys of the Somali refugees, their living conditions in Switzerland and in their previous host countries, as well as the policies, practices and attitudes of the Swiss government towards them.

The research was carried out by Joëlle Moret (who undertook interviews with refugees as well as with experts, analyzed the data and wrote the report), Simone Baglioni (who was also responsible for expert and refugee interviews and commented on the first draft of the report), under the supervision of Denise Efonayi-Mäder. The Swiss study was financed by the Swiss Federal Office for Migration (FOM).

¹ Convention Plus is an international effort initiated and coordinated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which aims at improving refugees protection and finding durable solutions for refugees worldwide through multilateral co-operation in a spirit of solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing.

However, the research could not have been carried out without the active involvement of other persons, to whom we would like to express our thanks. To Marco Pecoraro we owe the socio-demographic statistics on the Somali population in Switzerland. For the interviews with Somali persons, we relied on the helpful collaboration of a number of people: Jeanne Caruzzo, Daniela Da Rugna, Chantal Delli and Richard Mukundji. Finally, the editing of the text, written in the awkward English of its authors, was done by Joan Reilly.

We also want to express our great thanks to the experts (government officers, NGO representatives, researchers and other well-informed persons) for their time and advice. Somali community leaders in different places in Switzerland have also to be thanked for their valuable information and expertise as well as for facilitating contacts with potential interviewees.

Last but not least, we extend our sincere appreciation to all the Somali refugees (with different statuses) for agreeing to share their narratives and experiences, often by revisiting complex and emotionally sensitive memories.

Neuchâtel, June 2006

Joëlle Moret

Executive summary

Although known for its humanitarian tradition, Switzerland has seen its legislation regarding asylum matters become more restrictive in recent years. The legislative power over asylum matters (and over foreigners in general) lies with the Confederation, which is responsible for the Asylum Act of 1998 and the Law on the Stay and Sojourn of Aliens of 1931, as well as many other decrees, which are currently under review. The most important actor is the Federal Office for Migration (FOM), which is a branch of the Federal Department of Justice and Police. FOM is mainly responsible for the determination of asylum applications at first instance, although it works in tandem with the cantons (states) in areas such as asylum procedure, reception, social welfare, and promotion of voluntary repatriation, to name but a few. In the past years, an average of 10% of all asylum-seekers were granted refugee status, while approximately 25% received subsidiary status (provisional admission); the applications of the remaining 65% were rejected.

Switzerland is not a traditional or historical host country for Somalis, and the current population arrived as refugees in the last 12 years, with a total population of about 5,000 persons. According to 2003 statistics, the majority (67%) possessed subsidiary form of protection, while the rest held an annual residence permit (16%), a permanent residence permit (9%) or are asylum-seekers (8%).

Contrary to EU States, the definition of refugee applied by Switzerland is still limited to persecution attributable to state agents² and, given that Somalia has been without a recognized government since 1991, Somali exiles cannot claim to be suffering from such persecution. This means that, with the exception a few beneficiaries of resettlement programmes (176 persons between 1992 and 1999, and none since) or those accepted through family reunification with those previously resettled, Somalis are not granted refugee status according to the Geneva Convention. However, because of their need for international protection, most of them receive a subsidiary form of protection, called provisional admission (F permit). Since 1997, single and adult Somali men who belong to a clan from Somaliland or Puntland, or who used to live in those regions, are increasingly having their asylum claims rejected. Despite the lack of appropriate legal status, no Somalis have been forcibly returned to Somalia (including to the northern parts) by the Swiss

² A change of this practice is however envisaged.

authorities, presumably because of the technical difficulties such a move would imply.

The rights and benefits to which provisionally admitted persons are entitled are subject to many limitations, and are only slightly better than those of asylum-seekers, even after many years of residence in the country³. Interviewees mentioned many of these limitations among the main problems they encounter in the long term, and often consider them as important reasons for a secondary movement from Switzerland to other European countries or beyond.

Apart from the difficulties linked to living with an insecure status and in a precarious situation for many years, Somali interviewees reported the restricted access to employment and to higher education among the main issues of concern to them. Provisionally admitted persons (with an F permit) are subject to various limitations in their access to the labour market, where priority is given to holders of other statuses (except asylum-seekers) or due to regional restrictions in regard to specific economic sectors. In reality, this means diplomas and previous working experience are not recognized or useful, relegating refugees to low-skilled, low-paid jobs. Similar barriers exist with regard to higher education. As vocational education is based on apprenticeships, young people with provisional admission face preferential and restrictive rules when they seek access to advanced education, as they do in the labour market.

Lastly, family reunification remains another contentious issue. Provisionally admitted persons are not entitled to family reunification, even if they are close relatives (spouses and children). An unintended consequence of this is that refugees will find illegal – often dangerous and costly – ways for relatives, especially their children, to join them in Switzerland. Even more restrictive is the fact that F permit holders are not entitled to travel documents and this lack of freedom of movement outside of Switzerland is considered as a form of “imprisonment” for transnational families who live in various countries.

An analysis of the journey of Somalis living in Switzerland shows that the more recently they arrived, the shorter the journey was. In comparison to exiles leaving in the first years of the civil war, it appears that refugees who left the homeland more recently had better opportunities to organize a more

³ Switzerland’s subsidiary protection scheme is different from that of other European countries, notably the Netherlands, which entitles subsidiary protected persons to rights similar to those of recognized refugees.

direct journey to their intended destination, using networks and paths opened up by earlier refugees.

Somalis who arrived in Switzerland during the 1990s came mainly from Somalia’s neighbouring countries (mostly Kenya, but also Ethiopia, Djibouti or Yemen) as a result of unsatisfactory living conditions in the first country of settlement, combined with loss of hope in the political situation of Somalia. When concrete opportunities to travel materialized, many of the refugees opted to leave the continent. The great majority arrived illegally in Switzerland, mostly with the help of agents who organized the journey and the travel documents, and then accompanied them. The majority reached Europe by plane, often from a country neighbouring Somalia and/or via an Arab country (UAE or Saudi Arabia), while a minority undertook the risky journey across the Mediterranean Sea by boat. The journey from the arrival point (often Italy) to Switzerland is made by car or train.

The reasons pushing refugees to leave the camps or the cities and move onward are similar to those described in other case studies: difficult general conditions of living, lack of safety within and outside the camp, lack of opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency, and difficult access to education. Unregistered urban refugees are generally motivated to migrate by the lack of legal status and protection in urban areas, which leaves them at the mercy of police and surveillance authorities.

The choice of Switzerland as a settlement country is a by-product of a series of circumstances. While a large segment of the population is the result of family reunification efforts, many others relied on an agent’s choice and advice in choosing Switzerland as a host country. In several instances, interviewees arrived in Switzerland inadvertently, having been promised a different destination by the agent. The importance of Italy as an arrival point in Europe⁴ also seems to play a role, given its proximity to Switzerland which is easily accessible (through the green border) and offers comparably good living conditions and access to the social welfare system.

Switzerland is commonly considered by the refugees as a transit country, even though the transition is often a long one. Similarly, Swiss experts consider the Somali community as secondary movers who are likely to undertake another migration, although many do not have concrete plans or the means to carry out such a scheme. Such a movement is likely because interviewees are often extremely disappointed with their situation in Switzerland, for the above-

⁴ Somali refugees consider Italy as a transit point only and rarely as a destination of settlement.

mentioned reasons, and are tempted to move on to countries which they feel will offer the legal, social and communal advantages they deem necessary to their well-being. So-called “dream destinations” are, most notably, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Scandinavian countries, USA and Canada, which are seen as offering permanent legal status, larger Somali communities, better employment and education opportunities, and more freedoms in general. Despite these temptations, not all refugees heed the call to undertake irregular secondary movements because of the increasingly restrictive asylum policies being adopted in many European countries (e.g. the Netherlands) and improved cooperation between states regarding border control and asylum-seekers.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

This research takes place within the frame of the Convention Plus initiative, an international effort initiated and coordinated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which aims at improving refugee protection and finding durable solutions for refugees worldwide through multilateral co-operation in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility sharing. One focus of the initiative concerns the so-called “irregular secondary movements”: Switzerland and South Africa volunteered to act as facilitators for this theme. Together with the UNHCR, they commissioned the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) to conduct research in order to provide a better understanding of the movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers around the world. The purpose of the survey is to inform the way in which the issue of irregular secondary movements is addressed under Convention Plus.

The object of the study is to document the scope and the causes of irregular secondary movements of Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, and State responses thereto, including the understanding of the role and responsibilities of States in these situations. Increased knowledge of the factors and conditions leading to irregular secondary movements should contribute to a well-informed discussion among relevant partners, help to address this phenomenon generally and avoid policies being based on assumptions.

Though the study is obviously policy relevant, the research process has always remained independent and impartial. It is not determined by immediate policy interests, which would restrict its approach. Recent findings show that a combination of factors impact on movements of asylum-seekers and refugees, and not all of them are related to State policy. The study, therefore, adopted a broader, more pluralistic perspective, which includes the sub-national micro-level of the communities concerned and NGOs, as well as the national and supra-national dynamics.

The research is a multisited project and took place in eight countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen, Egypt, South Africa, Switzerland and the Netherlands. A team was based in each of these countries, and the research was conducted using the same methodology and the same tools (questionnaires, etc.).

This report presents the results of the Swiss study that took place within this context. The whole study is financed by Switzerland (through the Swiss Federal Office for Migration), Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

1.2 Methodology

We chose a method combining different angles of approach, targeting the populations concerned, governments, UNHCR officials and key informants from refugee communities as well as NGOs. This makes it possible to obtain information on different aspects of the phenomenon and opens perspectives from several sources, as well as helping nourish a dialogue among the parties involved.

The study is structured in two parts, one concerning the political and legal responses to the asylum issue provided by the countries studied (the aim being to obtain an overview of refugee protection regimes, including law, policy, practice and attitudes), the other aimed at letting the persons who are directly concerned, that is, Somali refugees and asylum-seekers, speak for themselves in order to understand the motivations and movement strategies of this population.

1.2.1 Interviews with experts and community leaders

The methodology consisted of interviewing, in a first phase, experts and “privileged observers”, that is, people with a professional or personal profile that allows them to have a clear point of view on one or many aspects of interest in this study. For that part of the study, we met representatives of the cantonal and federal authorities, NGO representatives, lawyers and researchers. Nine interviews were conducted, following a flexible interview schedule. Five interviews with Somali “community leaders” were also conducted, in different parts of Switzerland. The community leaders have been living in Switzerland for several years and have a specific knowledge of and good access to the Somali community. They are all strongly involved in Somali associations in Switzerland. These people were not only key informants, but were also important because they facilitated our access to the Somali refugees interviewed in the next phase of the research. In that sense, they are also considered as “gatekeepers” (Bloch 1999). The same flexible interview schedule as for the other experts was used for these interviews. Some of the interviews were recorded; all of them have been transcribed.

1.2.2 Interviews with Somali refugees

The other phase of the research consisted of 60 interviews with Somali refugees. A remark on the terminology is useful here: the Somalis we met benefit from different statuses: they are asylum-seekers, people with provisional admission (a subsidiary form of protection, as we will see),

recognized refugees, foreigners living in Switzerland with an annual or permanent residence permit and Somalis with Swiss citizenship⁵. In this report, when we use the term “refugee”, we mean all those categories, the word being used in its widest sense, for people having fled their country of origin and having – for most of them – lodged an asylum request in Switzerland. When we refer to specific legal categories of people, it will be specified in the text.

The interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured questionnaire. Most questions were open-ended, but a few had standardized answers. This questionnaire was used in a relatively flexible way, in order to give the interviewee the impression of a discussion rather than an interrogation. All interviews were then transcribed in a mask (using the Access software), which allows better quantitative and qualitative analysis of the answers, as well as comparability with the other country studies, in which the same methodology and mask were used. The interviews were conducted by six trained researchers in different parts of Switzerland, although some of them did only a few interviews. The team comprised four women and two men. For some of the interviews, an interpreter was needed, who usually was the gatekeeper through whom the interviewee was contacted. In those cases, the interpreter was asked to remain neutral and not to make any comments during the interview. This allowed the team to access people without good knowledge of the national languages or of English. Interviews were conducted in French, German, English, Italian and Somali.

To recruit interviewees, we began by asking community leaders and other partners to help us. Their role was important as they could convince people who trusted them to accept participating in an interview. However, in order to avoid biases in the sample, we used as many different “channels” as possible. Then, we also found our interview partners through snowballing techniques. At the beginning of each interview, it was made clear to the person that the interview was anonymous and strictly confidential, and that he/she always had the possibility to refuse answering to a question felt as too personal or sensitive. It was also explained that the interview had nothing to do with the asylum procedure, with the authorities or with the police: some of the questions resembling the ones asked during the procedure, this clarification was necessary. A symbolic incentive was given at the end of each interview to

⁵ The latter categories (people with a B or C permit and Swiss citizens) do not fall into a legal category of concern to the asylum field: however, we included few of them either because they arrived in Switzerland through an asylum channel and gained their actual status later, or because their specific situation was of particular interest to the study.

thank the person for his/her participation: the team decided on a phone card of 20 Swiss Francs.

Generally, the atmosphere during the interviews was positive and people talked to us quite freely. They mostly seemed to trust the interviewer, even though they sometimes avoided talking about specific aspects of their life or trajectory. In a few cases, the interviewer felt that the person did not trust him/her and was holding back much information. In other (quite numerous) cases, the interview took a very emotional turn as we asked our interview partners to talk about difficult moments of their lives. At the end of the interview, we asked people if they had comments or questions on the research (even though they had already been given the opportunity to ask questions at the beginning). The question that occurred most often concerned the goal of this research, and the effects it will have on their lives, which is fully understandable. Many people felt good about meeting someone interested in the situation of Somalis in general, or in listening to them in particular.

Statistical representativity was out of reach. However, we defined specific criteria based on the information we had on the profile of the refugee Somali population living in Switzerland and developed our sample according to these data. The criteria we used were: gender, age, legal status, canton of residence and, to a lesser extent, clan affiliation. In this way, we tried to avoid major sample biases and to gain perspectives on the broadest possible range of conditions facing the refugees.

1.2.3 Profile of the interviewees (experts, community leaders and refugees)

All the interviews took place between June 2004 and March 2005. The team started by meeting experts and community leaders in order to have a first insight into the situation of Somali refugees living in Switzerland. A few pre-interviews were also made during this first phase of the research in order to test the questionnaire and, more generally, the method chosen. Some small adaptations of the semi-structured questionnaire (for refugees) were made during the first months of the research (especially because some of the questions appeared not to be clear or accurate enough).

As has already been said, we did nine interviews with experts and privileged observers, as well as five other interviews with community leaders. The sample of those interviews is as follows (Table 1).

Table 1: Interviews with experts, privileged observers and community leaders

Total number of interviews	14
Of which	
Administration representatives	4
NGO representatives	3
Lawyers and other experts	2
Community leaders	5

For some of those interviews, more than one person was present: in total, we met 20 persons, of which six were women and fourteen were men. Unfortunately, it proved very difficult to find female community leaders and we were only able to meet one, who also works for an NGO active in the field of asylum.

Regarding the interviews with the refugees, apart from a couple of pre-tests, 60 Somali persons were met during the research, of which 35 men and 25 women. The large majority of the sample (43 persons, 72%) live in Switzerland with an F permit (provisional admission), while 4 persons have an N permit, (including one rejected asylum-seeker), 4 are recognized refugees, 6 have either an annual residence permit (B permit) or a permanent residence permit (C permit), but not with a refugee status, and 3 have Swiss citizenship (Table 2)⁶.

Table 2: Sample by sex and status

Sex	Asylum-seekers	Recognized refugees	Provisional admission	Other	Total N
Men	3	3	25	4	35
Women	1	1	18	5	25
Total N	4	4	43	9	60

⁶ Other data about the sample will be discussed in chapter 4.

Table 3: Sample by classes of age and status

Age of interviewees (classes)	Asylum-seekers	Recogn. ref.	Provisional admission	Other	Total N
More than 60 years old	--	--	1	1	2
Between 60 and 50	--	--	--	--	--
Between 50 and 40	1	--	10	1	12
Between 40 and 30	--	2	8	1	11
Between 30 and 20	2	1	16	5	24
Less than 20 years old	1	1	8	1	11
Total N	4	4	43	9	60

A methodological choice had been to interview mainly people who had arrived in Switzerland in the last six years because it gives some insight into the recent and present situation, as well as allowing us to interview persons with fresher memories of their trajectory. However, it was then decided not to stick strictly to this rule as the majority of the Somalis in Switzerland arrived earlier (see Table 9 further in the text). Therefore, some interviews were also made with Somalis who arrived in Switzerland before 1999, which gave us a better insight into the movements and strategies of these refugees. A quarter of the interviewees (15) arrived in Switzerland before 1997, while 37% (22) arrived between 1997 and 2002 and 38% (23) arrived later than 2002 (Table 4).

As the table shows, the balance of gender exists for the people who arrived earlier than 2001, but not for those who arrived more recently. This is due to the difficulty we had in approaching women who had been living in Switzerland for only a few years and convincing them to meet us.

Table 4: Sample of Somali interviewees by date of arrival in Switzerland and by gender

Arrival in CH	Men	Women	Total
1990-1992	2	2	4
1993-1994	3	4	7
1995-1996	2	2	4
1997-1998	1	3	4
1999-2000	4	5	9
2001-2002	7	2	9
2003-2004	16	7	23
Total	35	25	60

1.3 Structure of the report

The report is composed of three main parts. The first one (chapter 2) is a description of the protection regime in Switzerland. The idea of this part is to give a contextualized overview of the legal framework in the field of the protection of refugees and asylum policies. The legislation and policies will be set out, but the practices will also be described. With this part of the report, the attitude of the Swiss State towards refugees, and towards Somali refugees in particular, will be better understood. The different aspects relevant in terms of refugee protection and rights will be described after a description of the basic legal principles that govern these policies.

A (shorter) second part (chapter 3) is meant as an introduction to the Somalis living in Switzerland. In a few statistical figures, it will give a basic idea of this population of about 5000 people. This started to be a significant population in the early 1990s and most of the Somalis were or still are refugees in Switzerland.

The fourth chapter focuses specifically on how this Somali population living in Switzerland perceive their living conditions, as well as on the reasons that might push them to move onward. The journey from Somalia to Switzerland is an important part of this chapter, with a description of the main routes used, the means and strategies put forward and the intermediaries. The living conditions in the previous countries of settlement and the reasons that made the people choose to leave them are also analysed.

2 Overview of the protection regime

This chapter is built in two main sections. The first is a brief description of the basic legal principles on which the asylum policy is based in Switzerland. The second section presents the different aspects of asylum policy and practice, on a general level and – when relevant – with a focus on the Somalis' specific situation.

2.1 Basic legal principles

Switzerland has been a signatory State of the 1951 Convention since 1955 and of its 1967 Protocol since 1968. It has also ratified or acceded to all major international human rights treaties. The Swiss Constitution was last modified and accepted by the people in 1999. The legislative power regarding asylum and foreigners policies rests with the Confederation, especially in the Asylum Act (1998) and the Law on the Stay and Sojourn of Aliens (1931), as well as on many decrees. Both laws are currently under review by the Swiss Parliament.

The most important actor in the field of asylum is the Federal Office for Migration (FOM)⁷, which is supervised by the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP). The FOM is responsible for the determination of asylum applications in the first instance. In close collaboration with the cantons, it is also active in other areas: reception of asylum-seekers, social welfare, promotion of voluntary repatriation, etc.

Asylum-seekers have the possibility of lodging an appeal with the Swiss Asylum Appeals Commission (AAC) against negative decisions made by the Federal Office for Migration. The AAC is an independent judicial authority; it was created in 1992 and is the second and last instance in the asylum procedure.

The Swiss political system is federalist. This has some consequences in the field of asylum, as some of the competencies rest with the Confederation, while others are left to the cantonal authorities. It means that the practice is not the same in all parts of Switzerland, even though the cantons mostly depend on federal recommendations or minimum standards. For some social scientists, this practice may lead to discrimination, as the cantons have the means to influence the decisions of the federal authorities (Holzer and Schneider 2003).

Switzerland is not part of the European Union, nor of the Schengen Agreement or the Dublin Convention. The participation in those two European agreements (Schengen and Dublin) is however foreseen in the near future as the Swiss people voted for it in 2005. For the moment, bilateral agreements exist between Switzerland and some European states, for instance regarding the readmission of foreign nationals or for comparing digital prints of asylum-seekers (since Switzerland does not have access to the EURODAC database).

⁷ Until 2004, the Federal Office for Refugees was in charge of asylum matters: the FOM was born from the fusion of this office with the Federal Office of Immigration, Integration and Emigration.

2.2 Asylum policies and practices⁸

In this chapter, we will focus on the rights and benefits of asylum-seekers, recognized refugees and persons with a provisional admission, as they are the three main categories of people living in Switzerland in the field of asylum. The aim of this description is to give an overview of asylum policies as well as practices at a general level. When specificities exist regarding Somali refugees, they will be mentioned in the appropriate paragraph, as they are relevant for the understanding of the rest of the analysis.

2.2.1 Recognition of refugees

The Swiss Asylum Act recognizes the basic principle of the Geneva Convention of 1951 relating to the status of refugees. The article 3 of the Asylum Act reads as follows:

“Refugees are foreigners who in their native country or in the country of last residence are subject to or have a well-founded fear of serious disadvantages because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Considered as serious disadvantage are viz. a threat to life, physical integrity or freedom as well as measures exerting an unbearable psychological pressure. Flight motives specific to women are to be taken into account”.

Nowadays, less than 10% of asylum-seekers are recognized as refugees. This rate has changed notably since the beginning of the 1980s, when most asylum-seekers were granted refugee status. Another major change in the asylum policy of Switzerland appeared at the beginning of the 1990s, with the creation of different provisional and/or temporary statuses that allowed Switzerland to meet its international protection obligations without giving the people concerned the opportunity to integrate (since they are supposed to stay on a temporary basis) (Parini and Gianni 2005; Piguët 2005). The provisional

⁸ The information in this chapter is partially based on the following documents and sources (in addition to the interviews with experts, the existing knowledge of the researchers and the more specific literature mentioned in the text): UNHCR Survey Protection Overview for Switzerland (unpublished and confidential document), Federal Office for Migration (FOM) website, and the report on the legal and social conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees in Switzerland published by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles and the Danish Refugee Council (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and Danish Refugee Council 2003).

admission (F permit) that most Somalis receive, as we will see later, is the main form of subsidiary protection granted by Switzerland⁹.

At the end of 2004, according to the statistics of the Federal Office for Refugees, there were in Switzerland around 24'000 recognized refugees, 23'000 persons with a provisional admission, 17'000 asylum-seekers with a procedure still pending and 14'000 rejected asylum-seekers¹⁰.

Contrary to EU states, the definition applied to refugees by Switzerland is limited to persecution attributable to state agents¹¹. This means that Switzerland has not granted refugee status to any Somali asylum-seekers since it stopped its participation in resettlement programmes, and with the exception of family reunion cases. Most Somalis have been granted provisional admission, however: this kind of provisional admission (called "F" permit) is, among other reasons, granted to persons who are not recognized as refugees but who are nevertheless deemed in need of international protection and cannot be sent back to their country of origin because the return would be in breach of international human rights law, not "reasonable", or technically impossible. The provisional admission is not considered as a real status, but as a substitute measure that is supposed to last for a short period of time (Kamm et al. 2003). This means that no integration measures are provided for these persons. We will see later that in reality, the length of the stay in Switzerland is much longer than foreseen for many people with subsidiary protection.

In the case of Somali refugees, although it is recognized that they might have been subject to persecution, this persecution cannot be attributed to a state agent, Somalia being without a recognized government since 1991: therefore, no asylum status can be granted. At the same time, the granting of provisional admission is justified by two main reasons: the first is that the return is

⁹ Today the F permit is the only provisional status really granted (it is granted on an individual basis).

¹⁰ It should be noted that there is a specific category of people who have been recognized as refugees but who have not been granted asylum: they are recognized refugees with a provisional admission and are also in possession of a "F permit". Their number being very limited, this category does not appear in the description that follows: however, the rights and benefits of those people are slightly more restricted than those for recognized refugees (especially with regard to family reunion). The Asylum Act provides for a last legal category: temporary protection is a collective admission for persons in a situation of general danger. However, this provision has never yet been applied.

¹¹ This practice might however change in the near future and is to be discussed in Parliament. The change would affect about 100 persons every year, according to a lawyer working for an NGO, and would only concern new arrivals (no retroactive effect).

unreasonable because of the situation in Somalia (civil war, generalized violence, danger), the other is that the return would breach the European Convention on human rights (article 3) because the person would fear torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Another reason is simply the technical impossibility of returning people to Somalia (no direct flights to Somalia).

Very few Somalis' asylum applications are dismissed without entering into the substance of the case (12 in 2003, 37 in 2004, according to the FOM statistics), and when it does happen, it is mostly because the person refuses to cooperate with the procedure, according to the FOM experts.

2.2.2 Asylum procedure

The asylum request can be made in a Swiss embassy, at the border, at the airport or on Swiss territory, which is the most common situation¹². Once on Swiss territory, and whatever the manner of entry into the country, the person needs to register in one of the four FOM reception centres for asylum-seekers: two are near the German border (Basel and Kreuzlingen), one near the French border (Vallorbe) and one near the Italian border (Chiasso)¹³. According to the FOM employee we met at one of these centres, the average stay at the reception centre is fifteen days (the maximum allowed is 30 days), during which time asylum-seekers are registered (basic personal details), identified (photograph and fingerprints are taken), checked by medical staff and interviewed for a first time about their personal and family situation and about their grounds for asylum. They receive a fact sheet informing them about their rights and duties during the asylum procedure. They are given a bed in a dormitory and share common showers. Specific arrangements are made for families with minor children. Meals are prepared by a private caterer. Asylum-seekers are only allowed to leave the centre during certain day-time hours.

When the asylum claim is determined as not being unfounded and when there is no accelerated decision (either positive or negative), which is mostly the case for Somalis, the asylum-seeker is then assigned to one of the 26 cantons for residence; a second hearing takes place, carried out by the competent cantonal authorities. The file is then sent to the FOM which assesses it and

¹² UNHCR generally does not play a role in the Swiss asylum procedure. However, it has an active role in the airport procedures, as it has a veto right on the deportation to their country of origin of asylum-seekers considered as having a manifestly unfounded claim.

¹³ A fifth centre, located in Altstätten, is used only in exceptional cases, when the four main centres are full.

takes the first instance decision. The federal authorities' representative may wish to have a special hearing with the asylum-seeker, and this is organized in one of their own offices. A negative decision may be appealed within 30 days with the Asylum Appeals Commission (AAC): this second instance decision is final.

In specific cases, an asylum application can be dismissed without entering into the substance of the case. This happens for example when the person has already lodged an asylum request in another country or when it is clear that there are no valid reasons to seek asylum or when the person does not collaborate in the procedure¹⁴. The person whose case is dismissed without entering into the substance of his/her case is required to leave Switzerland and (since April 2004) does not benefit from social welfare. When it can be proved that the person has previously stayed for more than 20 days in another European country with which a readmission agreement has been signed, a preventive return to this third country may be prescribed.

For all hearings, a representative of a recognized relief organization is present, whose role is to check whether the hearing meets the correct procedure criteria, as well as a translator when necessary. The asylum-seeker can also ask to have a legal representative present, although this person is not allowed to speak in the name of his/her client.

Once in the assigned canton of residence, asylum-seekers waiting for a decision are given shelter (either in centres or in apartments), subsistence level benefits and are insured against sickness (every person living in Switzerland is legally required to be insured). Assistance is provided in cash payments or in kind. The cantons (or the communes or recognized relief organizations commissioned by the cantons) are responsible for the distribution of the assistance, the costs being reimbursed by the Federal Office for Migration.

There are no official specificities in the asylum procedure for Somalis in comparison to other nationalities. However, in practice, and according to the civil servants working at the Federal Office for Migration as well as to other experts, the procedure for this specific population seems simplified. As almost all Somalis are granted the same kind of admission and cannot be sent back, as mentioned above, there are no reasons to do lengthy and deep investigations on their case¹⁵. This means that they generally get their F

¹⁴ For a detailed description of the reasons for not entering into the matter of the case, please refer to articles 32 to 34 of the Asylum Act.

¹⁵ If such investigations were to be made (for example if the persecution by a non-state agent was recognized), the work of the FOM civil servants in charge of the procedure for

permit (subsidiary protection) quite rapidly and easily. The only situations in which it is not simple is when there are doubts about the nationality of the asylum-seeker (some people tend to say they are Somalis because they know about the rather generous practice granted to them, according to the FOM experts) or when there are clues pointing to a previous stay in another country in Europe. There are almost no cases of appeal against the decision of granting provisional admission to Somali asylum-seekers.

According to the experts, Somalis arriving at the centre are usually aware of what will happen to them and of the outcome of their asylum request (they expect the F permit): their stay at the centre is therefore not too difficult for them. The only worry they usually have is the canton to which they will be assigned. In most cases, they seem to have received all the information they need from the Somali community in Switzerland in which they first arrived and stayed for a short time before registering.

Since 1997, some Somalis have had their asylum claim rejected, on the following grounds: single and adult men who belong to a clan from Somaliland or Puntland or who have lived in those regions. For those people, provisional admission is no longer granted and their request is rejected, but in fact, rejected asylum-seekers have not been forcibly returned in the past few years.

2.2.3 Forced returns

In 1997, Somaliland and Puntland were declared safe enough for people to be returned and Switzerland decided not to grant provisional admission to Somali asylum-seekers almost automatically, as already mentioned. But it was quickly realized that it was technically impossible to return them to Somalia and started considering most of them as needing provisional admission again. A quite famous incident is still in many people's memory: in 1996, a Somali who had committed criminal offences had to be returned to Mogadishu: the Zurich police used their own plane to fly him to Somalia but when the plane landed, the policemen and the Somali man were taken hostage. After many negotiations (and a probable 20'000 Swiss francs ransom, according to the media), they were finally allowed to come home, but had to take the Somali man back with them to Switzerland¹⁶.

Somalis would be totally different, as they themselves admit: they would need to go into difficult investigations to prove the plausibility of the persecution the person alleges he/she has been victim of, as well as his/her identity, no easy task in a country with which no diplomatic relations exist.

¹⁶ See among others the Tages Anzeiger issues of 8 to 13 July 1996.

A few Somali refugees returned on a voluntary basis (15 between 1992 and 1995, and only 5 since 1996, according to the FOM statistics), but no forced return has been processed by the Swiss authorities in the past years.

2.2.4 Documentation and freedom of movement

During the procedure, asylum-seekers are given an “N” permit, which serves them as an identity document as they must hand over their own identity documents to the authorities at the beginning of the procedure. This permit is valid during the whole procedure (renewed depending on the needs and the cases). The asylum-seekers who are granted refugee status receive a “B” permit (annual residence permit) or a “C” permit (permanent residence permit) when they have been living legally in the country for more than five years.

Beneficiaries of a provisional admission receive an “F” permit, which is renewable on an annual basis. This also serves them as an identity document.

Recognized refugees can ask for a Convention travel-document, while asylum-seekers and subsidiary protected persons are in principle not entitled to such documents, unless in very exceptional circumstances.

As we will see, and as different experts point out, this is one of the major problems for Somalis living in Switzerland, as they often have members of their family living in other countries and they cannot visit them. It is also a major problem for children who cannot go on school trips outside Switzerland with other youngsters.

Asylum-seekers and subsidiary protected persons can move freely within Switzerland, but their official living and working place must remain in the canton to which they have been assigned (a change may be requested but is only permitted in very occasional cases, for family unity or for security reasons). Recognized refugees do not have complete freedom of choice of domicile until after they have been granted a C permit. While still benefiting from an annual residence permit (B permit), they are allowed to move to another canton for the same exceptional reasons as mentioned above; a move is also possible when they are financially self-sufficient, providing that the canton of destination accepts it.

2.2.5 Living conditions, shelter, and social care

Living conditions depend on the status of the person. Recognized refugees are treated on the same level as established migrants in terms of welfare assistance, social protection and access to the labour market, following the Geneva Convention. Their professional and social integration is promoted by means of specific measures within the scope of welfare assistance for refugees.

Things are different for persons with an N or an F permit. They also receive subsistence benefits and are insured against sickness, but these benefits are 40-60% lower than those granted to Swiss nationals or to recognized refugees. Support is as far as possible granted in kind rather than in the form of financial aid. It covers accommodation, food, toiletry and household articles, pocket money, clothes and shoes, electricity, water, heating, transportation to official appointments. Once they are assigned to a canton, they are usually placed in collective accommodation (centres), especially at the beginning of their stay. They move to private apartments (mostly provided by the local authorities responsible) after a certain period of time.

According to the FOM, around 50% of the recognized refugees and 60% of the asylum-seekers and persons with a provisional admission draw welfare benefits (also as a complement to a salary)¹⁷. The social welfare is to be reimbursed when the person has found a job and is financially independent.

2.2.6 Access to education

All children living in Switzerland (no matter what their status¹⁸) have to attend school up to the 9th grade, which is considered the end of compulsory education.

As for secondary and higher education, children of recognized refugees have the same rights as the nationals, and have the opportunity either to do an apprenticeship or to go to high school and then to university. The problems these children might encounter are not in terms of legal access, but of another nature (funding of the studies, for example).

The children of asylum-seekers and persons with provisional admission are restricted in terms of access to professional and higher education. Access to higher education is not strictly forbidden by law but it is hindered in practice. Many young people in Switzerland undergo a practical vocational education through an apprenticeship (usually three to four years): this means that they go to school part-time and work for an employer the rest of the time. Concretely, this also means that they need to enter the labour market to get their education, and this is where the problems lie for young people with an N or F permit. The Swiss legislation requires the employers to hire people with a better status before employing people with provisional admission, and then asylum-seekers. Besides, employers are rarely willing to employ someone who is supposed to be living in Switzerland only on a temporary basis. We

¹⁷ Source: FOM website (www.bfm.admin.ch).

¹⁸ Even the children of people living illegally in Switzerland are required to attend school.

will see later that this is one of the major problems that young Somalis with provisional admission encounter when trying to access to vocational education and find an apprenticeship.

Asylum-seekers and subsidiary admitted persons can benefit from basic language courses in most cantons. Recognized refugees can attend an intensive language course, as a certain amount of money is earmarked for this in the “integration package” they receive when they are granted the status.

In some cantons, asylum-seekers can attend occupational programmes, where they may acquire practical skills that could be useful to them in case of a return to their country of origin¹⁹. The goal of these programmes is also to give a structure to everyday life. People attending them do not earn real wages, but receive small incentives.

2.2.7 Access to employment

Recognized refugees may look for a job in whatever branch they wish (although a few jobs are still reserved for Swiss citizens). Professional integration programmes are also set up to help them enter the labour market (recognition of their foreign diplomas, language classes, etc.).

Asylum-seekers are not allowed to work during the first three months after they have applied for asylum. This prohibition can be extended to six months when a first negative decision has been taken. Their labour opportunities may be restricted by the canton to some specific branches, such as agriculture, construction, hospitals, restaurants, hotels and cleaning. Asylum-seekers may also only be hired when the employer can prove that no Swiss citizen or foreigner with a B or C permit is interested in having the job. Foreigners coming from countries of the European Union or the EFTA space also have priority on the labour market.

Persons living in Switzerland with provisional admission (F permit) do not encounter any working prohibition, but many restrictions. Those restrictions, regarding the branches they can work in, are based on recommendations made by the Confederation but can be adapted by each canton. They usually depend on the economic situation and its consequences on the employment market. They have also been put in place to avoid making Switzerland too attractive to potential asylum-seekers (Kuster and Cavelti 2003). In any case, the priority to Swiss citizens, foreigners with B or C permits or from the EU or

¹⁹ They are few programmes for asylum-seekers and it has to be noted that none of them is aimed at their local integration.

EFTA space must prevail. Usually, people with provisional admission have priority over asylum-seekers.

Persons with an N or F permit automatically have 10% of their wages retained on a special account by the FOM. This money serves to reimburse social welfare costs²⁰ and the procedure costs, and to pay the trip back to the country of origin which might occur at a later stage (and will be reimbursed if too much has been taken out). In the Swiss legislation, all social welfare benefits are meant to be reimbursed by the recipients once they are in a situation to do so; however, the tendency in a few cantons is now to abandon this practice.

2.2.8 Access to health care

Asylum-seekers, persons benefiting from a provisional admission and recognized refugees are covered by a health insurance, which is compulsory for all people living legally in Switzerland. The costs of the insurance, as well as the percentage of the medical costs that is to be paid by the insured person are covered by the Confederation or by the cantons for people relying on social welfare. The choice of the health provider can be restricted for asylum-seekers and persons with an F permit. Dental care is also covered, but only when strictly necessary.

2.2.9 Family unity

Spouses and minor children of recognized refugees are also granted asylum and receive refugee status (this also applies for children of recognized refugees born in Switzerland). However, the right to family reunification does not mean that the costs associated with it (travel costs, documents needed, etc) are the responsibility of the authorities.

Asylum-seekers and persons with provisional admission cannot benefit from family reunification. However, if the close relatives (spouses and minor children) of subsidiary protected people arrive in Switzerland by their own means, they will also be granted provisional admission.

2.2.10 Detention

Rejected asylum-seekers may be placed in administrative detention under “coercive measures” in order to ensure enforcement or deportation. This can happen in different cases, mainly when the person does not abide by his duty to cooperate in the asylum procedure (“preparatory detention”) and when

²⁰ Given that asylum-seekers are not allowed to work during the first three months of their procedure, a fixed sum has been defined for the social welfare costs of this period.

there are concrete indications that he intends to avoid deportation (“deportation detention”). The maximum length of detention is nine months (but the new Asylum Act, discussed by the Parliament in 2005, might extend it to 24 months).

2.2.11 Long-term solutions

The Federal Office for Migration offers the possibility of **voluntary repatriation**, through assistance programmes and extensive return counselling systems. These are available to all people in the field of asylum, including recognized refugees and persons with provisional admission, but excluding asylum-seekers who have stayed beyond their given departure date, those whose case has been dismissed without entering into the substance (i.e. persons not admitted to an ordinary asylum procedure), and criminal offenders. A voluntary return programme has been set up for Somalis, but according to the experts, it has not been a success, as Somalis have not asked to benefit from it. For example, some members of the Somali community in Lausanne, in an unpublished document, considered “the projects offered by the FOR inappropriate both conceptually and with regard to timing”, for different reasons.

Regarding **resettlement**, Switzerland has officially frozen its quota since 1998, although single cases are still regularly brought to Switzerland using this procedure. In all, 176 Somali refugees have been resettled by Switzerland since 1992, the majority of them in 1993²¹.

Regarding **local integration**, recognized refugees enjoy all rights and benefits pursuant to the 1951 Convention. This means that, once they receive a C permit (after five years of residence in Switzerland), they enjoy the same rights as Swiss citizens, except for voting and eligibility rights. The social rights and benefits of asylum-seekers, as well as of persons with provisional admission, are limited, as described above. These categories of people are not included in the integration measures planned by the Swiss legislation.

People with provisional admission may qualify to have their F permit upgraded to a B permit only on very strict criteria. These criteria are decided by the cantons, but the Swiss law sets minimum standards for eligibility that the cantons must follow. The minimum length of stay is four years for families with children going to school and nine years for single persons. Moreover, in order to have their permit upgraded, candidates must meet other

²¹ The detailed figures are : 3 persons in 1992, 106 in 1993, 28 in 1994, 29 in 1995, 9 in 1998 and 1 in 1999 (source : FOM).

integration criteria, the main ones being social and professional integration and proof of long-term self-sufficiency. In practice, the details of application of this process are very different from canton to canton; some cantons do not present any candidates for upgrading of a permit to the federal authorities (which are the last instance of decision), whereas others do so much more often²². There is no means of appeal against the cantonal decision not to present requests for their residents to the federal authorities. It is interesting to note the “integration paradox” involved in this whole process: people must be integrated in order to qualify for having their F permit upgraded to a B permit, but nothing is done to promote their integration since their stay is supposed to be temporary (Kamm et al. 2003).

The conditions for **acquiring Swiss nationality** are set down in the Federal Law on Nationality and require twelve years of residence in Switzerland (the years count double between the age of ten and twenty). However, the first steps of the process are regulated by communal and cantonal laws, which set criteria for accepting candidates for naturalization. All persons with a legal status living in Switzerland may apply for naturalization, including asylum-seekers and persons with a provisional admission. There is no facilitated naturalization procedure for recognized refugees (nor for second generation foreigners).

2.2.12 Conclusion

The description of the rights and benefits accorded to each of the categories of people in the field of asylum, as well as the summary table (Table 5), show that, while recognized refugees benefit from basically the same rights as settled migrants, things are different for asylum-seekers and people living with a provisional admission.

²² One of the reasons why it might not be in the interest of the cantons to give B permits is that they would have to pay for the person if he/she needs social welfare, while the Confederation is in charge of paying the social welfare for people with an F permit.

Table 5: Rights and benefits of different categories of people in the field of asylum

	Asylum-seekers	Persons with a provisional admission	Recognized refugees
Documentation	N permit, valid during the whole procedure, renewed depending on the needs and the cases	F permit, renewable every year	Annual residence permit B / permanent residence permit C after 5 years of residence in CH
Choice of canton of residence	No choice	No choice	Restricted with B permit, free with C permit
Travel outside of CH	Not allowed	Not allowed	Allowed (Convention travel document issued)
Welfare assistance	40-60 % lower than for Swiss citizens	40-60 % lower than for Swiss citizens	Same as for Swiss citizens
Access to education	Compulsory until 9 th grade, restricted for young people and adults	Compulsory until 9 th grade, restricted for young people and adults	Same as for Swiss citizens
Access to labour market	Prohibited for the first 3 or 6 months, restricted later (branches restriction and priority to all other foreigners categories)	Restricted (branches restriction and priority to all other foreigners categories, except asylum-seekers)	No major restriction
Access to health care	Health care covered by compulsory insurance (restrictions in choice of health provider)	Health care covered by compulsory insurance (restrictions in choice of health provider)	Health care covered by compulsory insurance
Family reunification	No entitlement	No entitlement	Right for spouses and minor children
Access to federal integration measures	No entitlement	No entitlement	Right to social and professional integration measures

The situation of the people benefiting from a provisional admission is of specific interest to us in this report, as the majority of Somalis living in Switzerland have been granted subsidiary admission. As we will see, most of the problems encountered by the interviewees are clearly perceived as being related to their F permit and the restrictions it implies, and we will look in detail at the different fields in which those problems occur. However, it is important to mention here that when provisional admission was introduced into Swiss law (in 1986), as a substitute measure to the granting of asylum

status, it was conceived as a “temporary” admission²³. As time went by, practice showed that only very few of the people who had been granted an F permit went back to their country of origin, the situation there not being stable enough to ask people to return. As a consequence, many people, including Somalis, have been living in Switzerland for many years with this provisional admission and the many restrictions of rights and opportunities this entails. Other European countries have introduced subsidiary forms of protection into their legislation for humanitarian or other reasons. This is notably the case of the Netherlands and of Denmark. While Switzerland opted to handle persons benefiting from such admission in the same manner as asylum-seekers, other countries considered that these persons should rather be treated on a similar basis to recognized refugees. Switzerland’s policy regarding the persons admitted on subsidiary grounds are clearly stricter than the directives published by the European Commission, especially in terms of duration of the limitations linked to this kind of status (Peter 2003)²⁴.

Before closing this descriptive chapter, it is important to say a few words on the political climate and the general perception of the refugees among the Swiss population (and the media). As in most other European countries, this perception has become far from positive and welcoming, especially in the past 20 years. Reflected in the media debate, fears, anger, mistrust and lack of factual information are the main components of the general discussions on asylum. Again following a general European trend, some right wing political parties are taking advantage of this and stirring up those fears, making the “problem” of asylum a pillar of their programmes. The fact that the trends show that the number of asylum claims is going down does not alter this situation, and issues such as the misuse of asylum systems, criminality among asylum-seekers and the overpopulation of Muslims are still very common themes in the public debate. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, both the Law on the Stay and Sojourn of Aliens and the Asylum Act are currently under revision in the Swiss Parliament. Everything suggests that the direction taken by both laws is a very restrictive one.

2.3 Conclusion: Somalis and the Swiss asylum system

This journey through the Swiss asylum policy and its related practices shows a rather complex system, with specific rights granted to specific categories of

²³ Its official denomination in French and German is “temporary admission”.

²⁴ Germany’s policies regarding subsidiary protection are similar to those of Switzerland. However, this country recognizes the fact that the reduction of the rights and benefits of subsidiarily admitted persons should be limited in time.

persons divided along the lines of their legal status. While asylum-seekers have very limited rights, although they can survive thanks to the welfare benefits they are entitled to, recognized refugees have rights that are almost similar to those of Swiss nationals. The Geneva Convention on Refugees is respected – although this does not mean that recognized refugees, like other foreigners living in Switzerland, do not suffer from various other forms of discrimination in practice.

The great majority of Somalis go through a simplified and short procedure leading to the granting of a subsidiary form of protection: provisional admission (F permit). As we will see in the next chapters, the perception Somali refugees themselves have of this admission is very negative, as all the problems and obstacles they encounter are seen as closely linked to the restrictions it implies, especially in the longer term. However, the perception that other actors, and especially the representatives of the authorities, have of the F permit is different. During most of the interviews, the terms “favourable situation”, “good permit” or “settled status” were very commonly used when referring to provisional admission. This seems understandable bearing in mind that the majority of these experts (representing the authorities, but also working for NGOs) generally have to deal with people who are in a much worse situation: asylum-seekers, but also rejected asylum-seekers, persons whose case has not been taken up (not accepted for an ordinary asylum procedure), or even undocumented migrants. In comparison to this, the situation of persons living with provisional admission, and who are in no danger of being returned home, is no doubt enviable. When compared to recognized refugees, it is much less so.

The difference of perception is probably also a matter of timeline, which Somali refugees also acknowledge: the situation allowed by provisional admission is favourable provided as it does not last too long. And this is where the problem lies, as we will see later, since many Somalis (and others) have been living in Switzerland with this kind of permit for many long years.

Another issue can be raised in the conclusion of this first chapter: is the situation of Somali refugees living in Switzerland better or worse than in other (European) countries? It is difficult to give a clear answer to this question as other elements must be taken into account: the first, once again, is the time factor; the second is related to the type of person that is taken into consideration. As far as legal and social rights conditions are concerned, Switzerland can be the “best” place or the “worst” place depending on the needs and the existing resources of the person. While the welfare assistance and the general living conditions can be considered as “interesting” for people who cannot be self-reliant and for vulnerable persons, the prospects of integration are rather limited for persons who want to rebuild their lives, their future, and the future of their children, as the next chapters will show. As we

heard in an informal discussion with a community leader and a female friend of his, “we would prefer a system like in other countries where they help you only for a short time but at the same time give you real opportunities to integrate and to become self-reliant very early”.

The description that a representative of the FOM made during an interview also shows this ambiguity and the difficulties that are found when trying to compare the conditions offered by each country: “Switzerland in some cases offers better conditions to people with an F permit than France, for example in terms of social welfare or of health services. But it is true that France is more generous when it comes to giving refugee status (especially for minority groups). And a child who is born in France automatically receives French nationality”.

These differences, and the fact that the “choice” of a host country also depends on the needs and the time when these needs arise, are a part of the explanation of the secondary movements of the Somali asylum-seekers, as we will see in the following chapters.

3 Somalis in Switzerland

According to the statistics²⁵, a little more than 5000 Somalis are living in Switzerland (Table 6). Men and women are almost equal in numbers and this population is very young: almost half of the Somalis in Switzerland are younger than 20 and 84% are younger than 40 (Table 7). Together with the Congolese and the Angolans they constitute one of the most important African communities in Switzerland. The migration of Somalis to Switzerland is quite recent: most of them arrived during the last 12 years, mainly as refugees. According to the statistics of the Federal Office for Migration (FOM), over the last couple of years, the number of asylum requests by Somalis has risen lightly (394 in 2002, 469 in 2003, 590 in 2004), although the total number of asylum requests decreased in 2004 in Switzerland as well as in other European countries. The experts working at the FOM confirmed this trend; moreover, according to them, more men have been arriving in Switzerland recently than women or families. The number of non-accompanied minors is also quite high (89 in 2004, of which 20 disappeared,

²⁵ When no specific source is mentioned, the statistical data come from the Swiss AUPER (persons in the field of asylum) and CAR (Central Aliens Register) databases (2003). The numbers are comprised of all Somalis living in Switzerland with a legal status. According to the Swiss census of 2000, around 100 Somalis live in Switzerland with a Swiss passport: they are not included in the numbers presented in this chapter.

according to a FOM expert). A Somali community leader also told us about this new trend, specifying that more and more young single men were arriving. The statistics show that, in 2003 at least, most of the Somalis living in Switzerland (61%) were single, and almost one third were married.

Table 6: Somali population living in Switzerland, by sex breakdown, in 2003

Sex	N	in %
F	2435	47.8
M	2658	52.2
Total	5093	100

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

Table 7: Somali population living in Switzerland, by age breakdown, in 2003

Age	N	in %
0-19	2468	48.4
20-39	1829	36
40-59	646	12.7
60 and more	150	3
Total	5093	100

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

Table 8: Somali population living in Switzerland, by civil status, in 2003

Civil status	N	en %
Unknown	33	0.6
Single	3205	62.9
Divorced	130	2.6
Married	1601	31.4
Widow	124	2.4
Total	5093	100

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

In 2003, a large number of the Somalis living in Switzerland (almost 60%) had been living in the country for more than 5 years, which means that they arrived before 1998, with an important peak in 1993 (Table 9). There are no reasons for these figures to have changed much since, and we may say that the majority of the Somalis, although benefiting from a “temporary” provisional admission, are long-term inhabitants of this country.

Table 9: Somali population living in Switzerland by number of years since arrival, gender and type of status, in 2003

Number of years since arrival in CH	Type of permit								Total	
	B&C				N&F					
	Gender				Gender					
	F		M		F		M			
N	in %	N	in %	N	in %	N	in %	N	in %	
0 (arrival in 2003)	7	1.7	3	0.6	126	8.9	242	16.2	378	10.0
1	6	1.5	7	1.5	110	7.8	155	10.4	278	7.4
2	6	1.5	5	1	120	8.5	113	7.6	244	6.5
3	16	4	6	1.3	115	8.2	75	5	212	5.6
4	17	4.2	9	1.9	127	9	95	6.4	248	6.6
5 (arrival in 1998)	11	2.7	9	1.9	90	6.4	102	6.8	212	5.6
6	16	4	14	2.9	135	9.6	162	10.9	327	8.6
7	25	6.2	17	3.6	110	7.8	108	7.2	260	6.9
8	26	6.5	26	5.5	71	5	57	3.8	180	4.8
9	37	9.2	39	8.2	123	8.7	119	8	318	8.4
10 (arrival in 1993)	132	32.9	169	35.4	176	12.5	158	10.6	635	16.8
11	39	9.7	47	9.9	66	4.7	55	3.7	207	5.5
12	40	10	60	12.6	31	2.2	32	2.1	163	4.3
13	11	2.7	22	4.6	7	0.5	11	0.7	51	1.3
14	4	1	14	2.9	3	0.2	6	0.4	27	0.7
15-31 (arrival between 1972 and 1988)	8	1.7	30	6.1	0	0	3	0.3	41	1.1
Total	401	100	477	100	1410	100	1493	100	3781	100.0
<i>Born in Switzerland</i>	<i>184</i>		<i>238</i>		<i>440</i>		<i>450</i>		<i>1312</i>	

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

The majority have been denied refugee status but benefit from provisional admission and live with an F permit (66,8 %). As has been said, this authorization entitles the persons to stay in Switzerland and is renewable every year, but includes many limitations. The others are mostly in possession of an annual residence permit B (16,7 %), a permanent residence permit C (8,8 %) or are still in the asylum procedure (asylum-seekers, N permit, 7,7 %) (Table 10).

Table 10: Somali population living in Switzerland, by type of permit, in 2003

Type of permit	N	in %
B Permit	852	16.7
C Permit	448	8.8
F Permit	3401	66.8
N Permit	392	7.7
Total	5093	100

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

Data concerning clan origin are difficult to obtain but it seems that the three major clan affiliations are Darod (mainly Somalis who arrived quite a long time ago), Majerteen and Hawiye (both arrived more recently). These assumptions are based on interviews with experts and community leaders.

Due to their limited number and the fact that the Somalis live in different parts of the country (see Table 11), they do not constitute a very visible group²⁶. Generally, it emerges from the expert interviews that they are not considered as facing specific discrimination or integration problems, nor do they account for many criminal records (as is the case, for instance, in the Netherlands). According to some experts, Somalis were considered as difficult when they first arrived in large numbers (early 1990s) but that it is no longer the case. This was mentioned by different representatives of the cantonal and federal authorities.

Table 11: Somali population living in Switzerland, by canton of residence, in 2003

Canton of residence	N	in %
Zurich	1194	23.4
Berne	636	12.5
Lucerne	160	3.1
Uri	2	0
Schwyz	17	0.3
Glaris	2	0
Zug	15	0.3
Fribourg	259	5.1

²⁶ Although many Somali associations exist, and try to draw attention to their situation, as we will see later, the Somali community is not as visible as in other countries: as an example we could mention the absence of Somali inhabited areas in Swiss cities, or the non existence of ethnic businesses.

Solothurn	104	2
BS	16	0.3
BL	17	0.3
Schaffhouse	28	0.5
Aarau	1	0
St Gall	206	4
Grisons	46	0.9
Argovie	96	1.9
Thurgovie	34	0.7
Tessin	36	0.7
Vaud	774	15.2
Valais	175	3.4
Neuchâtel	279	5.5
Genève	966	19
Jura	7	0.1
Unknown	23	0.5
Total	5093	100

Source: AUPER & CAR 2003

4 Movements, motivations and strategies of the Somalis living in Switzerland

This chapter is based mainly on the perspective of the Somali interviewees. Letting the persons directly concerned speak for themselves is fundamental and we will see here that the way they live and perceive their living conditions and the policies they depend on is often different from that of the experts. It will also appear that the legislation, policies and practices, in Switzerland and in the previous countries they stayed in, have immense consequences on their lives.

The first and second sections of this chapter focus on the journey Somali refugees have made since they left their home country, until they arrived in Switzerland. The reasons for leaving Somalia and the manner of doing so, the intermediaries contacted, the routes taken and the means of transport used will be described. Many people resided in other countries before they arrived in Switzerland: the living conditions they found there, and the reasons that made them move onward, are analysed, as well as the reasons why they finally chose (or not) Switzerland as a destination country.

The life of the Somali refugees in Switzerland is at the heart of the third part. The living conditions as they are perceived are described, especially in terms of the problems encountered. The focus on the problematic aspects is explained by the fact that these negative experiences are closely linked to the

potential secondary movements of the Somali refugees, as they might – at least partially – cause them. The Somali community living in Switzerland, as well as the links between the Somalis living in Switzerland, those living in Somalia and those living in other countries, are also briefly described here.

Moving (irregularly or not) to another country from Switzerland is one among various other strategies for the future: the last section is about the plans for the future of the Somali refugees we met. A special focus is put on the secondary movements and the reasons that lie behind this choice.

4.1 Leaving Somalia

Most of the interviewees are from Mogadishu or had been living there for a long time before they left the country: 43 persons out of 60 (72%). 4 persons come from Kismayo, while the others come from different regions in the country (only one used to live in Somaliland before leaving). The clan affiliation of the persons we met was a little difficult to establish: the question was not always asked (mainly because it seemed to be a sensitive issue in some cases) and when it was, some people gave the name of their sub-clan and not of the main clan they belong to. However, the answers we did get show a large representation of people belonging to the Darod (17) or to the Hawiye (17) clans. One person is a Bantu Somali, another one belongs to the Rahaweins, while the clan affiliation is unknown for 11 of them and of a different nature for 12 other persons.

Almost half of the persons we met (27) left Somalia in recent years (after 2000): this high proportion is due to our methodological choice, which was to meet mainly people who arrived in Switzerland in recent years. However, a large number (24) left Somalia between 1990 and 1993, in the years after the Syad Barre regime fell and the civil war started. A smaller proportion (9 persons) left their country of origin between 1994 and 1999 (see Table 12).

Table 12: Year of departure from Somalia, by sex breakdown

Year of departure	Men		Women		Total	
	N	In %	N	In %	N	In %
1990-1993	13	37%	11	44%	24	40%
1994-1999	3	9%	6	24%	9	15%
2000-2004	19	54%	8	32%	27	45%
Total	35	100%	25	100%	60	100%

The sample shows two “waves” of departure (which are not to be considered as statistically representative in a more general way), and which correspond roughly to two different scenarios (manner and conditions in which people left their country).

The people who left Somalia at the outbreak of the civil war or during the first few years after it had started mostly fled in a rush and in dispersed order. This means that the departure had not been prepared, or at best only hastily, and that in most cases, the families could not leave all together, often not knowing where the other members of their family were, or even whether they were still alive or not. A man tells us:

I left because of the violence. It was no longer possible to stay for the people of my clan. We had been invaded by the Hawiye tribes. Even our neighbours with whom we had always lived in peace had become enemies. One day, I went out of Mogadishu and could not get home because they had closed the access. I had to hide myself. I did not know where my family was. Then I learned they had been captured. After about four weeks, when the place was calmer, I learned from friends that our house was down, I became really crazy. I had not seen my family and I did not see them until I arrived in Switzerland, some months after that. I left Somalia to go searching for them, I did not know where they were, but I knew they had left the country. (301/male in his 60s)

The people who left Somalia at that time mostly fled to a neighbouring country first: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti or Yemen (see Table 15). In most cases, there is no chance and no time to build a migration project (for the longer term) as the only thing that counts is leaving a country that became too dangerous and finding some security as fast and as easily as possible. The other reason is that the estrangement is often considered as temporary, until the fighting ends and it is possible to go back again.

In some cases, the process starts with a movement within the country, before a decision is made to leave it altogether. For example, some people first left Mogadishu and went to Kismayo, thinking that they might be able to wait for peace and go back from there. When the fighting zone extended to the south of Somalia as well, they decided to cross the border and went to Kenya.

The second scenario is one of a more prepared journey. This does not mean that the reasons for leaving Somalia are much different: up to today, people who leave Somalia, especially Mogadishu, flee generalized violence, insecurity and the absence of law, as many testimonies we heard revealed. This is also acknowledged by the international community, as very few Somalis are sent back (except for the large voluntary repatriation programmes to the north of Somalia run by UNHCR and some governments), as well as by UNHCR. In a position on the return of rejected asylum-seekers to Somalia published in 2004, it states clearly that, due to the human rights and humanitarian situations, no rejected asylum-seekers should be involuntarily returned to south Somalia. The description given is eloquent: “throughout the country, human rights violations remain endemic. These include murder, looting and destruction of property, use of child soldiers, kidnapping, discrimination of minorities, torture, unlawful arrest and detention, and denial of due process by local authorities. (...) Gender-based violence is prevalent,

including rape, female genital mutilation and domestic violence”. (UNHCR 2004b: 2). The difference lies in the fact that these people, for one reason or another, stayed in Somalia for a few years more after the war had started and, in the main, took their decision to leave without the same urgency and with the chance to organize themselves better. These people could also benefit from the fact that many left before them and were already living abroad: they had members of their network or family who could help them organize the journey, find the right people and, of course, find the money. The difference lies more in the availability of resources of one sort or another that would enable a person to leave than in the situation of the person as such. This hypothesis allows us to distance ourselves from the traditional distinction between “economic migrants” and refugees: while there is no denying that often the person in the family who leaves is considered as an “investment” for the whole family who will expect to live better with one of its members abroad, many other aspects come into play in this kind of community decision. The situation described by people who left Mogadishu in the most recent years is still a terrifying one, marked by violence between clans or sub-clans, murders and revenges, as the following example shows:

While I was working at the electricity company I encountered some problems. There were tribalism problems. The cousin of my boss wanted to have my job because he was unemployed. We are all from the same clan but from different sub-clans. My boss told him no and said that he wanted to keep me because I did a good job. This guy did not like this and started to threaten me. He told me that he would kill me. One day he attacked me. Nothing happened but I was shocked. After this I stayed home for three days. When I went back to work the others said that I should leave because I was causing problems. This was not true, though. Then this guy came and attacked me again as well as my boss who is his cousin. We both survived but a guard got killed in the gunfire. I escaped and went back home. My mother told me to leave the country. She said that my life was in danger. She also said that she would take care of my family because I did not have enough money to take them all with me. (509/male/about 25 years old).

This situation, in which violence has become a way of life, without any government to protect its citizens and make sure that there is some kind of law, leads to desperate economic situations with very little in the way of work opportunities. A major aspect of this, that appears in many testimonies, is that “there is no future” in Somalia. As Denise Efonayi-Mäder (2005) explains in her study on the trajectories of West Africans to Switzerland, this lack of hope of any improvement in the situation rather than the difficult situation itself often pushes people to leave.

The situation is particularly difficult for women, especially when there is no man in the family to protect them. Rapes are not rare, although we mostly did not ask for details during the interviews; they are well known as a war weapon, as in many other conflicts.

I started having problems with the boys. I was 14-15 and my father had left for Kenya. We were living in a problem area and as my father wasn't there any more and I did not have any older brother, I had no one to protect me. There were rapes. I wasn't raped, but they kept entering our house, they wanted to aggress us. My mother was often away, looking for food. She was worried for me. That is when she started looking for someone who could help me leave. (302/female/18 years old).

Some other gender-specific reasons for leaving Somalia came up. For example, we met an 18-year-old girl who left Somalia with her mother's help because her father wanted to force her to marry someone she did not want to marry.

Not all Somalis chose to leave their country or found the opportunity to do so. This raises the question of who left, or rather who left and arrived in Switzerland (or, in a more general manner, in Europe). Not surprisingly, the people we met in Switzerland mostly come originally from middle to upper class families. When asked what their life was like before they left Somalia, many of them made a distinction between the period before the war (which was very often a good life, with a job or studies going on, and material belongings such as houses, cars, and farming goods) and the period that came later, with all or some of this disappearing. Logically, better-off people fled to Europe or North America, while the poorest could only flee to neighbouring countries, or else move within Somalia. The social class affects not only the destination reached, but also the routes used and the means of migration (Van Hear 2004). A good proportion of them already had some members of their family in Europe or North America, who could help them either organize or finance the journey (or both). It is self-evident that, as Gundel writes, “existing networks of the limited numbers of Somalis who had migrated to Italy, UK and other places in Western Europe, and the US before the conflict were important in shaping who, how, and where the later and much larger numbers of refugees went” (Gundel 2002: 265-266). This help, although always at least partially of a “humanitarian” kind, should be considered as being part of a larger strategy. As a community leader explained, the person who lives abroad and helps the family still living in Somalia by sending remittances might well prefer, at some stage, to pay for the journey of another member (usually one of the children) to a country where he/she could take over the responsibility of supporting the family financially. Helping others' movements is a way of sharing out the burdens of assistance (Piguet 1994).

A family's decision to “send” one of its children, when he/she is old enough, is part of large collective strategies. Although these strategies could not be comprehensively detailed in our interviews, a few elements can be mentioned here. In this “investment” strategy, it is interesting to see which one of the children is chosen to go. For one of the experts, the choice is not simply a family decision but a community or a sub-clan one: in the sub-clan, every member has a specific role to play, and one of these roles might be to migrate

in order – among other aims – to send money home. In many cases, one of the male children is sent (usually not the eldest one, according to the same expert, but this is difficult to prove with our interviews). However, it is interesting to note that in some cases, the eldest girl of the family is sent. Different explanations can be given, one of them being that women are believed to have a better chance of obtaining a better status when making an asylum claim. Another is that a woman is often considered as more reliable than a man, that her family, as a community leader puts it, “can be better assured that she will not forget them”, in other words, that she will keep sending money. In our sample, we met five girls who left Somalia recently, at the age of 16 or 17, without their family, and arrived in Switzerland where they had either a close member of their family (mother or father) or at least someone from the larger network (uncle, aunt or other) to welcome them and look after them²⁷. All of them are the oldest female child of the family, and their feelings vis-à-vis this situation are mostly ambiguous. On the one hand they have to face the difficulties of the life they find here and deal with the pressure that their family puts on them, and on the other, they have the satisfaction of living in a safe place where they will have opportunities to build a better future for themselves.

I did not decide to leave my homeland, my family decided to send me to Europe. I am the eldest girl of the family, but I have older brothers. They sent me here because they wanted me to have a better future, to be able to learn, and to live in a safe place. (Do you regret?) Yes, I was forced to come, because of the lack of security, and also because it is more dangerous for girls to stay in Mogadishu. (312/female/18 years old).

To conclude this chapter about the reasons for leaving Somalia, and the conditions in which this departure happens, it is worth mentioning that every story is unique and different and much more complex than the schema in which we describe them. The distinction between prepared and unprepared departure is more of a theoretical kind and most migration stories are a mix of both, made up of many stages.

4.2 The journey to Switzerland

In our interviews, only four persons arrived in Switzerland in a legal way. Two of them (both males) were resettled from a UNHCR refugee camp, one in Kenya and the other in Yemen, at the time when Switzerland was still

²⁷ An expert talks about the control that the network members might also exert on these young women (for example checking that they get some education, get married within the community quite soon and send money home).

participating in those programmes, in the early 1990s. Two other persons had benefited from family reunion: one man whose sister had been resettled to Switzerland and obtained refugee status (he joined her in 1995 after having lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for four years); the other is a young girl who arrived recently and joined her father who has been living here for a long time and who has obtained Swiss nationality. All other interviewees entered Switzerland in an illegal manner, which is not surprising as the legal opportunities are so limited: Switzerland no longer participates in resettlement programmes (or only in very specific and rare cases) and family reunion is not allowed to most Somalis because of their legal status (provisional admission which does not give the right to family reunion).

This chapter is built around four main topics: the first is a tentative typology of the main routes that Somalis take or used to take to come to Switzerland (trajectories, countries of transit, means of transport); the second looks at the means that are used to make long and expensive journey (costs, smugglers, other intermediaries, documents used); a third is about the conditions encountered in the main countries they settled in for some time before arriving in Switzerland; and the last issue we will raise is the reasons that made people choose Switzerland as a destination country.

4.2.1 From Somalia to Switzerland: by land, by boat, by plane

Once again there are as many trajectories as there are Somali refugees. However, for analytical purposes, we will try to differentiate the main types of trajectories used by Somali refugees between their country of origin and Switzerland. In this chapter, we will describe the different types of journeys that we heard of during the interviews, both with the refugees themselves and with the experts. It should be noted here that it is difficult to specify the exact scope of each of these typical journeys, due to the small number of interviews as well as to possible biases in our sample. But this is also due to the fact that the ways taken by the refugees and the means used to reach Europe change very fast.

4.2.1.1 From Somalia to a neighbouring country

Most of the time, a first step brings the people out of Somalia into a neighbouring country: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen seem to be the most common first places of arrival. From there, and after a length of stay that varies from a few days to a few years, the rest of the journey is prepared (on the countries of transit/settlement, see chapter 4.2.3).

Most of the people got out of Somalia by land, in a car or a truck. The border can be crossed legally or illegally (with the help of a smuggler or other people, including, for example, the Somali population living in Ethiopia near the border, or with fake or borrowed passports). Some people also left

Somalia by plane, some of them using planes transporting Khat or other goods between Somalia and Kenya, as the following example shows:

There is a lot of corruption between Somalia and Kenya, especially because of the Khat business. Because of this, it was not very difficult to enter Kenya. Planes come from Nairobi to Mogadishu, full of Khat, and instead of going back empty, they carry people. (613/male/18 years old).

To cross to Yemen, the most common way is naturally to take a boat, in what is often a very dangerous journey (Grabundzija 2006).

This first “phase” of the journey outside of Somalia might be linear and simple, but in many cases it already involves multiple steps. It is not rare for the people we met to have lived in different African countries, either because the living conditions they found in one of them were not satisfactory and they wanted to try another place that might offer better life conditions (in terms of work, education, etc.), or because they joined family members who were living in another place, or because they thought that another country would offer better opportunities to find the means to leave Africa and travel further (especially smugglers).

It also happened that interviewees tried to go back to Somalia after having stayed for some time in one or several neighbouring countries and decided to leave again after finding that it was still not possible to stay. The following example shows how this part of the journey might already involve multiple movements.

We left Mogadishu in 1991, but we made many movements back and forth between Kenya and the North of Somalia. We also spent some time in Kismayo. But in Kenya, the life conditions in the camp were too difficult. And when we went to the North of Somalia, we had nothing, it wasn't good for the children. In Mogadishu, it was too dangerous, and then it also became too dangerous in Kismayo. Once we came back to Mogadishu, it was in 1997. We saw that some people had taken our houses and were living in them. My husband got kidnapped, this is when I decided I had to leave with my children and go to Europe. (310/female in her 40s).

4.2.1.2 From Africa to Europe

The first way to reach a European country is by plane. Most of the flights (if not all²⁸) were with a stop over, usually in an Arab country. The United Arab Emirates (Dubai specifically, but Qatar is also mentioned) and Saudi Arabia are the two main transit countries. The people who arrived in Europe by plane

²⁸ It is very unlikely that direct flights from Somalia to Europe existed after the war started, the airport runways being destroyed. A few interviewees mentioned direct flights to Europe: this is probably due to the lack of details in their narration or to the lack of detailed memories of a trip that was made long ago.

came either alone or with the members of their family (children, or another person). They were helped by a smuggler who took charge of organizing the trip and the travel documents, mostly passports borrowed from Somali persons established in a European or North American country. However, some Somalis who arrived in the early 1990s travelled legally with their own passports, as it was still possible for Somali citizens to obtain visas for Italy.

This form of travel, although still used as our interviews show, is getting more and more difficult as the controls at the airports are getting tighter, especially since 9/11 and since biometric data are starting to be used more commonly on identity documents. Not everyone can afford to travel by plane: according to one of the experts, only “the good middle class” arrived in Europe this way.

A large majority of the people we interviewed arrived in Europe by plane: we will come back to the details of their journey in the next chapters.

The second route mentioned is by boat, principally from North Africa. Libya is well known as a country from which Europe can be reached by boat, especially in European public opinion. However, according to the experts, it is not so easy to use this country as a transit country now, since its government has become stricter. The journey to reach North Africa comprises many steps and stops in different countries, as the following example shows:

Life was very difficult, so I decided to leave and go to Ethiopia. But Ethiopia is also a fragile country, with war. There is nothing to do, no durable solution. I saved some money and met some other young men and started building a project to go to Europe. After having stayed in Ethiopia for three or four months, I went to Sudan in the truck of some tradesmen to whom I gave some money. After a little more than a month, I arrived in Libya, still paying some tradesmen to take me into their truck and stayed there for four or five months. Then I paid a smuggler and took a boat to Italy. (604/male/38 years old).

This way of crossing is cheaper, but much more dangerous: boats sinking and people drowning are (all too) regularly reported in the media. Those who cross the sea by boat are usually single people, rather than families. It also seems that this way is more favoured by men, although young women do sometimes embark on boats. According to one community leader however, probably talking mainly about upper class people, young girls often cannot swim and their parents would not want them to be on a boat mixing with young men. During our research, we met a young girl who crossed the sea by boat:

The project was to go to Italy. The easiest way was to go to Libya, then cross the sea to Italy. I left my country without any documents, with one of my father's friends, who stayed in Libya. I stayed there for about fifteen days until I got on a boat with two Somali young men. Many people died during the journey, but luckily our boat did not sink. Others did. When I arrived in Italy, I didn't know anyone and I couldn't settle there. I stayed only for about fifteen days. They don't accept refugees and you cannot find work. The Somalis with whom I had travelled were

continuing their journey to Sweden or to Holland; with the money I had left, I could only go to Switzerland. I came by train, without any documents and wasn't controlled at the border. (607/female/around 20 years old).

The arrival points of those boats vary. Italy is very often mentioned but seems not to be easily accessible anymore. Greece is another entry point. According to one expert, the Yugoslavian coast is also a common arrival point. From there it is possible to cross to Austria and reach the rest of Europe.

Another “new” route seems to be the one that goes through Syria into Turkey, and then across the Aegean Sea to Greece. This was explained to us by one community leader, and is confirmed in an article in “Le Temps” about illegal migrants crossing from Turkey to the small island of Samos, only 1,2 km away from the Turkish coast, making it the shortest way to reach Europe from Asia²⁹.

4.2.1.3 Next stop: Switzerland

Although some Somalis arrive in Switzerland by plane, most of them come by land, either by car or by train. From another country they have reached in Europe, they cross the border either without any papers at all, or with fake or borrowed identity documents.

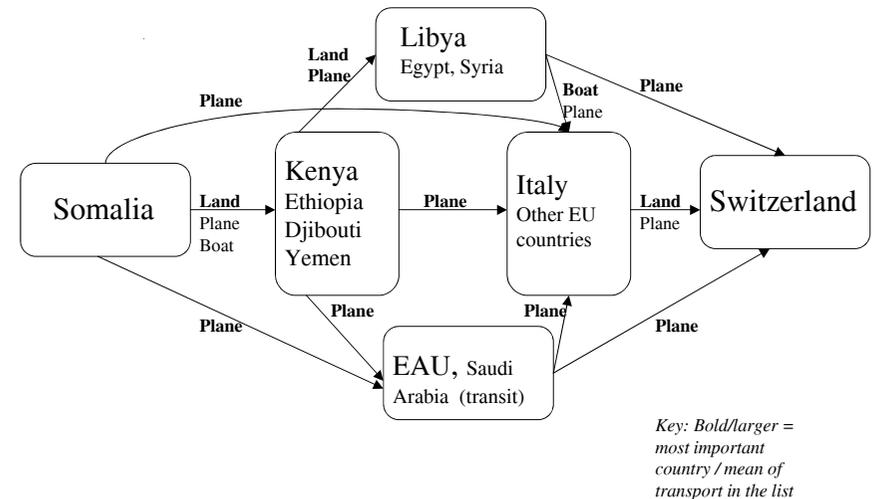
Italy appears as a major transit point from which to enter Switzerland, whatever the journey that brought them there. In our interviews, a little more than half the persons (31) we met had spent some time in Italy, usually only in transit, sometimes for a longer period of time. This part of the journey will be developed in later chapters.

4.2.1.4 Conclusion

The following diagram summarizes the main routes that have been described. However, it must be noted that it corresponds to the journeys as they appear in the interviews we made in Switzerland only. The general picture of the routes taken by Somali refugees, although not totally different, is more complex and varied.

We will now go into some detail about those journeys and the way they are organized.

Diagram 1: Routes taken by Somali refugees between Somalia and Switzerland



4.2.2 Smugglers and helpers, documents and costs

As seen in the previous chapter, the journey to Europe is very often built little by little, with different stages allowing people to organize the next part of the journey, as well as its financing. For those who left Somalia in the early- and mid-nineties, the project of leaving Africa was often formed only after a few years of exile, when they realized that the situation was not improving and that opportunities for a better life on another continent existed. For those who left later in the decade, the project is more often one of exile in Europe or North America from the beginning³⁰. The common feature of all those journeys is the need to find help to travel, as no legal way of emigrating is available³¹. The two major challenges here reside in finding the right person(s) and finding the way to finance this person and his (rarely her) services. During our interviews, we gathered precious information on the smugglers / helpers networks, the travel and identity documents used and the price asked for these services, although many people say that they do not

³⁰ Once again, one must bear in mind that we are describing schematic types (that are often mixed in reality) and that the people we talk about are the ones who arrived in Europe (and are not representative of all the people living Somalia).

³¹ It is interesting to note that even for those who travel in a legal manner, intermediaries are a necessity. Some of them are the same, while others are different.

²⁹ “Samos, l’autre porte d’entrée de la forteresse Europe utilisée par les clandestins”. Nicolas Jury. Le Temps, 31 March 2005.

know much about the details of the journey, because the person they travelled with took care of everything, kept all the documents, did not give any information, disappeared without saying goodbye, etc.

A first remark must be made on the terms used for the persons who help the Somali refugees to cross the borders illegally. The persons we interviewed sometimes use the terms smuggler but they said that the word used in Somali translates into “someone who carries someone else” or “carrier”. Most of the time however, they refer to this person as “the man I travelled with”. In this report we will use the term “smuggler” to refer to a person who has been paid to help someone else cross illegally one or many borders³². It is also interesting that these persons, whatever they are called, are considered differently depending on the interviewees and their experience with them. According to the Somalis we interviewed, these persons are either considered positively, for example as “someone who saved someone else’s life”, or negatively, for example as “someone who makes money from the desperate situation of other people”. For all of them, however, smugglers are necessary since they are the only way they have to travel to Europe. We will not enter into a detailed and exhaustive discussion on smugglers and smuggling networks here; however, a few interesting points are worth mentioning.

Different types of smugglers are described in the existing literature and appear in the interviews: what differentiates them is the kind of relation between the smuggler and the smuggled person (kinship or friendship link or client/service provider link), the motivation that moves the smuggler (humanitarian or business reasons), the degree of professionalization of the business (occasional or not), involvement in a larger smuggling network (that is sometimes linked with trafficking), the degree of “ethnic” logic that lies behind the activity (smuggling of Somalis by Somalis for example), etc.

We will not go into great detail on the way of crossing the border from Somalia to the neighbouring countries (by land or by boat) since this is described in the reports on those countries.

The smuggling networks that bring people by boat from one African country to Europe were not mentioned very often during our own research, although the media regularly echo this kind of activity. For this reason, this report will focus instead on other parts of the smuggling routes. Two of these will be discussed now: the journey from an African country to Europe by plane and

³² This is based on the UNO definition: “Smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident” (United Nations 2000).

the crossing of the border from one of Switzerland’s neighbouring countries into Switzerland itself.

4.2.2.1 The flying route to Europe

As has already been said, most people we met arrived in a European country, more rarely directly in Switzerland, by plane. They also mainly travelled illegally, which means not on their own real passports with the visas required for entering the country in which they arrived. A few persons who left Somalia in the early 1990s benefited from a situation where it was still possible for Somalis to obtain a visa to enter Italy (due to the historical links between the two countries) and therefore flew legally from a neighbouring country of Somalia to Italy. Moreover, since the collapse of the government, Somali passports are not internationally recognized and cannot be used as travel documents: the only ways for Somali citizens to travel legally are therefore to obtain an international attestation of transit delivered by the international organizations (in very rare humanitarian cases), or to obtain a special pass from an embassy for a specific reason (for example attending a conference), or to travel on a passport from another country (according to an expert, around one third of the Somali citizens also have another citizenship).

With so few possibilities to travel legally, the only way is to find a helper, which does not seem to be difficult. The more problematic aspect appears when it comes to finding the right person, who will not cheat you and whom you can trust. The service offered by this type of person is mostly “all-in”: they will arrange the whole trip, get the necessary documents, and accompany the smuggled person during the whole journey. We did not get much information about the network in which those persons are embedded, but they do not seem to belong to large criminal or mafia-like networks (although it cannot be ruled out that some do). However, it is obvious that they cannot work totally on their own as they need the help of intermediaries, notably forgers, airline staff and immigration officials (Koser 2004). Their network, in the case of Somalis, must also be transnational as the use of other persons’ passports (Somalis established or naturalized in a European country) is very widespread. Many people we met said that they did not remember or did not know what documents they travelled on as the smuggler generally kept them to himself and gave no explanations. But the picture that emerges in most cases is that people travelled on someone else’s passport, with the smuggler pretending that they were his wife or children. It is difficult to establish the degree of “professionalization” involved here, in other words whether bringing people to Europe by using other people’s passports (probably often their own family’s) is a main or a side activity in their lives, a proper business or not. According to Nuruddin Farah (2000), who met a couple of “carriers” in Italy during his investigations, it is a dangerous business and everything must be organized very precisely and rehearsed before the journey (especially

when the people they carry are registered in their own travel documents, as members of their families). One of the smugglers he met also explained that “a third of those carried were sent back to the starting-point of their travel, returning penniless and in debt, humiliated and, on top of that, in chains” (Farah 2000: 78).

In some cases, the fields between friends and carriers blur as for this man whose travel was arranged by a friend of his, already established in Europe:

I have a good Somali friend who lives in England. He came to Mogadishu and brought me a British passport from a friend of his who looks just like me. My friend gave me this passport and we travelled together to Europe. All I had to pay for was the plane ticket. We took a plane to Dubai and from there had a plane ticket to England with a stop over in Zurich where I stayed. After I went through the passport check in Zurich together with my friend, he took the passport and left to take another plane to England. He told me that it was better for me to stay in Zurich because in England, at the Immigration gate the police would check my fingerprints and then find out that I am not the person indicated in the passport. (505/male/25 years old).

The question of the network probably goes much further than a simple smuggling network and involves other aspects related to the more general transnational activities of the Somali diaspora. The smuggling of Somalis should be considered as part of a larger frame of transnational networks and strategies. According to one expert, when one person organises the travel of another person to Europe or to North America, it creates dependency links that might last for the rest of their life: “links of solidarity create links of dependency”. Moreover, as the example above also shows, the person who helps to organize the trip or those who welcome the newcomer in the country where s/he arrives do not always find it in their own their interest to have this new person in this same country. We heard a few stories of people who arrived and were asked by their family members already living there to leave after a few days; in whose interest is not really clear.

In Paris, relatives came to pick me up at the airport. I stayed some days with them, but they did not want me to live among them. They told me that I had to go to Switzerland because I wouldn't be able to survive in France. They organized a car for me. Before I left, they took my documents and all the money I had. They told me that I had to travel to Switzerland like that, without anything. As I was afraid and did not know what to do, and as I was dependant on those relatives, I did everything they wanted. (703/female/in her 40s).

We heard of a female smuggler in only one interview. Some other studies show the same results (a great majority of, indeed almost exclusively, male smugglers), for example the work done by Koser in Afghanistan (Koser 2004), although others reveal that some migrants (especially women) travelled with female smugglers, for example from western and central African countries, working on an occasional rather on professional basis (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2005).

The fact that the smuggling activities are at least partially linked to the Somali diaspora does not prevent people from being cheated. It emerges from different interviews that many people were cheated by the person they contacted, who disappeared with the money they gave him. One interviewee even told us that most Somali families lost large sums of money in this way. It is probably more difficult for the people who are already here and try to organize the travel of other family members, for example their children, who are still in Africa. Another way smugglers cheat people is by promising to bring them to a specific country then leaving them in another one, where they did not want to go. This kind of misadventure is not rare, as one expert working at a refugee reception centre also told us: some people arrive in Switzerland thinking they are somewhere else and it is then difficult to move onward, especially as they have often already spent all their money. Inversely, some people who had planned to come to Switzerland were taken to another country by the smuggler. This is what happened to this young woman who wanted to join her sick father in Switzerland:

First, we took the plane to Turkey. We stayed in Turkey for 15 days. I do not know if we travelled with a passport or not. The man always took me by the hand, I followed him everywhere, when he sat down or stood up I did the same. I was not allowed to speak to him. From Turkey, we took another plane to Rome. The man took me to the station from the airport and said, now we are in Switzerland. Then he left and I did not see him again. He took all my money and everything I had, except for the paper with the phone number of my father. In the station, I started to ask people in English if this was Switzerland. They said no this is Rome. I did not know where Rome was. Finally, I met an old Somali woman. I asked her in Somali and she said, no, this is Italy, not Switzerland. (705/female/18 years old)

The price of such a trip varies, but according to some experts, it is becoming more expensive and this has to be attributed to the greater number of difficulties encountered by the smugglers. The restrictive policies developed by the European countries to close the access to their territories has obviously rendered the smugglers' work more dangerous and more difficult, and therefore more expensive for their “client” (Nadig 2002). It also cannot be ruled out, as a community leader explained, that some smugglers play on that: “It is more expensive at certain times. When the media talk about the closing of the borders, smugglers take advantage of this opportunity to raise their prices”. The price of the trip from Africa to Europe by plane is between 3000 and 7000 dollars. All the persons we met mentioned prices in this range (except one who said she had paid 10'000 dollars), with an average of between 3000 and 5000 dollars. There are different ways of financing such an expensive trip: many received help from family members abroad (especially the ones who left more recently) while others sold some of their belongings (houses for example) to pay for the trip. We did not meet anyone who told us they had not paid in advance, but this situation probably happens, as a community leader explained to us: the problem then lies with the family back

home living with this huge debt to reimburse and waiting for the person who has left to earn money and send it home, which sometimes does not happen as easily as was planned.

4.2.2.2 Crossing the border to Switzerland

As mentioned above, the great majority of people we interviewed entered Switzerland illegally. As the table below (Table 13) shows, at least half of them crossed the border with fake or borrowed documents, while a quarter (at least 14 persons) crossed it without any identification documents, by car or by train.

Table 13: Type of documentation used to enter Switzerland

Type of documentation	N	%
Own passport	4	7%
Bought or borrowed documents	30	50%
No documents	14	23%
No clear answer	12	20%
Total	60	100%

Depending on the arrangement they had made with the smuggler, he accompanied them all the way to Switzerland or only to a neighbouring country, generally Italy. In some cases, the deal was clearly that the smuggler had to bring the person to Switzerland; in others he had the mandate to bring the person to Europe, whatever the country. Those in the latter situation therefore arrived in a third country that they decided to leave after some time (usually a few days or weeks) or that they had already planned to leave even before they arrived. A new smuggler had then to be found to help them cross the border to Switzerland, usually by train or by car. A few people also said that they had crossed the border on their own, by train, but it is not always clear whether this was entirely true or not. Most probably the type of smugglers we are dealing with here are those described as “occasional” smugglers by D’Amato et al. (D’Amato et al. 2005: 91). They are people who know the region well and know how to cross the border illegally without too much danger. These people possibly belong to the Somali “smuggling chain”, but this did not come out clearly in our interviews.

To conclude, the journey to Switzerland is a long one and finding help to travel illegally is a difficult and expensive business. As we will see later, all the people in our sample spent at least one day in another country before entering Switzerland, while a little more than half of the interviewees spent more than one month in a first country. In a few cases, the journey is extraordinarily long and complex, as the following example shows. After having waited two years in Kenya for family reunion with parents and

siblings who were living in Switzerland, this young girl decided to travel irregularly:

I left Kenya in 2000 and went to the Emirates. My mother had asked a man she knew there to help me. He passed me off as his daughter and registered me on his passport. I received this new passport with a visa where my identity corresponded to the daughter of this man who came to pick me up at the airport. Then this man asked for too much money to help me go to Europe (20’000 dollars). My parents, who could not find such a high sum of money decided not to deal with this man anymore, but he started threatening me and said he would denounce me to the immigration services and that I would never be allowed to leave the country anymore. Then I asked a friend of the family, a Somali man established in the Emirates, to help me and change the date of birth written in the new passport. Another friend of the family who was established in Italy forged an Italian residence permit for me. The man who changed my birth date also found a tourist visa to Iran for me and he accompanied me there. I stayed in Iran for four days. There, we went to a travel agency and the man bought me a plane ticket to Paris and back. As I had a fake address in Italy (inscribed in my fake residence permit) I did not have any trouble obtaining a visa for France. I took the plane on my own. Once on the plane, I destroyed all the documents I had so when I arrived to France the authorities couldn’t send me back as they did not know where I was coming from. I had not kept anything that would have been a clue (clothes tag, bus ticket...) about where I had been. I also said that I was older than 18 because I feared they might keep me and put me in the care of a guardian. After nine days of interview, they let me enter the French territory. I could stay there for two weeks. Then I took a train to Geneva and arrived in Switzerland avoiding the customs. I could not go directly to Italy from the Emirates with a fake Italian residence permit as they would have noticed it was fake. This is why I went through Iran and France before entering Switzerland. (606/female/in her 20s).

4.2.3 Transit and first settlement countries

In our interviews, we differentiated between the countries through which people only passed, and those where they settled for some time. We decided to call a country a “settlement country” when someone stayed there for at least a month. While some countries can be both countries of transit and of settlement, as the two tables below (Table 14 and Table 15) show, some others appear clearly being for transit only. This is notably the case for countries of the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia, which 8 people reached first, especially those who left in 2003-2004, but where no one stayed for more than a month. The four neighbouring countries of Somalia have been used as both transit and/or settlement countries. A remark must be made here: in reality, a country can be considered as a transit country by the person who chooses it even if this person stays there for more than a month, and even for much longer than that, when the aim from the beginning is to stay there until a way has been found to move onwards.

Table 14: First country reached after the departure from Somalia, by year of departure

	Kenya	Ethiopia	Djibouti	Yemen	UAE/SA	Libya	France	Italy
1990-1993	13	5	2	3	0	0	0	1
1994-1999	4	2	1	0	1	0	1	0
2000-2004	10	5	2	2	7	1	0	0
Total	27	12	5	5	8	1	1	1

Average time spent in the first country reached: 535 days (about 18 months)

Table 15: First country of settlement, by year of departure

	Switzerland	Kenya	Ethiopia	Djibouti	Yemen	Italy	Total
1990-1993	3	10	4	1	3	2	24
1994-1999	5	3	1	0	0	0	9
2000-2004	19	4	2	1	1	0	27
Total	27	18	7	2	4	2	60

Average time spent in the first country of settlement: 32, 8 months

In this chapter we will say a few words on the main countries mentioned by the people we interviewed and the reasons why they decided to leave them. It must be noted that the situations described here reflect the people who found the means to leave them and therefore do not always represent the real situation of all the Somalis living there. The country reports on those countries will give much more detailed and representative information on the living conditions in those countries.

4.2.3.1 Kenya

Almost half of the interviewees (27) reached Kenya after having left Somalia, while more than half of those who settled in at least one country before arriving in Switzerland did so in Kenya (18 out of 33). This is not surprising as Kenya is now the country that hosts the largest Somali refugee population in the world (a little under 160'000 in 2003, according to the UNHCR statistics (UNHCR 2004a)).

The conditions these people encountered in Kenya are mostly very difficult. It is necessary here to differentiate between those who stayed in Nairobi, in most cases in transit because they were waiting to leave for a Western country, and those who stayed in the refugee camps.

Those who resided in the capital city as unregistered urban refugees were living there illegally. They usually shared flats with other people in the Somali inhabited areas of the city. The description this young man gave of his life in Nairobi shows the main problems they encounter:

I could not live peacefully in Kenya. The authorities harass you, ask you for money and threaten to put you in jail. It was almost worse than in Somalia because I was on my own and couldn't work. In Kenya, policemen know that if they put a Somali in jail, a member of your family or another Somali will pay to get you out, there is no judgement. The majority of those who are in Kenya are in transit, waiting to leave for Europe, Canada, USA. This is why the Kenyan authorities know that Somalis have money. If you do not speak their language, then they know that you are not integrated and are waiting to leave so they ask you for money. Also, Kenyans rent flats to Somalis, they take advantage of our situation because we are illegal and they think that we have money. Somalis are good resources for Kenyan people. All those Somalis waiting do not do anything, they only chew khat. I did not want to become like them, I had to leave. (613/male/around 18 years old)

The main problem mentioned by those who lived illegally in Kenya is harassment by the police forces, summary arrests and the bribe system. One person also mentioned the rape that women must endure when they are imprisoned and it seems highly probable that the conditions and overcrowding in which Somalis live have worst consequences for women, and for vulnerable persons in general. It also seems difficult to find work and many of them who resided there for some time were only able to live thanks to the remittances sent by their relatives. The image of Somalis having money could come from the fact that many of them have family abroad. But the jealousy of the Kenyan population also has to do with their being very good in business, as one expert said.

A report of Human Rights Watch gives an exhaustive description of the living conditions of refugees in Nairobi, concluding that neither their assistance nor their protection needs are met (Human Rights Watch 2002).

Many Somali refugees live or lived in camps situated in remote desert areas near the Somali border. The camps are run by UNHCR and the refugees who live there receive in-kind assistance (food ration, water, non-food items) and are not allowed to work. They all mention the unbearable living conditions in the camps, and the lack of any opportunity to build a sustainable, self-sufficient life there: heat, dirt, illnesses, lack of adequate health care, scarcity of food, water, firewood, etc. The problem of the insecurity in the camps was also mentioned by some interviewees, among others by this woman:

Young girls were being raped and young men killed. Every morning we would find a few of them dead. And the camp was near the border and there were attacks from Somalis who would cross the border. If you had your tribe around you it was ok, but if you did not it was dangerous. And even when you have people of your own tribe, when you are hungry and want to feed your kids, you would do anything, there are no rules anymore. (310/female/in her 40s).

The encampment policy in Kenya (and in other countries) does not allow people to leave the camps without a special authorization. However, it appears that some people who are registered in the camps do not stay there all the time. According to one expert we met, some people are officially

registered but travel between Kenya and Somalia for business purposes. Others probably travel between the camp and the city (Nairobi, or Mombassa) for the same reason. As the next example shows, many illegal and informal activities go on in the camps:

Life in the camp was very difficult. My husband had to go to the city to get some things, he had friends doing business there, some family members also. But he would rarely bring money back, I had to manage on my own. Finding money was essential, everything is paid in cash there, and the food rations they would give us were not sufficient, what they gave for the baby was not enough either. (309/female/in her early 30s)

Remittances sent to the camps by family members overseas are one of the other survival strategies and it appears that some of the refugees living in the camps are better-off than others (Horst 2002).

Although there are schools in the camps, this does not mean that all children can attend them. A young girl who stayed in a camp as a child explained for example that she could only go to the UN school for a couple of months because her family wanted her to work in the small cigarette selling business they had.

One of the advantages that people see of staying in the camps, compared to the unregistered life in the city, is that they have a better chance of being resettled by UNHCR, according to one expert we met³³. This, however, must be balanced by two facts. The first one is that the resettlement programmes in the Kenyan office of the UNHCR have been tainted by the corruption scandals of 1999, officially admitted and brought to court by UNHCR (Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) 2001). Many years later, this scandal still causes serious problems, notably because the regular resettlement referrals from the UNHCR branch of Nairobi have been frozen, even though urgent cases are still referred (Human Rights Watch 2002). Some of the people we interviewed suffered from this corruption system, as the following example shows:

Only those who could pay would leave. You had to pay cash, 80% of those who left had paid the intermediaries. I know that some people left under my name: I was on a list but someone else who had money paid to be taken as if she was me and left. I saw some people fighting over that. (309/female/in her early 30s)

The other thing about resettlement is that it seems that fewer and fewer countries are willing to resettle refugees in general, and Somalis in particular.

³³ This assumption should be taken cautiously as the result of at least one other study show the contrary (Horst 2001).

It is difficult to know if this is due to a degree of fatigue with regard to the Somali cases or to other reasons.

The reasons why some people choose to live illegally in Nairobi rather than as registered refugees in the camps are manifold and are mostly to be understood in relation with the more global life and migration strategies of the Somali refugees (Horst 2001). Some people we met said that they had heard about the terrible living conditions in the camps and that they preferred to live more freely in Nairobi, with more opportunities to build their own lives. This kind of project can include a long-term stay in Kenya or the planning of an onward movement to another country. It seems fair to think that those who cannot hope for a legal migration path (resettlement, family reunion, for example) have a better chance of finding a smuggler (and the means paying him) in a capital city than in a camp. The fact that many Somalis seem to be in transit in Nairobi confirms this. Other people we met explained that they did not go to the camps because they had not heard that it was possible to register as a refugee. It is difficult to know whether this answer is totally honest, or whether it is prompted by some anxiety about telling the true reason³⁴.

4.2.3.2 Ethiopia

The situation in Ethiopia seems quite similar to that in Kenya, with some people living in the refugee camps while some others prefer to live as unregistered refugees in the capital city, Addis Ababa. One of the major differences lies in the general acceptance of the Somali refugees both by the population and by the authorities: in Ethiopia the tolerance toward Somalis is much greater than in Kenya. It seems easier to live in Addis Ababa (albeit illegally) than in Nairobi, with less harassment and conflicts. According to Da Rugna (2006), this relative tolerance is due to political as well as ethnic affinities between the two countries (see also Gomes 2001).

Although this is probably subject to change depending on the period, we met a few people who moved from Kenya to Addis Ababa having heard that it would be easier to find a way to leave Africa: in our interviews three persons clearly mentioned this as their reason for moving to Ethiopia, while one first went back to Somalia (from Kenya) and then moved on to Ethiopia. Moreover, almost all the people we met who had transited or stayed in Ethiopia planned not to stay there for long and chose that country because

³⁴ Another reason might be a question of terminology: the question asked was “did you apply for asylum in the first state you arrived in?” and many people answered that there wasn’t any infrastructure to do so (we heard this kind of answer regarding Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen). It turned out that the link between “applying for asylum” and “registering as a refugee in a camp” is not obvious for everyone.

they thought it was a good place to find help to move further. One person mentioned that she went to Ethiopia instead of Kenya to find a smuggler because she knew more Somalis established there. Although there are refugee camps in Ethiopia, we did not meet anyone who had spent some time in those camps. This probably has something to do with the fact that the camps are located near the northern border of the country, and that they were mostly inhabited by people fleeing Somaliland and Puntland, whereas our sample mostly comprises people from central and southern Somalia.

The interviewees who stayed in Addis Ababa also lived in the Somali inhabited area of the city, sharing flats with other Somalis. Although probably slightly better than in Nairobi, living conditions in Addis Ababa naturally also depend on the individual situations.

4.2.3.3 Yemen

The people we met who spent some time in Yemen before arriving in Switzerland (four persons) all resided there illegally and did not register in the camps (except for one person who was resettled to Switzerland). The main problems they talk about with regard to their living conditions in this country are related to the (illegal) jobs they found and the insecurity of living as illegal migrants in the Yemeni cities. The following quote is from a man who spent four years in Yemen and then decided to go to Europe with the money he had been able to save from his work:

I decided to leave Yemen because I did not have any chance to improve my life there. I was exploited, I was working for a family, doing small things. In Yemen, we are considered as slaves, we cannot get a better life there and all the things I had heard about Yemen were not true. Once I arrived there I discovered how hard it was to live in this country for a Somali like me. (206/male/19 years old)

Somali women are often hired as housemaids in Yemeni households, as Grabundzija explains (2006), and it is not rare for them to be severely exploited (in terms of salary and work conditions in general) and sexually harassed. Living and working illegally, they are particularly vulnerable. This is also mentioned by an expert working at a Swiss asylum registration centre: “we also met Somali women who were slaves in families in Yemen or in Saudi Arabia. When the family moved to Europe, they took them with them and they then found the opportunity to escape and make an asylum request”.

During our interviews, we met a woman who came with the Somali family for whom she had been working in Yemen for a few years. They took her with them when they came to Switzerland and lodged an asylum request, passing her off as their daughter. When she realized that, unlike the children of the family, they would not let her go to school because they wanted her to work, she escaped, told the truth and made a new personal asylum request.

4.2.3.4 Djibouti

In our sample, few people used Djibouti as a transit (5) and even fewer stayed there for more than a month (2). Except for one man who worked there for one year and then travelled further in Africa, they all chose Djibouti because of the opportunities they could find there in terms of onward movements. We therefore do not have much information on the living conditions in this country.

4.2.3.5 United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf countries

As already mentioned, the countries of the UAE and Saudi Arabia are quite often chosen as transit countries from Somalia, especially in recent years, but rarely as settlement countries by the persons we met (although a couple of people spent a few months in one of those countries). The information we have about the living conditions in those countries is limited, but the main difficulties seem to lie in the documentation and the work conditions. Administrative harassment is also mentioned as a reason for leaving those countries by one of the experts we met.

4.2.3.6 Italy

As has been said, Italy is an important transit country for people who arrived in Switzerland. This is confirmed by the experts, the community leaders and the Somali refugees we met. In our sample, more than half of the interviewees (31 persons) made at least a stop in Italy during their journey. It is fair to think that due to historical links and to the large Somali community living in Italy, it is a transit point in a more general way for Somalis arriving in Europe, a first arrival point where they can stop for some time while thinking of what comes next (Farah 2000).

However, we met few cases of people who stayed in Italy for more than a few days or weeks³⁵. Although it was probably different in the early 1990s (Somalis could still get visas and work more easily in Italy), the people who left Somalia more recently knew from the start that they did not want to stay in Italy. One interviewee even explained that the deal between the client and the smuggler is often a trip to Europe, to any country except Italy. The reason why Somali refugees do not want to stay in this country is that they believe that they cannot benefit from any status nor from any social welfare. This

³⁵ It is very probable that they often stay more than those few days (maximum two weeks) that they talk about, but that they do not want to talk about it, being afraid that Switzerland might send them back to Italy if the authorities learn that they stayed there more than 20 days.

perception of Italy as not being a country of asylum was also found among asylum-seekers from Kosovo, Sri Lanka and Iraq in a study from 2001 (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2001). Italy being a signatory state of the Geneva Convention, this belief is not fully accurate, but it is nevertheless true that the social welfare assistance is low and not accessible to every asylum-seeker.

When the rest of the trip is not already planned, Italy is the place where they (or the smuggler) decide where to go next. This is influenced by different factors, the main one being the money available to travel further. But the information gathered during the time spent in the Somali community in Italy plays an important role as the following example shows:

My brother and I arrived in Italy and stayed there with some Somali people for two weeks. We gathered information on the different European countries and on the conditions offered to Somali asylum-seekers in each of those. I wanted to go to England because I knew there were many Somalis there, that they could study and become doctors, professors, lawyers. We were in Milan and we were told that in Italy it was difficult to ask for asylum, but that Chiasso was very close and wasn't Italy anymore, but Switzerland. I did not have any clear idea about this country. (608/male/23 years old)

It also happens (but it might be rarer now) that someone arrives in Italy and starts looking for his/her family members already in Europe from there. This is what happened to one man we interviewed who arrived in Italy and decided to go on with his search in Switzerland when he saw many families (without a father) leaving Italy for Switzerland. Once in Switzerland, he had to lodge an asylum request because he had no other means of staying legally in the country: it was the officer in charge of his file who told him his family was there.

Although most interviewees consider that Italy does not offer good living conditions for refugees, it has some advantages compared to Switzerland, as the story of this man who made many trips back and forth between the two countries shows well:

I arrived in Italy in 1990 and got a resident permit and a job as a truck driver, which allowed me to travel in Europe. In 1999 I left Italy and came to Switzerland to join my wife and children and seek asylum (I got an F permit). Besides, I wasn't happy about my situation in Italy. The working conditions were bad, I felt exploited, without any social security. Italy is not as organized as Switzerland, there are no rules. I had an illegal job, my salary was diminishing, I had only half of a normal salary, there was no justice. I wanted to find better conditions but when I come to think of it, I felt better in Italy than in Switzerland, I felt free and could work after all. Conditions in Switzerland are not better but worse. After nine months in Switzerland, I went back to Italy and stayed there for two years. I came back in 2002 to be with my family and they gave me an F permit again. (603/male/42 years old)

Although not very clear on every point, this example shows the many factors that can influence a strategy and the choice of the country of settlement. In

this case, the person must find the balance between being with his family, having a job (even if it means working in difficult conditions), living with a permit that allows him to travel (freedom), etc.

4.2.4 Reasons for choosing Switzerland

The reasons that push people to choose (or simply to come to) Switzerland are varied and interrelated, as the table below shows (Table 16). A few studies have been done recently in Europe to try to understand the choice of one country of asylum rather than another and the motivations that lie behind this choice. One of the main results of those studies is that although the policies related to asylum in the different countries may have some small effect on the distribution of the general asylum flows, they are strongly counterbalanced by other factors, especially the social, familial and smugglers networks (Hatton 2004; Thielemann 2002), the general economic attractiveness of a country (Holzer and Schneider 2002), the historical, colonial or linguistic links, and the geographical proximity (Neumayer 2004). In Switzerland, two major studies confirm that those factors play a much more important role than restrictive or permissive asylum policies, be it for asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka, Albania or Iraq (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2001) or for migrants and asylum-seekers from West Africa (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2005).

Table 16: Reasons for choosing Switzerland as a destination country

Reason	N	In %
Relatives/friends in the host country	27	45%
Chances to enter easily	21	35%
Rule of law and democracy	21	35%
High level of welfare provisions for exiles	19	32%
Good opportunities for education	15	25%
Choice of the smuggler	15	25%
Strong chance to obtain a refugee or equivalent status	12	20%
High standard of living	12	20%
Working possibilities	11	18%
High number of compatriots in the country	1	2%
Not in the Dublin Convention	1	2%

Note: More than one answer was possible.

Since Switzerland is not a « typical » or historical country of settlement for Somalis, and the community is small and scattered, other reasons must attract Somali refugees. The main one is notably the presence of a member of the family (in rare cases of a friend): almost half the people we met mention this as their reason for choosing Switzerland. Family links can be the main reason for choosing a country, especially when we talk about close family links (spouse and children) but it may be one of the reasons in a wider strategy

perspective: many of the people we interviewed came to Switzerland to join an aunt or an uncle, whereas they most probably had family members in other European countries; other elements, such as the fact that it is easy to organize the journey, or the standard of living, might have played an important role in the choice of the country of asylum there.

The information they had about Switzerland and its policies regarding asylum in general and toward Somalis in particular was in most cases not accurate. The number of people disappointed with the conditions they found once they arrived (see next chapter) confirms this. While still in Africa, it seems natural that people know little about the differences between the European countries and simply wish to find a peaceful, safe, tolerant and democratic country of asylum. Some learn about the differences between the countries once in Italy (or another of Switzerland's neighbouring countries). For those people who transited via another country before arriving in Switzerland, it seems fair to say that the high level of welfare assistance (mentioned by 19 persons), the hope of obtaining an advantageous status (12), the high standard of living (12), and the good opportunities of education (15) and of employment (11) might have been important, be the information they were given true or not. Another push factor that is not listed is linked to the good access to health care: some people clearly chose Switzerland mainly for this reason.

I left Somalia because of medical reasons. I was badly sick and knew I couldn't get treatment in Somalia. I decided to come to Europe to get treated. I contacted a smuggler who would get me here. Switzerland had a reputation of being a humanitarian country, an asylum country, and I knew that in USA or Canada, they discriminated against sick people, that they did not let them in. (305/male/in his early 40s)

The proximity of Switzerland with Italy must not be neglected as an important factor for those who had not definitely planned to come to a specific European country, as a previous quotation showed. 21 persons mentioned the fact that it was easier to enter the country, for different reasons. One of these reasons was, in seven cases, explicitly that Switzerland was the nearest country to reach after their arrival in a first European country where they did not want to stay; in other words, for those persons, the easiest and cheapest way to reach another country was to choose Switzerland: five came from Italy, while one had landed in France and another in Germany. As has been said, more than half the interviewees at least transited via Italy during their journey: it is fair to believe that in many cases the proximity of Switzerland with this important country of "entry" into Europe plays a role in the decision of Somalis to settle in Switzerland.

The role played by the smugglers and their networks comes out as very important, as in other studies on that topic (for example Robinson and Segrott 2002). A quarter of the people (15) we met in our sample had not chosen

Switzerland but arrived in this country because this is where the smuggler dumped them: of these, some had left the choice up to the smuggler, trusting him, while others had made a different deal but were cheated and brought to Switzerland instead of the country they wanted to go to. Alternatively, the choice of Switzerland as a destination country was made by some members of the family already established in another European country: the reasons behind this collective decision are manifold and, not always convergent with the interest of the person concerned.

Finally, some people do choose Switzerland because it is not part of the Schengen and Dublin Conventions (only one man said this explicitly in our sample): those people have lived in one or several other European countries that they have had to leave and the only choice they have left is to go to Switzerland and lodge a new asylum request. This way of "circulating" between different European countries, although not rare for young West African asylum-seekers (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2005), seems to be new among young Somalis, but we did not find many facts to prove this assumption. We did, however, meet a young man who had a long European journey behind him (he arrived in Europe in 2002, and in Switzerland in 2004). His story also shows how the asylum procedure can have different outcomes depending on the country where the request is made.

I left Tanzania on the passport of a Somali established in Denmark. The plane made a stop over in Holland, so I got off there and sought asylum. I lived in a refugee centre and had three interviews. I received a negative answer but I appealed, but that was negative as well. I was scared they would send me back to Somalia, so I began thinking of going to Sweden, where I had members of my (enlarged) family. I went to Sweden illegally, by car and without any documents. In Sweden, I also sought asylum; after four months, I was accepted. I was happy, I held a party. But unfortunately, on the following days they called me and said they had made a mistake and that they had learned from the Dutch authorities that had already lodged a request. After nine months in Sweden, they put me in jail and then sent me back to Holland. In Holland, I did not know what to do, I stayed with some friends for a month, living illegally. My lawyer said he couldn't do anything for me, that I would never be accepted. After six months of wandering, I called my family in Sweden and they sent me some money to go to France. But I knew it wouldn't work in France either as they were in the Schengen Convention and could access my fingerprints. I had to go to Switzerland. (613/male/18 years old)

It is possible here to attempt a short typology of the reasons for choosing Switzerland as a settlement country. A first group of people chose it because of family reasons, wanting to join members of their family already living here: family reunion being hardly available for Somalis in Switzerland, they had to opt for illegal ways to travel. Another group did not specifically choose Switzerland and arrived here either by chance or because they did not have any other option for financial reasons. For these people, the smuggler plays a major role, as he is the one who chooses according to his networks and

opportunities. The last group of people chose Switzerland for a mixture of reasons and according to the information and advice they could gather from the Somali community either in Africa or already established in Europe: various (often collective) strategies come into play here; these are often difficult to sort out clearly, perhaps even for the person directly concerned.

To conclude, according to one expert, “Switzerland is a transit country, a first stop. There is a good standard of reception, you can do relatively well as long as you do not intend to stay. And the network links for getting to Switzerland are quite well organized. You can also build the contacts you need to go further”. The next chapter examines in detail those reception conditions and the way they are perceived by the Somali refugees, while the issue of transiting and of secondary movements as such are raised in chapter 4.4.

4.3 Living in Switzerland

Let us be blunt to start this chapter: the Somalis we met are – in their great majority – unhappy about their living conditions in Switzerland, except for some of the few who have been living in Switzerland for many years and can now benefit from a stable status. In the past few years, Somali associations have tried to draw public attention to their situation and the difficulties they have to face because of the instability and precariousness of their legal status (F permit). Different Swiss newspapers have published articles giving voice to the Somali community³⁶. In this chapter, we will first go through the different aspects that the Somali refugees mention as dissatisfying and that could become a reason for some of them to try to move further and find better living conditions in another country. In a second section, we will focus on the Somali community in Switzerland, including the contacts people have with other Somalis living in Switzerland, Somalis living in other countries and in their homeland. The question of remittances, either received or sent, will also be the object of a section in this chapter.

³⁶ For example “Wir Somalier haben alle Hoffnung verloren” (We Somalis have lost all hope), Tages Anzeiger 3 August 2002 ; “Der Finger ruht in einem Glas” (The finger lies in the glass), Wochenzeitung 4 July 2002 ; “Wir alle leben hier in einer Sackgasse” (We are all living in a dead-end here), Tages Anzeiger 25 June 2001 ; “Leben im Dauerprovisorium, Somalische Flüchtlinge in der Schweiz” (Living in the provisional, Somali refugees in Switzerland), NZZ 24/25 April 1999.

4.3.1 Living conditions and satisfaction level

Table 17: Degree of satisfaction of Somali refugees with respect to different aspects: number of satisfied persons (on the number of respondents, excluding the non-answers)

	Persons with a provisional admission (N=43)			Total sample (N=60)		
	N resp.	N	In %	N resp.	N	In %
Protection against refoulement	39	28	72%	54	40	74%
Protection from persecution, including by security agents and other refugees	40	38	95%	55	52	95%
Physical safety or freedom, including risks of attack, robbery, rape, detention, arrest	40	37	93%	56	49	88%
Protection against harassment by the police or military of the country of asylum, police violence and extortion	33	22	96%	34	31	91%
Registration, secure legal status and documentation	41	12	29%	57	21	37%
Access to fair and efficient asylum procedures	40	18	45%	54	27	50%
Access to educational and employment possibilities	41	7	17%	57	16	28%
Access to family reunification	40	4	10%	52	8	15%
An adequate standard of living	41	18	44%	56	28	50%
Availability of long-term durable solutions by way of voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement	40	5	13%	53	14	26%
Access to legal opportunities to migrate	36	2	6%	48	8	17%

Notes: the first column indicates the (varying) number of respondents for each question. The figures for the other legal categories of people interviewed are not shown because the number of people they represent is too low to be significant.

In all countries, interviewees were asked about their satisfaction with regard to a set of topics related to human rights and life conditions. These topics had to be the same for all the countries studied in the framework of the whole research, which sometimes made the questions seem strange to the interviewees in certain contexts. It is also worth noting that the abstract quality of the question sometimes made it hard to explain, and difficult for the interviewees to understand. This resulted in a high percentage of people not answering some parts of this question.

The aspects regarding protection against persecution, physical safety and protection against harassment by police forces or other agents are considered as mainly satisfactory, as well as – to a lesser extent – the protection against a

forced return. Only around half of the people we met (a little less for those with provisional admission) are satisfied with the asylum procedure and with their general standard of living. Other aspects reveal greater levels of dissatisfaction: the issues of documentation, of the access to education and employment, access to family reunification and to durable solutions (especially in terms of local integration, naturally) and to the legal opportunities to migrate emerge as very problematic.

Not all of those aspects will be described in detail, as we chose to mention only those that represent an important problem and are likely to cause secondary movements. This chapter is also mainly focused on the problems encountered by holders of a provisional admission, as they represent the large majority of Somalis living in Switzerland. Generally speaking, and without drawing many distinctions, it can be said that asylum-seekers mention more difficulties than provisionally admitted persons, while permanent residents and Swiss citizens of Somali origin seem better off. As we will also see, people living with a B working permit face many difficulties they did not always expect.

The precariousness of the situation of people living on a provisional basis on the long term has psychological consequences, as the study of Kamm et al. (2003) also showed. Apart from the questions linked to the recognition of identity mentioned in the next section, many forms of psychological distress have been reported by the Somalis we interviewed. The feeling of being treated differently, of not being allowed to be part of the society, of living on the margins appears in almost all accounts, due to the numerous restrictions imposed on holders of F permits.

Another difficulty that is frequently described is the feeling of being in prison: a chapter will be dedicated to this important issue of the lack of freedom in general. Here, the lack of freedom is felt as an obstacle to being able to control their own lives, of being bound by the restrictive rules linked to the permit they were given, and also of being dependant on the authorities and the persons who represent them.

I feel like a prisoner, always controlled, I have to justify every move, to tell where I am going, whom I am going to see, how long for, when I go to another canton. I feel put down by the representatives of the authorities (aliens police, workers at the refugee centre, etc). I want to leave this country as soon as possible. (604/male/37 years old)

All Somalis are dead mentally, no one is fresh in his mind anymore. (503/male/19 years old)

They let us stay as 'guests' that must remain in the shadow... ghosts. (210/male/21 years old)

4.3.1.1 Asylum procedure and documentation

The Swiss asylum procedure undergone by the people we interviewed was not often mentioned as an important problem³⁷. According to the person we met who is working in one of the registration centres, Somalis are mostly not surprised by the procedure and seem to know how things are going to happen. The fact that they had obviously first stayed within their community before registering and the mostly positive outcome of their asylum procedure (provisional admission) make their stay at the centre not too difficult, which is not the case for all asylum-seekers, again according to this person.

The question of the outcome of the procedure and of the documentation is much more problematic than the procedure itself and is even at the heart of many problems encountered by the Somalis living with a provisional admission in Switzerland. As the table above shows (Table 17), only a little more than a quarter (29%) of the interviewees with an F permit (37% of all interviewees) feel satisfied with their status and documentation. As the Swiss study already mentioned also showed (Kamm et al. 2003), the "F permit" is neither well known nor properly understood by many people, including employers and apartment renters. Apart from major problems that occur when trying to find a job or rent an apartment, this causes daily difficulties for such permit holders. The next quotation is quite eloquent in this regard:

Everything is complicated. For example, if you want to have a phone line, you have to pay 500 francs in advance or ask someone who has a better permit if you can use his name. You also need to buy everything in cash, they won't allow you to have a leasing, for example if you want to buy a computer. Even if you want to have a video-club card, they refuse it because you have an F permit. I tried in two different places near where I live but they refused. It is not racism, it is not because I am black or because I am Muslim, it is only because I have an F permit! It is scary how no one believes you, you are always guilty in everybody's eyes (304/male/29 years old).

The Somali refugees who live with provisional admission very often talked about such difficulties that are especially hard to bear over the longer term. Their perception of the permit they were granted is quite different from that of the authorities, who mainly consider it as an "advantageous" situation (which is true compared to that asylum-seekers, for example): most of them perceive their situation as "living without a permit", very often saying that their situation would be so much better, so different, "if only they had a permit". This perception of living without proper documentation (although it does not

³⁷ However, a few interviewees considered the length of the procedure, the quality of translator's work or the living conditions at the registration centre (lack of privacy and of freedom) as problematic.

affect the legality of their sojourn) has to be linked with a feeling of non-recognition of their identity. A community leader explains: “The particularity of Somalis is that they obtain only F permits, whatever their personal history. But as it says on the back of the document, an F permit does not even prove the identity of the person. One of the major difficulties Somalis face is being unable to prove their history with documents. Other countries, like the Netherlands or the United Kingdom, give a better status to Somalis: it allows people to recover their identity, in some way”. This issue of identity has probably something to do with the (philosophical) ideas of recognition as a means to identity (Ricoeur 2004): Somalis living with provisional admission are not recognized by their host country (Switzerland) as refugees, but only as “tolerated” persons; on the international level, they also face identification problems since their Somali passport is not recognized by most States and does not allow them to travel freely.

The precariousness of the situation, of the legal status and of a documentation that is not known by many people, nor recognized as proper identification document, are among the main elements mentioned by Somalis as reasons for leaving Switzerland. The comparison with the legal situation of Somali refugees in other countries is often made and those who have been living in Switzerland for some years all know people who went to other European countries and have better documentation, even a passport of their host country. Most of the sections which follow have to do directly or indirectly with this issue.

Finally, it is difficult to grasp exactly what the position is with regard to protection against a forced return to Somalia. So long as the asylum-seekers are not sure about the outcome of their procedure and believe they might have to leave Switzerland, the persons living with refugee status, a C permit or a Swiss passport naturally do not worry about it. However, the majority of the Somalis living with provisional admission (as well as some of those who have an annual B permit) are in a more ambiguous zone in this respect. While the majority (72%) feel that they will not be asked to go back home, some believe that they cannot be certain of it. This is especially the case for people who arrived recently, but it also happens that interviewees who have been here for many years and still have provisional admission status worry about having to leave, like this woman who has been in Switzerland for more than eleven years:

Here in Switzerland, we are provisionally admitted. Nobody can tell us how long “provisional” is. I am afraid that we might have to go back one day. If so, I would try to go to another country. But I do not want to move again, I want to stay here for my children’s sake. (706/female/43 years old)

4.3.1.2 Freedom of movement

We have already mentioned the psychological aspects related to the feeling of lack of freedom linked to having only limited control over one’s own life. But the lack of freedom on a purely spatial and geographical level is also felt as an important reason for dissatisfaction among Somalis living in Switzerland. This appears in at least two different issues.

The first is linked to the lack of choice of the place of residence, more precisely of the canton of residence. It appears as quite important that the living conditions, on a social and even legal level (as we will see in a later chapter) differ depending on the canton of residence. In our sample, we met Somali refugees living in six different cantons (Neuchâtel, Zurich, Geneva, Vaud, Berne and Valais) and marked differences can be noted in their situations, as is often corroborated by interviews with experts or community leaders. For example, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, the cantons of Neuchâtel and Geneva are perceived as easier places to live, either because of the presence of a more or less organized Somali community or the openness of the authorities, whereas the canton of Valais is seen as one of the most difficult places for Somali refugees, but also perhaps for refugees in general. A person living in a bilingual town in the canton of Berne and whose French is excellent also told us that he would find a job more easily if he could move to a French-speaking canton, which seems quite plausible.

The other – and probably the most important – aspect related to the lack of freedom of movement is the ban on travelling outside Switzerland that is attached to the provisional admission. Somalis living with an annual resident permit (B permit) face the same problem because Somali passports are not recognized by most countries and they therefore cannot travel with their own passport; nor can they benefit from a Convention travel document (considered as the refugees “passport”), because, except for a few, they are not recognized as refugees. It is therefore nearly impossible for most Somalis living in Switzerland to travel to other countries. This is felt as a heavy burden by the great majority of the interviewees and is very often mentioned as one of the main reasons for not wanting to stay in this country. The reasons why this lack of freedom of movement is so difficult to live with are manifold and complex and it would be interesting to have a comparative point of view in order to understand how far cultural aspects play a role in the Somalis’ case (on the cultural aspect, see chapter 5).

Somalis consider themselves as nomadic (although not all of them are) and this is usually the first explanation that they give when asked why they resent so much not being allowed to travel outside Switzerland. This cultural factor is probably not negligible and is related to more practical problems. One of them is that most Somalis living in Switzerland have family members or

friends living in other European States whom they would like to visit from time to time. Many of the interviewees mentioned the frustration they felt at not being able to attend a wedding or a funeral taking place in another country while all the other members of the community could make the trip. Many Somalis are also good at trading and the prohibition on travel is clearly an obstacle to such activities that Somalis are often used to being able to engage in (although this is not the only difficulty they face in that matter).

The problem is obviously even greater for people living near a border who might have friends or colleagues living on the other side whom they cannot visit, although they are almost neighbours.

Another major problem related to this issue is specifically linked to the children (and teenagers) who cannot participate in all school activities, some of them being organized in another country than Switzerland, and even sometimes just on the other side of the border. This concerns, for example, school trips, camps, class exchanges, study tours or sporting activities³⁸. Parents often feel very bad about seeing their children so strongly differentiated from the others and having to go without such activities.

It is hard for my daughters. They see their classmates go to France or to other places and they don't understand why they can't go with them. They don't understand that it is Switzerland that forbids it, they think that it is their mother who doesn't want them to go. (309/female/in her early 30s)

4.3.1.3 General living conditions, social welfare and housing

In general, the Somalis we met complained more about not being able to be independent and self-reliant than about the amount of money they receive from social welfare. Naturally, those who are unemployed usually find it difficult to live with such small amounts of money (which is, it should be remembered, about 40-60% less than the amount received by a national or a foreigner holding a resident permit) but it seems that they would prefer to be helped in finding a job rather than to see this amount increased.

As regards housing, two complaints were made in a few cases. The first is about the difficulties that people with an F permit face when trying to find an apartment, especially in cities and in times where very few apartments to rent are available on the market. Owners and renters give preference to persons with better permits, which makes it very difficult for people with only a provisional situation.

³⁸ A recent article on that topic was published recently in a Swiss newspaper: "Kein weg nach Paris" (No way to Paris), Berner Zeitung, Daga Samatar, 25 May 2005.

The other dissatisfying aspect is mentioned by the people still living in a refugee centre³⁹. The lack of freedom and of privacy are the main difficulties facing people living in reception centres. The comments of this young girl living in a centre show the other problems encountered by her and the other Somali girls who also live there:

Life at the centre is difficult. The others are loud, they make noise the whole nightlong and we have to go to school in the morning: we need to sleep at night. When we complain to the social workers, they do not do anything. There is a problem with the cleanness of the common rooms, the others do not do anything, the bathroom and the kitchen are always dirty. This causes us trouble because of our religion: we need clean places to perform our ablutions and our prayers. They should separate people according to the religion. The conflicts are often with the West Africans who also live here. (313/female/18 years old)

In short, although around half of the interviewees feel unsatisfied with their general standard of living, this aspect does not appear as a fundamental cause of potential secondary movement. However, the difficulties they face when trying to improve their economic situation by themselves (especially through work) are perceived as harder to bear.

4.3.1.4 Access to education

Many people consider the difficulty of access to education as one of the major problems they encounter when benefiting only from provisional admission. While access to primary and secondary school (compulsory schooling) is not a problem and is even considered as a positive aspect in Switzerland, things become more difficult when young people want access to higher and professional education.

As has been mentioned, further education, and even university is not forbidden to people living in Switzerland with an F permit, although they have to face many difficulties, including the costs. In our sample, we met only two persons going to university at the time of the interview: one (living with an F permit) was able to do so thanks to the financial help of his family living in Somalia, while the other is a young woman who was naturalized a few years ago.

The situation is much more problematic when it comes to vocational education, and this even for people who have done most of their education in Switzerland. As mentioned earlier, to enter an apprenticeship, you need to find an employer who is ready to hire you, but the same preferential rules apply as in the rest of the labour market. Employers are supposed to give

³⁹ In the sample, 14 people (3 asylum-seekers and 11 people with a provisional admission) were living in a refugee centre while all the others were living in a private apartment.

priority to young people with a better permit; besides, many employers are not well informed about what a “provisional” (and therefore temporary) admission is and prefer not to take the risk of hiring someone who might have to leave the country at any time. In those conditions, quite apart from the other forms of discrimination to which they might be subjected (because of their origin, their colour, their religion, etc), young Somalis with an F permit face many difficulties when trying to pursue their education after compulsory schooling⁴⁰. Many parents are very worried for their children and often feel guilty about having nothing better to offer them.

My oldest son did his school in Switzerland but when he finished he couldn't find an apprenticeship. He is very unhappy and realizes that he does not have the same status as his friends. He goes out and drinks a lot. Now they sent him to one of those occupational programmes, with asylum-seekers that just arrived in Switzerland. He is in very low spirits since he understood what the system was like for a young person with an F permit. He says he will leave Switzerland as soon as he is 18. To see him so unhappy also makes me worry for the future of my two daughters. When kids go to school, it is ok, but when they finish and realize that it is different for them, they suffer a lot. (...) I think Switzerland should give them the impression that they have their place in the society, that they belong to the society they live in. Children are rootless, they should feel at home here. (609/female/36 years old)

The situation is even more difficult for the young Somalis who arrived in Switzerland after the age of compulsory schooling (or a little earlier). They mostly do not have the educational background needed to start a vocational education, and first have to learn the language. They are trapped in this situation where it is too late to go to compulsory school and where they cannot have access to higher or professional education because they lack the basic education. When they are still minor, they can register in so-called integration classes, where they have the opportunity to learn the local language and catch up with the basic knowledge. However, this is not usually sufficient to allow them access to further education. Often, the only solution they have is to find unskilled jobs.

Young people who arrived because their family sent them to Europe might face another problem, as a young community leader told us: “their families clubbed together to pay for the trip and are expecting them to send money back home: they cannot study, they have to work”.

⁴⁰ It is worth noting that the number of apprenticeship positions has been reduced in the past few years, and that many young people who leave of school cannot find a place. With such a tight general situation, it is even harder for those who have a more precarious legal status.

Because a long-term migration project usually involves giving the children better chances for their future, the issue of education plays a major part in the concerns of the people we interviewed. While most of them agree that the school system is a good one, the lack of access to vocational education is an important concern. According to many Somali refugees we met, as well as most of the community leaders, one of the major reasons why Somalis leave Switzerland for other countries is to offer their children better educational opportunities.

4.3.1.5 Access to employment

Provisional status implies limitations on access to the labour market, with priority basically being given to all the other persons apart from asylum-seekers, cantonal restrictions on certain branches and the restriction on the place of work (canton of residence). Some of these people may have professional diplomas and skills but they find that they cannot use them or even have them recognized.

In our sample of 60 persons, only 16 (27%) are employed (see Table 18 and Table 19). The others are unemployed, either on the dole, or receiving social welfare. When looking only at the persons living with provisional admission, this percentage falls to 21%. Some people we interviewed are studying, either at university level (2), or in an apprenticeship (1), or are registered in “integration classes” for young people (6).

Table 18: Percentage of persons employed by status breakdown

Status	N	In %
Asylum-seekers	1	(25%)
Convention refugees	1	(25%)
Provisional admission	9	21%
Other	5	56%
Total	16	27%

Note: the numbers in bracket are the percentages that correspond to less than 5 persons.

Table 19: Percentage of persons employed, by sex breakdown

Sex	N	In %
Male	10	28,6%
Female	6	24%
Total	16	27%

The professional background of the sample should be briefly described here: more than half of the interviewees had no profession before they left, either because they were still going to school (12), studying at university (8),

looking after the house, the children and/or elderly people (5 women and 6 young girls), or unemployed without any professional education (5). The other interviewees had been working as drivers or mechanics (4), traders or business managers (6), farmers (4) or in various professions (nurse, secretary, money collector in bus or for electricity firm, teacher, maid, political scientist, criminal investigation officer).

Most of the interviewees mentioned that in Switzerland the issue of employment was an important problem: this is not surprising as access to the labour market has major consequences on the possibilities of integration, both on a social and on an economic level, notably as one of the first signs of the legitimacy of the presence of a foreign person (Sayad and Bourdieu 1997) (even in the field of asylum) and as a central part of the a person's identity. Somali refugees suffer from the fact that they cannot find jobs and – when they do – from the precariousness and the bad working and wage conditions of their jobs (mostly in restaurants, factories or as cleaners). The low percentage of interviewees satisfied with both educational and employment opportunities (17%) clearly shows this trend.

Apart from this fundamental aspect of the difficulty of access to employment opportunities, side issues appeared in some interviews, which deserve to be mentioned although they do not represent a major problem.

The first is the fact that holders of F permits have no opportunity to create their own jobs: they are not allowed to work as free-lancers in their own business (shops, restaurants, other trading activities, for example). In many other countries, this is both legally (or at least informally) allowed and economically and socially viable because of a large community (especially in Britain). In Switzerland, as one expert explains, the community is too small and scattered for ethnic or more or less invisible informal businesses, which shows that the problem is not solely related to the limitations attached to subsidiary admission, but to wider societal and political aspects.

The administrative aspect should not be forgotten either. As we have explained, asylum-seekers and provisionally admitted persons have 10% of their wages deducted by the Federal Office for Migration (as a “preventive” participation in the costs linked to their stay). Moreover, they, and also B permit holders, are subject to tax deducted at source (while nationals, recognized refugees and C permit holders pay their taxes based on a tax declaration). All this means administrative hassle for potential employers and therefore one more reason for preferring not to employ persons who would imply those worries (Piguët and Losa 2002).

On the issue of work, we are not considered, we are on the margin of the society, we do not count. Now that I lost my job, I realize that my F permit will be a problem. I went to an interview for a job but they told me they could not employ me

because of the tax deducted at source, because it created extra work for their accounts department. But I think it was only a pretext (305/male/in his early 40s).

On top of the complication implied for the employer, this administrative aspect has implications for the employee too (at least regarding the 10% deduction): as one expert explained, finding a job is less attractive, especially in domains where the basic wages are already low, and it might even push people to prefer receiving social welfare benefits or/and working on the black market.

Lastly, a few Somali women mentioned an additional problem they had to face when wanting to wear their scarf at work. Many employers do not allow this practice and it is clearly one more obstacle to integration on the labour market for those women who do not want to abandon the veil.

This leads us to one last comment regarding the work issue: on top of all those obstacles that Somali refugees encounter, linked mostly to the kind of sojourn authorization they hold, the Swiss labour market is not devoid of discrimination against foreigners, as many studies have shown (Fibbi et al. 2003; Flückiger and Ramirez 2003).

4.3.1.6 Family reunification

Persons admitted on a provisional basis (as well as asylum-seekers) are not allowed family reunification, even with the members of their close family, spouses or children. Even though, from a purely legal perspective, this is in line with fundamental human rights, it is worrying in the longer term, in that the protection of the family life is not guaranteed (Kiener and Rieder 2003). Many of the people we met suffer from having their family scattered and not being able to reunify it legally. It is especially hard for parents who left (some of) their children behind and have no way of bringing them to join them except by illegal means. This is probably where the heart of the problem lies: people will tend to try anything to have their close family with them, including taking the risk of hiring smugglers and spending large sums of money without knowing whether it will work. The story of this family is eloquent:

My father was already in Switzerland. I arrived a year later with my mother and my youngest brother. My mother suffered a lot because she had to leave her five other children behind, they stayed in Somalia with my aunt. I felt responsible for that, because she did it for me, to prevent me from being raped. I know it was hard for her. Then my aunt said she could not look after the five kids, on top of her own. That is when we sent my sister (the eldest after me) to another aunt, in Saudi Arabia. She was 12 and my mother had the same fears as she had had for me. She stayed there for four years, helping in my aunt's house. But it wasn't a life, she couldn't go out, she was living there illegally. My aunt said that she did not have any future there, that she was in prison, so she and her husband helped us pay someone to bring her here. She has been in Switzerland for eleven months now. My three brothers and my sister went to Ethiopia when my mother could pay for them

to go there. They live in an apartment with other people in Addis Ababa. But they had to move often because the neighbours knew that they had family in Europe and thought that they were rich, so they used blackmail on them. So we saved enough to pay the trip for my little sister. I worked a lot, on top of my apprenticeship. We paid 4500 dollars cash. She has been here for five months now. Before that, we made a request to the authorities in Berne to be allowed to bring them all to Switzerland. We just received the news that my two little brothers will be allowed to come legally, but not the third one, who has turned 18 in the meantime. Things are getting better but it is as though there is always something that is wrong. We don't want to leave my brother alone in Ethiopia, he doesn't have any family there. (302/female/20 years old)

Besides, as one NGO representative said, the integration of an individual rarely goes without his/her family network. Many Somalis, as well as a few experts we interviewed, mentioned the ban on family reunification as a potential cause of secondary movement.

The prohibiting of family reunification for most Somali refugees living in Switzerland is among the most important problems faced, as the very low number of satisfied interviewees (10% of provisionally admitted persons, 15% of the total sample) demonstrates.

4.3.1.7 Integration opportunities

The integration paradox intrinsic in provisional admission has been explained earlier: people with an F permit are not supposed to integrate, being accepted on a temporary basis, and therefore nothing is foreseen to help them in this respect. On the other hand, they often stay in Switzerland for long years, and the condition that would enable them to stay on a more stable basis would be economic and social integration.

All the other aspects that have been described so far show that numerous obstacles are placed in the way of integration for people living in this country with an F permit, but also often for those with a better status.

It is unsatisfactory because they keep us frozen in our position. It is not easy for Somalis. We are not allowed to melt into the society. (301/male in his 60s)

F permit prevents you from building your life. (310/female/in her 40s)

This last quotation shows that the lack of prospects is more difficult to bear than the actual situation. If there were hope and some possibility of creating something for oneself, or at least for the next generation, things would probably be considered differently.

The great majority of the people we met expressed their hope of seeing their F permit changed into an annual residence permit (B permit) before long, although they know the difficulties they will have to face. Many had already made the request although they knew they did not fulfil the requirements (especially the number of years of stay in Switzerland, usually nine years for single persons, four for families with children) and were thinking of starting

again, while others were still waiting for an answer to their application. As explained in the first part, the conditions for obtaining a B permit are strict and difficult to fulfil. Many mentioned the limited access to language courses, which is another difficulty in finding a job. The limitations they encounter on the labour market are of course often put forward as another obstacle to becoming economically independent and thus having a better chance of obtaining a B permit. Even people who have made every effort to integrate, like this woman who has been in Switzerland for more than ten years, learned German and worked most of the time, although with three children (and a sick mother to care for), find it very difficult to gain any recognition for their efforts:

I still have F-Status after all the years I have been living in Switzerland [since 1994]. To me this is not fair. I am treated in the same way as other refugees who just came here this year! But I speak German very well. I worked a lot, even as a translator for the Asylum organization. I also did a lot of voluntary work but I still do not get B! I applied for B-status in May 2003. I still do not have an answer! They told me that even though I have been here longer than 8 years I still won't get another status because now I don't work! They said that I should have worked at the hotel at least one year. But it was not my fault that I couldn't work there any longer. It is also very difficult for my boys. They only have F as well. My daughter has a Swiss passport because she did enough years of required years of school in Switzerland but my boys were already too old for that. Sometimes I think that I'm going to be ill. Not physically but mentally. I don't have a future. (...) I cannot go anywhere and finding a job is very difficult. I am integrated here but my status does not change! (508/female/48 years old)

The specific situation of women living in Switzerland without their husband but with their children needs special attention, as it is not uncommon. Different community leaders and an NGO representative drew our attention to this problem. Those mothers often have more than three or four children to look after, and little chance of having anyone else look after them: in these conditions, it is nearly impossible for them to have a job and become independent. We met this woman with five children (including one with serious medical problems) whose husband cannot join them, because she is not allowed family reunification, and who knows she will never be able to become independent and stabilize her situation. And the irony of the situation is that even if these women found a job (the kind of job that their permit, and sometimes their educational background, allows them), their wages would hardly be sufficient to support their whole family. This particular dead-end situation is not recognized at all by the authorities and prevents whole families from being integrated and finding and opportunities for a better future.

The criteria governing the upgrading of an F permit into a B permit are different depending on the canton of residence (the federal authorities set minimum standards, but no binding rules for the transformation of the

permit). Many of the experts we met, as well as some of the refugees living in “more difficult” cantons (especially Valais and Zurich) mentioned this difference in the treatment received which has such important consequences on their chances of integration.

The hope of obtaining a B permit is mentioned by everyone living with provisional admission. It is however interesting to note that those who did finally obtain this residence status do not always see much improvement in their situation and are often disappointed because it does not solve all their problems as they thought it might. They still encounter many difficulties on the labour market, although they are not so restricted as with an F permit (discrimination, no recognition of their diplomas and skills, etc); their economic situation does not always really improve, and they still have great difficulty if they want to travel outside Switzerland. Another issue they mentioned is the administrative difficulties they must face when wanting to renew their B permit: this permit has to be renewed every year and, unlike provisional admission which is part of the asylum system, the B permit is tied to self-sufficiency; non-fulfilment of this criterion can in some cases endanger the renewal of the permit. A couple of people we met live in a state of uncertainty because they are unemployed and do not know what will happen about their legal situation. They have not found the stability that they missed so much when they had “only” an F permit.

This could lead us to say that all the disadvantages that Somali refugees attribute directly to the F permit could be part of a more general system, where discrimination and other structural elements leading to precarious situations affect far more people than only those with provisional admission.

4.3.1.8 Positive aspects

Many (fundamental) aspects of the living conditions are mentioned as being problematic, especially for people who have lived in Switzerland for a long time without a stabilized status. However, it should also be noted that many of the people we met told us about positive aspects that Switzerland offers them. The first of these is security and this aspect is often repeated in the words of people who fled a situation where their lives were threatened every day. The security of having the basic means of living and shelter is also mentioned in several interviews, although these means are not always considered as sufficient in comparison to the general living standards of the host country.

Security usually includes physical safety as well as protection from harassment by police forces⁴¹.

Among the positive things, the two aspects most often mentioned are education (at compulsory school level) and the health system. Most people are very satisfied with the fact that their children have access to good schools (at least until the end of compulsory schooling) and that they are well insured in case of health problems, with access to a good health system. According to some of the experts and community leaders, this can be a reason for people to choose to come to Switzerland, for example from Italy, when they know they will need specific medical care. One community leader explained that women sometimes come (from Italy) to Switzerland when they are pregnant because they know that they will be able to deliver the baby in good conditions.

This chapter about the living conditions as they are perceived by the Somali refugees is largely focused on those who benefit from provisional admission, because they represent the majority of the Somalis living in Switzerland (as well as of our sample) and because many of the problems they face are closely linked to this status, or at least perceived as being so. The ambiguity of provisional admission status, which was not meant to last but which does so in reality, is reflected quite clearly in the interviews. While grateful to their host country for offering them security, shelter, schooling for their children and health care, they suffer a lot from the numerous limitations attached to their provisional status. The main sense that emerges very strongly from almost all interviews is the feeling of being trapped in this situation where they have to stay (they cannot go back to their home country, nor can they freely decide to go to another country) but have only limited opportunities to build their future and integrate into the society. The words “feeling like I’m in a cage” or “being in an open jail” appear in many interviews.

The satisfaction level of the Somalis living in Switzerland with another status or permit is generally better, although it has been shown that not all problems are solved when the status changes. Somalis with a permanent resident permit (C) or with a Swiss passport mostly feel well integrated and the ones we interviewed are often involved in the Somali community, participating in or leading Somali associations, for example.

⁴¹ While this last aspect is mostly considered as positive, a few persons (especially males) had bad experiences with representatives of the police force, either at the beginning of their stay (registration) or later, when that had already been living in the country for some time.

4.3.2 The Somali community in Switzerland

4.3.2.1 A diverse Somali community

There is no such thing as “a Somali community” in Switzerland. Somalis who live in this country arrived at different times, for different reasons, they belong to different clans, etc. All the experts and community leaders we interviewed agree that Somalis usually live quite closely together, although their number is low and they are scattered around the country, but that they generally stick together according to other identity criteria than simply their Somali nationality.

According to a community leader, there have been different “waves” of arrival, which created different groups of Somalis living in Switzerland today: “The first group of Somalis arrived in Switzerland in the 70s. They are integrated here, speak the language, work and have Swiss passports. For them Switzerland is their home. They do not mix with other Somalis. The second group of Somalis came in the 80s. These were people who had escaped from the Barre government. The Somalis who came to Switzerland were mostly of the Darood, Majerteen and Isaak clan. They all now have B-status, are integrated and speak German. But the biggest group of Somalis who came to Switzerland left Somalia in the 90s. They all have F-status and because of that, they are the ones who face the greatest problems. They cannot find jobs and have difficulty learning German, which hinders their integration. Moreover, they experienced the civil war, which changed their mentality. Many Somalis who came to Switzerland during the last few years are traumatised. Somalis who came 15 or 20 years ago – like me – often do not understand the Somalis who came in the 90s. And because of this we don’t mix”.

These boundaries created along the lines of status also appeared in the study on Western African migrants living in Switzerland (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2005: 102) and the distance maintained by those who have settled and integrated vis-à-vis those who arrived recently arises out of misunderstanding and differences of interests, as well as fears of being perceived as like them.

At the same time, and this can be perceived as to some extent contradictory, the solidarity within (specific) Somali communities is very strong and Somalis are often considered as quite well organized. They have created many associations in the different places where we interviewed them, aiming to help newcomers cope with administrative formalities, as well as encouraging their integration and education (in particular through different types of courses). They also want to play a role on a societal level, fighting for recognition and the recognition of their rights. Some of these associations (especially the NGO RAJO which exists in many countries) are more focused on the home country, working on peace building and the reconstruction of Somalia.

Finally, according to one expert, some of these associations play a more hidden role in facilitating and organizing the movements and crossings of Somalis en route.

On the local level, Somali associations more often than not compete with one another, which prevents them from becoming as influential as they might be. This is confirmed in general by the literature on Somali communities in the West (Perouse De Montclos 2003). Their importance also depends on the canton in which they are settled and, of course, on the number of Somalis living in each place. For example, the Somali community in Zurich organizes many activities: festivals, radio broadcast, etc, probably because the potential audience is large enough. Likewise in Neuchâtel, Somalis are quite active and organized, although the size of the town cannot be compared to Zurich. One assumption might be that this canton has set open and active integration policies that help in particular to facilitate communication between the authorities and migrants’ associations. Although we have not focused on this aspect, it can also be said that some cantons seem to be more active than others in women’s issues. In Berne for example, many activities aimed at women’s integration have been set up by both Somali associations and local NGOs.

Although not totally representative, and possibly biased by the snowballing sampling methods, it is interesting to look at how many people in our sample answered that they belonged to a Somali association: taking all cantons together, only 12 people said they did, notably in Neuchâtel and in Berne. This does not mean that the other 80% of the people we interviewed do not have any contacts with the Somali associations: they might participate in some of their activities, or have other informal contacts with their members, but they do not officially belong to one of them. Even when not belonging to clearly defined associations, most Somalis have a very “Somali oriented” social life, meeting chiefly with other Somalis. However, according to different experts, community leaders and refugees, not all Somalis are part of a Somali community and some might even be quite isolated, be it by personal choice or not.

No, I do not participate in the Somali community. I am on the margins of the community because I do not like their way of thinking. They are here in Switzerland but their heads are still in Somalia. Some of them for example continue to give all this importance to clans...I do not recognize this way of dealing with people. I have friends who belong to different clans, I don’t care about this...To be integrated in this context you need to use your head here and not to make use of your brain as if you were back in Somalia. (203/male/33 years old)

As one person working in an NGO says, “we see situations where the network is very dense and some others where the person seems totally isolated. I have examples of both. I guess that a part of the community is very well organized

but I have the impression that there are certain limits for some people or some clans". This quotation, and many others, shows clearly that the solidarity between Somalis can be very strong and well organized, although it does not function on a national basis but involves many other criteria that are probably much more complex than the explanations we have been able to give here.

The question of the clan or sub-clan affiliation is also a delicate and complex one that we will not go into in detail here. One guess is that the importance given to this part of the identity depends on the context: while all Somalis are invited to funerals or weddings, no matter what their clan affiliation or even whether they know the person who died or the bride, it is different when power issues are at stake. This is notably the case in some Somali associations that have either disappeared or split up because of (sub-)clans conflicts. Clans probably also become important when it comes to strategic matters (for example welcoming a newcomer, or organizing an onward movement from Switzerland) and, as has already been said, solidarity is mostly strategic because the other side of the coin is often links of dependency.

In summary, the ties between Somalis living in Switzerland are mostly strong, with a dense and relatively close network. The networks however do not encompass the whole community, but are very diverse and defined along other lines (mainly clans or sub-clans, but probably also statuses) (Perouse De Montclos 2003). The links with the rest of the society do exist as many examples show (for example the links between a Somali association and the Integration bureau in Neuchâtel), although they are not very frequent. During one discussion with a few young Somalis, it appeared clearly that marrying a non-Somali would be a major problem and that the great majority of them, even those who had been here for a long time, did not even imagine it possible. The rarity of mixed couples among Somalis is just one sign of the attachment they have to their own community. This very probably also has to do with religious prescriptions, as the Koran does not allow Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men.

This attachment also shows up strongly on an international, or rather on a transnational level, as the links kept between members of an (extended) family or sub-clans are usually important and frequent.

4.3.2.2 Remittances and contacts: Somalia and other countries

The link to the home country is also quite strong. The table below (Table 20) shows that 80% of the persons we interviewed still have contacts with family members living in Somalia, mostly by phone or through Internet.

Table 20: Answer to the questions related to the contacts in Somalia and the remittances

	Yes		No	
	N	In %	N	In %
Do you still have contacts in Somalia?	48	80%	12	20%
Do you receive remittances from abroad?*	6	10%	53	88%
Do you send remittances to Somalia (or to a neighbouring country)?	25	42%	35	58%

* The total of answers is not 100% because one person refused to answer to this question.

Table 21: Percentage of persons who send remittances according to their employment status and their gender

Employment status	Sex	Sends remittances	
		N	In %
Working	Male	9	90%
	Female	2	33%
	All	11	69%
Not working	Male	6	24%
	Female	8	42%
	All	14	32%
Total males		15	43%
Total females		10	40%
Total sample		25	42%

It appears from some interviews that these contacts are often money related and that it can become a problem for some families who feel under a lot of pressure to send money home when they hardly have enough to survive on themselves.

I call my mother once a month. She is ill, I worry a lot. But you always have to take into account all the requests: when the phone rings, we always think that it is from Africa and that they need money. (310/female/in her 40's)

The issue of remittances is important in the Somali diaspora: Pérouse de Montclos (2003), for example, estimates that more 140 millions dollars are sent each year to Somalia by those who live abroad, while it seems that other estimates put it as high as 800 million dollars (Horst 2004). In our sample, it appears that less than half of the people (42%) send money back home or to their families living in Somalia's neighbouring countries (mainly Kenya). While the majority of the men who have a job send money home (90%), and women do so less (only 33%), it is different for those who do not have a job: 42% of the women find a way to send money back home, while only 24% of

the men do so. It is difficult to explain this difference as there is a chance that it may be due to the small scale of the sample.

Those who send money often do so because they feel under pressure to do so; they clearly feel that they have no choice, even though it impinges upon their own chances of integrating. This balance between a person's own interests and those of the family came out quite clearly in a few interviews.

The money transfers are mostly made through the Somali banking system ("Hawilad"), although a few people mentioned that they preferred more formal ways of sending money, especially through Western Union (though this does not allow them to send money directly to Somalia), because they feel it is safer⁴².

Of course I send money home; I have to. But the little that I can send is enough to make my wife and daughters survive. There are no banks in Somalia, so I use a Somali institution that works like a bank. They are based in London and have representatives everywhere, in the major cities at least. I give them the money and they send a fax with the list of all the people who sent money and the list of those who will receive it. It is very fast; the money is there the following day. And it is safe. (305/male/in his early 40s)

Six persons mentioned receiving support from family members (or in one case friends) living in another country: United States, Netherlands, Great Britain have been mentioned, as well as, in two cases, Somalia. They receive this money either on a regular basis or only when they have a special need. One of the persons who receive money from Somalia is one of the two university students in our sample who obviously comes from a wealthy family that owns a farm and whose siblings also live abroad in different countries. He explained that his parents support him because he is studying. The other one does not come from such a family and feels ashamed about the money that they send him although they already paid for his trip and would like to leave too. Apart from these exceptional cases, the great majority of the Somalis living in Switzerland (88%) do not receive any kind of material support, even when they have family members established in Europe or North America: a few mentioned that Switzerland is considered as a rich country and that they are therefore considered as not needing any more support.

It is useful here to remember that "during the migration process the obligations of solidarity within extended and joint families are negotiated, reinforced or dissolved" (Dahinden 2005: 203). Those examples show that the

⁴² The Hawilad systems are described and analysed frequently in the literature on the Somali diasporas (see for example Gundel 2002; Horst 2002, 2004; Horst and Van Hear 2002; Prouse De Montclos 2003).

issue of remittances is far from being linear and simple, and is influenced by many more factors than those we are able to grasp in a study such as this, which was not specifically focused on this topic.

4.4 Secondary movements and other perspectives for the future

4.4.1 Plans for the future

In most cases, it is difficult for the Somali refugees we met to answer to the question of where they see their future, because it depends on many different factors that are felt to be beyond their own control. This also means that the answers given in the table below (Table 22) are partially arbitrary because in many cases, different answers could have been chosen: for example, people often do not really know where their future lies and hope they will be able to stay in Switzerland, while thinking of going back to Somalia if the country stabilizes. This means that the figures shown here must be taken cautiously, although they (and the open answers associated with them) give interesting insights on the Somalis refugees' perspectives on the future. The number of people not knowing where they will be in the future is quite high (28% of the respondents) and they often link it to the uncertainty of their legal situation.

Table 22: Answer to the question "where do you imagine living in the next few years?"

Place	N	In %
Here (in Switzerland)	35	58%
In my country of origin (Somalia)	4	7%
In another country	4	7%
Don't know	17	28%

More than half of our sample imagines living in Switzerland in the next few years. However, an important part of those who gave this answer also said that they would prefer to go back to Somalia if peace were restored. Only a few believe they will stay in Switzerland for the rest of their lives, usually people who are well integrated and those who have children growing up in this country, going to school and having a better chance of obtaining a Swiss passport (as they benefit from easier criteria in terms of years of residence in the country). Those parents often face a difficult dilemma, like many other migrants: their dreams still lie in their home country and they still believe they might one day go back, while their children are well integrated and are building a life of their own in the host country. At the same time, having children integrated in the host society might well be a source of legitimacy for

their parents' presence in the country (Bolzman et al. 2001). We even met two women who would have the opportunity to leave for the USA through family reunion but who have refused it because their children do not want to leave the country. The future of the children dictates many decisions, whether it be to leave the country in order to offer them a better future, as we saw earlier, or to stay for the children's sake, even though the situation could be easier for the parents in another place.

My priority was the safety of my kids. Then I could only think about what I was missing. But now I still don't have a stable status and I can't leave anymore. I didn't get a chance to create a stable enough situation for myself. My husband lives in the USA, but I don't want to join him although we would be allowed to. My kids are well integrated here, I don't want to start everything all over again. But we don't have the right to family reunion here, so I hope to have a B permit so my husband could come. He is ready to come. (...) In the future, I will stay here, but I love Somalia, I wish I could go back to visit my family. I feel torn because my children are here, they are used to it. But my family is there. (310/female in her 40s)

Only four interviewees (7% of the sample) stated clearly that they are thinking of going back to Somalia in the near future. This is a low figure if we compare it to the number of people who concretely imagine their immediate future somewhere other than in Somalia or who cannot give a clear answer to this question but who strongly hope they will be able to go back one day, either forever or to build a life between there and here. The impossibility of returning today appears strongly in all other interviews: the general insecurity and the disastrous economic, social and humanitarian conditions in Somalia are among the main aspects mentioned.

Moreover, it appears that those who do go back are people who can do so under good conditions. This means that they have acquired both a secure legal status abroad and wealth enough to allow them to pursue a concrete project, often linked to some kind of business. According to one community leader, there are many new businesses in Somalia, private schools or universities, for example, run by Somalis who are established abroad and who travel back and forth. But the purely economic aspect is matched by the status acquired within the sub-clan: some young Somalis leave the country or are sent by their (enlarged) family in order to fulfil a specific task for the community: in the words of one expert, "the idea is to help the sub-clan by sending money back home and at the same time to consolidate one's position in this sub-clan: they leave to come back stronger and be able to play the role of a traditional leader". When we see the difficulties that many of the people face in trying to survive economically and in terms of stability and of skills building, it is not surprising that many prefer to stay or will try to go to another place where they have a better chance of building something that would allow them to go back home one day.

I would like to remain in Switzerland, but only if I get the opportunity to be educated, otherwise I cannot stay here. Imagine, what sense would it make to stay here without education? Once I have to go back to Somalia, I will be like those who have just arrived from the bush. I will not be able to do anything without education. (205/male/17 years old)

In our sample, we met only one person who had specifically thought of going back to Somalia and had even approached the office in charge of voluntary return programmes. It is not clear why his idea did not lead to a concrete project, whether it was because of a lack of competence and efficiency on the part of the office or because he dropped the idea himself; but the level of despair in which he finds himself is probably a reason for his not being able to make plans for the future anymore:

I don't know what to imagine for my future, I don't know where to go concretely. I would like to go back to Somalia to cultivate the soil, and also to try to find out where my family is, but I don't know how to go about it. (605/male/39 years old)

Old people think more concretely about going back; many hope they will be able to go back to their homeland for the end of their lives and to die there. Representatives of the Federal Office for Migration told us about one single voluntary return to Somalia in recent years: an old woman who strongly desired to finish her life at home. As this case is the only recent one, we met this woman's daughter for an interview: she told us about her mother who decided to go back when she started having health problems and could benefit from the FOMs assistance to travel back to Somalia.

Only four persons (7% of the sample) admitted imagining their future in another country than Switzerland, although none of them told us about concrete plans regarding their future movement. Others told us about members of their family, usually grown up children, who think of leaving Switzerland for another country. The reasons that make people want to leave are linked in various ways to the precariousness of their legal status and the lack of opportunities to build their own lives in Switzerland. Young men in particular say they want to leave, and this in fact corresponds to what experts and community leaders told us, as we will see in the next section.

I don't really know, but I won't remain here if I do not get full asylum status. I have relatives that are established in Canada and in the UK and they are all very happy. They received education, they received documents to travel, so maybe I will join them one day. (206/male/19 years old)

However, we also met one young woman who is a university student and already in possession of a Swiss passport. She already knows she will go back to the United Arab Emirates (where she and her family lived before they came

to Switzerland) and where she believes she will find a job more easily. This example shows that it is not only Somalis who have an insecure status who think of leaving⁴³.

4.4.2 Secondary movements: leaving Switzerland to find better living conditions

4.4.2.1 Scope of (irregular) secondary movements and examples

The exact scope of secondary movements from Switzerland is impossible to account for and we will not be able to provide with precise figures about people leaving this country illegally. The only statistics available are from the Federal Office for Migration but it is difficult to find out much about illegal movements by Somalis. The only indicator is the number of so-called “non official departures”. In the table below (Table 23), we compare this figure for Somalis with the figures for the other nationalities that also in many cases receive provisional admission⁴⁴. The percentages of non-official departures (of the total number of people in the asylum process) do not show important differences. However, the percentage of non-official departures out of all the types of departures is higher for Somalis than for all the other groups of refugees. Considering the fact that Somalis rarely go back home (which could be the case for other nationals), this could be a pointer to more irregular secondary movements from Switzerland where Somalis are concerned. But this assumption must of course be taken with caution as many other elements could have effects that are not taken into account in this very summary statistical analysis.

⁴³ This fact appears clearly in the Dutch and Danish cases: in those countries, large numbers of Somalis left the country (mostly to go to Great Britain) as soon as they received the citizenship of their host country, as testified in different articles (for example “Somalis desert Denmark”, *Jyllandsposten*, 17 March 2005;) and documented in a few studies (notably Bang Nielsen 2004).

⁴⁴ An ideal situation would have been to compare the figures of non-official departures of persons with a provisional admission only, but these detailed statistics are unfortunately not available.

Table 23: Non-official departures of nationals having a high rate of provisional admission in the Swiss asylum process in 2004

Country	Total number in the asylum process	Provisional admission	Non-official departures	Percentage on all departures
Somalia	3928	3458 (88%)	237 (6%)	86%
Sri Lanka	2996	2428 (81%)	168 (5,6%)	50%
Angola	2907	2092 (72%)	170 (5,8%)	73%
Serbia and Montenegro	11425	7945 (70%)	1258 (11%)	45%
Bosnia Herzegovina	4037	2304 (57%)	223 (5,5%)	34%

Source: FOM, asylum statistics 2004

According to all the experts and community leaders that we met, the case seems clear: a large number of Somalis are in Switzerland in transit and often choose to move onward after a few years. The official in charge of a cantonal office for migration sums it up, “They are a surprising population: the more Somalis arrive in Switzerland, the less we find them in our database”. The figures vary, but according to most of the community leaders, the proportion of those who leave is higher than those who stay. When asked for more details, they often qualify their estimation a little but the fact remains that Switzerland does not appear to be a country where Somalis want to stay and is considered more as a transit country, albeit often a “long-term transit”.

However, according to different testimonies, the rate of irregular departures is not as high as it used to be (from 90% two years ago to only 60% now, according to a community leader). This change is corroborated by the FOM asylum statistics, at least when looking at the absolute numbers: while in 2004, 237 Somalis left the country unofficially, they numbered 385 in 2003, 611 in 2002 and 808 in 2001. The reason for this change does not lie in any great improvement in the situation of Somalis in Switzerland, but rather in the increase in the difficulties faced by irregular secondary movers. Because of the European systems of information sharing (to which Switzerland for the moment only has access on a bilateral basis and upon specific request), Somalis know that it is becoming more difficult to move to another country and make a new asylum request. The EURODAC system in particular (European database of all asylum-seekers’ fingerprints) is known as a major obstacle to such movements. Another reason that makes people leave Switzerland less easily is the fact that the situation in many other European countries is not as good for Somalis as it used to be: many governments of traditional “dream” countries such as the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries have taken a restrictive turn in their refugee policies. A last explanation resides in the fact that many families have been living in

Switzerland for some years now and, as has already been explained, they do not want to start the whole integration process all over again, especially when they have school-aged children. This might also hold true for young single persons who have jobs and friends and do not want to face a whole new asylum procedure, as another community leader told us.

Notwithstanding this apparent decrease in the number of people who leave Switzerland unofficially, the fact remains that many people at least say that they would think of doing so if their situation does not get better. During our research, we met only one person who told us about an attempt to reach Denmark illegally (around 1999):

I had been in Switzerland for about six months by then and I really missed my children. At that time, other Somali refugees told me that in Denmark it would be possible to bring one's children along after six months. That is when I decided to go to Denmark. I met a smuggler at the train station and gave him 1000 dollars for some papers. I did not understand the documents because they were in German. I do not know if it was an ID or a passport but the man told me that I would be able to travel to Denmark and stay there with these documents. I went together with another Somali woman who also bought the same papers and wanted to go to Denmark as well. We took a train to Berlin and from there wanted to go to Denmark, but the police checked us in Berlin. They said that we had illegal documents and took us to prison. We stayed in prison for 18 days! Most of the time I was in a sort of coma. They took me to the hospital. I didn't want to stay in Germany. After 18 months, they brought me and my girlfriend back to Switzerland. (501/female/37 years old)

Others, as has been mentioned, talked about potential future movements to other countries (Canada, United Kingdom, USA or just "another country in Europe") but without concrete projects in mind (at least not that they told us about).

We also asked the interviewees whether they had family members who had been living in Switzerland but who had left and were now living in another country: 11% of the sample (7 persons) gave us a positive answer. They had sisters and brothers, but also a daughter, a mother, an aunt or a sister in law who left the country to find better conditions somewhere else⁴⁵. Some had been able to find a legal way to travel, while others had had to take the irregular way. The countries they chose are in three cases the USA, in two Great Britain, and for the others Canada or the Netherlands. The reasons why

⁴⁵ Although it might be due to chance given such a small number of persons, it is interesting to note that in all but one cases, the persons who left Switzerland for another country were women.

these persons left are diverse, as the examples below show, but in many cases the precariousness of the situation in Switzerland was mentioned.

One of my brothers, who is in the US today, stayed in Switzerland for seven years. Here, he had an F status, could not work and had to stay in an asylum centre for four years which he did not like at all. When he got out of the centre, he did not manage to settle in Switzerland. He lived in the Canton of Aargau and suffered from racist attacks almost every day. He became very unhappy, he hadn't enough money to live on and decided to leave for the US. There, he was given the opportunity to go to university. Now, he has a nice job and sends me 200 Swiss Francs every month. He has also asked us to come to the US, but my children do not want to leave. They have made friends here, speak Swiss German and are happy. (702/female/40 years old)

Three of my sisters who live in the US today stayed in Switzerland before they left. One won a green card. She then went to the US with my mother who was also in Switzerland at that time. My two other sisters had contacts with Somalis in the US. They wanted to get married to them. Both of them got a visa from those men and got married to them. All of them left at the end of the 1990s. (706/female/43 years old)

4.4.2.2 Secondary movers, countries of destination, networks and information

Most probably, the majority of those who move onward is constituted of young single persons, who are independent and can better afford the costs of such a choice than a family. At least two community leaders believe that educated people will tend to move more and try to continue their education or to find a job corresponding to their diploma or skills in a country that allows them to work (for example the Scandinavian countries).

One of the things that surprises some of our interlocutors (experts) is that it is not uncommon for whole families to move irregularly, even with many children. Because of the precariousness of their situation and the lack of hope in any improvement in the future, they prefer to leave and start all over again in another country. Their motivation probably lies in giving their children a better future even if it means going through a hard time first, as the following description of what happens in this kind of process shows:

An important part of my life is here, in Switzerland. I feel some attachment, I want my child to go to school here and do not want him to become rootless like all those kids who went to school for five or six years, learned the language and then suddenly have to leave the country because their parents can't stand living with provisional admission and decided to go to another country, for example to the Netherlands, where B permits are given more easily. Those children have to learn another new language and often have to get used to a new name because their parents changed their name to start a new asylum procedure. (601/male/25 years old)

It also happens that families do not move all together. According to a community leader, it is not uncommon for the father to leave first and then the

family joins him later. This kind of strategic move is not surprising, as it seems sensible not to leave everything behind without exploring and testing the ground first.

The countries of destination that people perceive as interesting after a stay in Switzerland are, as the different examples mentioned earlier show, in North America (USA and Canada) and in Northern Europe, with the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands as the main “dream” countries. The attractiveness of those countries lies in the possibility of obtaining a stable status, with valid and recognized documents, being able to study, work and travel freely. Many of the people we talked to had examples of other Somalis they know who had gone to one of these countries and were able to come to visit them after only a few years, go to university or had found an interesting and well-paid job, or had even become citizens of their new host country.

But of those countries, the United Kingdom clearly stands out as the place where most Somalis already in Europe would want to live, mainly because of the freedom, in the broadest sense, that this country offers to Somalis. The UK hosts the largest Somali community in Europe, with up to 75'000 Somalis according to some estimates (Perouse De Montclos 2003); this country has a long tradition of hosting Somali settlements since the beginning of the 20th century, due to the historical and colonial links between the UK and Somaliland. A study on Danish Somalis, confirmed – according to its author – by other studies, shows that a high number of Somalis left their first European host country for Britain once they had access to EU citizenship, especially from the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries (Bang Nielsen 2004). These secondary movements, although legal, show the attraction exercised by this country on Somali refugees already living in Europe, even those who have a stabilized situation. Still according to this study, the reasons for this attraction lie in the freedom (for example in the way of living) and tolerance that the country offers to foreigners, and in particular Somalis, and in the opportunities it offers, notably in the fields of employment and education. These elements are confirmed both by the Somalis living in Switzerland and the experts that we met. This community leader, for example, explained that “Somalis want to be free. In Britain, they are free to have their own business, to have more than one job. Many have become businessmen. It is a thousand times better than here. They are also free to receive the education they want, at any time, as long as they have the capacities for it. (...) And there, the education they got in Somalia is recognized. My uncle had a Somali PhD: in France, he was a concierge. When he got the French passport, he went to UK and now he is a university professor there”. The large Somali community that was built over the years is in itself another pull factor. While in many countries, including Switzerland, the Somali community is relatively small

and loose-knit, with the choice of the place of settlement within the country often being limited, its size in the UK allows it to be organized differently and to offer services specifically provided by and for the Somalis. Somali ethnic businesses are the typical example, but Somali schools or lawyers and politicians who defend Somalis’ rights also play an important role. As this woman told us:

I know a family who left Switzerland. They first went to Italy and then to England. Now the two elder sons go to university, both parents work. The only thing they miss from Switzerland is the quiet, the cleanness and the security. Somalis like England, the USA and the Canada because their kids can learn English, which is an international language, not like Dutch for example, and also because there is a large Somali community: you can find Somali products, for example wooden toothbrushes. There are shops that have products that come straight from the North of Somalia. (307/female/in her 30s)

In short, in those countries where a large enough community has settled, Somalis can “survive thanks to the group and within the group”, according to an expert, and this makes the difference.

Even though movements within Europe (as well as those from Europe to North America), have become more difficult in the past few years, due to the strengthening of border controls and in asylum policies, they are facilitated by what a community leader described as “a mafia”. The Somali network certainly plays a central role in the secondary movements within Europe, as everything shows that it is only through this network that Somalis organize their movements. Its functions are diverse and range from the gathering of information regarding the situation in the different countries and the recent changes, to the organization of the trip itself (including the documentation) to support to help integration once in the new host country. Again, things are much more complex than that in reality, and the distribution of roles as well as the links and hidden strategies within the network will not even be mentioned here. According to the community leaders we met, the price of a trip within Europe is quite expensive, at least one or two thousand dollars. The use of borrowed or false passports seems to be the most common way to travel⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ There are also ways to move onward in a legal manner, one of them being through marriage. According to a community leader, and an informal discussion with a couple of young Somali women, it seems that many marriages are contracted across borders and it is probably difficult to know to what extent these are to be considered as “unconsummated marriages”. Many couples also meet through Internet, then one of the future spouse leaves his/her first host country to join his/her wife/husband to be, in a country where the situation is more favourable.

4.5 Leaving Switzerland

We started this last part of the report with a chapter entitled “leaving Somalia” and we end it with one called “leaving Switzerland”, signalling that the trajectory might well not be finished here. As the results of the research show, the trajectories of Somali refugees are complex, composed of multiple steps, of diverse strategies, of many movements across many borders, yet with the home country always playing a central role. In most cases, they also take time, often with many years of travelling and settling in other countries, between the departure from Somalia until their arrival in Switzerland. A hypothesis we make, however, is that the length of the total journey has become shorter over the years, due to the migration paths that have been opened by the previous waves of Somali migrants and refugees, and the resources that they represent for their families or clans.

Many refugees we met spent some months or years in neighbouring countries of Somalia before they decided to leave for Europe and found the means to do so. They resided either in camps or in cities, either legally (registered) or not (undocumented and more or less tolerated) in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen or Djibouti. Their journey often took them first to Italy, and then to Switzerland, in the great majority of cases with the help of one or more smugglers (or “carriers” as they are commonly called).

Two main reasons amongst others, and within a complex network of strategies, brought them to Switzerland: the first is linked to the presence of family members already living in Switzerland, the second is linked to chance, or rather to the choice made by the smuggler (according to the opportunities and connections he had at that time). In all cases, the conditions they find in this country, in other words, the opportunities offered by the status they receive – provisional admission – mostly do not satisfy them, especially in terms of longer-term integration. While it is difficult to know the exact proportion of Somali refugees who really leave Switzerland after some time spent in this country, it is interesting to note that most of those we met know other people who have left, and that the aspect of the “secondary movements” of Somali refugees is in every mouth, as if it were part of their identity. These two perspectives of onward movements to places where the grass is greener, i.e. one linked to the conditions encountered and one linked to more cultural elements, will be developed in the conclusion of this report. It should, however, be mentioned that, even though the “non-official” departures of Somali refugees, as the authorities term them, are a socially interesting phenomenon in the eyes of everyone (authorities representatives, NGO representatives and other experts, Somali community leaders and refugees), it is difficult to prove that they outnumber to any great extent that of other refugee populations, or even that they reach the high proportion rates (up to 90%) that we heard of during our interviews.

5 Conclusion

The reasons why some Somalis wish to move onward after a stay in Switzerland emerge clearly in the last few chapters. They can be seen from two different perspectives: a contextual or structural one, linked to the living conditions and to the asylum policies, and a more cultural one, linked to the supposed “nomadism” of Somalis.

The contextual/structural perspective is closely linked to standards of protection and living conditions, and the policies they depend on, as well as the prospects for the future that Switzerland offers to Somali refugees. As we saw, the protection standards are met, since almost all Somalis receive subsidiary protection and no forced returns to Somalia have been processed in recent years. However, this protection is granted on a provisional basis as the Swiss policy is based on the assumption that Somalis will leave the country when the situation in their home country improves. In fact, Somalis have been arriving in Switzerland for the past fifteen years, fleeing a war- and violence-torn country, and almost none have gone back during that time. Yet, this reality has not changed anything in the Swiss policy regarding Somali refugees who are for the most part still accepted on the same provisional basis. This leads to a situation in which the basic needs are met, since Somalis living in Switzerland receive assistance, food and shelter, as well as finding security, but problems occur in the longer term, when other needs (such as stability, employment, further education prospects, travel opportunities) start to come to the fore. When those needs are not satisfied and when there is no real prospect of any improvement in the situation in the near future, people start thinking of finding better conditions somewhere else. The reason almost always mentioned is the precariousness of the situation, given the provisional admission and the limitations that the F permit implies. This has practical consequences mainly in the following fields, as described in the previous chapters: freedom of movement (travel outside Switzerland allowed only under very exceptional circumstances), access to family reunion which is not allowed even with close family (spouse and children) and even after many years of living in the country, employment restricted to certain activities and access to it generally difficult, and access to education which is satisfactory only until the end of compulsory schooling. Subsidiary forms of protection have been created in other European countries, and it is interesting to note that the EU directives recommend that the living conditions of the refugees accepted on subsidiary grounds should be similar to those of “fully” recognized refugees, at least after a couple of years in the country. In Switzerland, provisionally admitted persons have only slightly better conditions than asylum-seekers.

Most interviewees clearly linked all the problems they had to the provisional admission. Without denying the reality of these problems, it appears that if the frame were widened a little, we would find that more general structural aspects play a role as well. The disappointment mentioned by the few persons who managed to have their F permit transformed into a B permit gives a sense of this. The freedom to travel outside Switzerland for example, is not any easier, as Somali passports are not internationally recognized, and the B or C permit alone is not considered as a travel document. Another aspect is access to the labour market, largely tinged with (subtle or overt) discrimination. Women wearing the veil, for example, will not be well accepted in many Swiss working places once they have a more stable status. The access to further or university education also partly depends on economic means and, although theoretically open to everyone, the way to this kind of education is beset by many obstacles. These are just a few examples to underline the fact that, although “the F permit” is often blamed for all the difficulties faced, living conditions and policies on a more general level also play a part⁴⁷.

These can be considered as the main structural reasons that push people not to stay in Switzerland and to seek a better future somewhere else, even though they have received a favourable status compared to many other asylum-seekers. As a community leader (from a settled clan, and not a nomadic one) told us: “Why do you think that whole families, with children, decide to leave everything, to change their names and to start everything all over again? It is not because they are nomads, but because they did not find what they wanted; because they are very disappointed”. This last quotation shows the unintended consequences that a system can sometimes produce, pushing persons and families to travel illegally, change their identity, and start afresh: while this is difficult for obvious reasons for those who go through the experience, it cannot be seen as positive for the countries concerned, either, be it the one they leave (which, let us not forget, accepted responsibility and invested money) or for the new host country (which will in turn have to make the same investment).

According to the interviews we made during this research, it seems that an important majority of the Somalis living in Switzerland have either thought about moving to another country, are still thinking about it, or have already taken the plunge. It should not be forgotten, however, that other elements – the financial factor (i.e. the resources needed to leave), the fact that children

⁴⁷ On this issue, it is also interesting to note that very few interviewees complained about hostile, racist or discriminatory attitudes of the host population toward them because of their origin, colour or religion, in contrast to West African refugees in Switzerland (in the study by Denise Efonayi-Mäder already mentioned), or the Somalis living in the Netherlands, often with Dutch citizenship (Moret and Van Eck 2006).

have started to integrate in Switzerland, for example – play a role in the equation. Moreover, although the issue of onward movement was present in almost all the comments we heard, one can ask to what extent this is done out of habit, as it were, and how far it actually reflects a concrete reality. It does seem as if the aspect of moving to another country (or even only thinking about doing so) is somehow felt to be an intimate component of “Somaliness”. This hypothesis would naturally have to be investigated further to be really relevant.

The question of nomadism as a basic cultural explanation of why Somalis move onward is a tricky one. On one hand, it has to be mentioned that a great majority of the Somalis we met referred to this cultural feature to explain the importance of the movements of the Somali refugees very early in the interviews. In most cases, however, they qualified their first assertion, saying that Somalis would probably often stay where they were if they felt satisfied with their lives. We will not give an answer to this apparent contradiction in what was said, as it seems highly probable that both assumptions are partly true. As Bang Nielsen also found in the study already cited (2004), nomadism does not concretely explain why people decide to move (when others choose not to)⁴⁸, but this cultural feature of moving and of constantly looking for a better place with better living conditions is clearly part of the process. This is partly summed up in the words of another community leader: “It is true that we are nomads, Somalis were shepherds, they used to go where the rain was, where the resources were; here and now, it is the same; they don’t give us documents, so we move further”. The scale of the geographical space in which they move, as well as the resources they are looking for, are different, but the strategies (which one expert calls strategies of survival) apparently retain some traditional features and they rely on similar movements and networks, with the home country always playing a central role, as in the “long distance nationalism” described recently by some scholars (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002)⁴⁹. In this sense, they create community structures favourable to secondary movements that are more important than territories. It

⁴⁸ It does not explain it, as a supposed traditional settled way of life would for example not explain why so few Europeans migrate.

⁴⁹ Comparing it to the links migrants maintained with their home country before World War I and the rise of the Nation-State, when, as they put it, “the fact that migrants came and went, maintained their home ties, sent home money to buy land and supported home areas by remittances was understood as common practice” (313), they then analyse today’s long distance nationalism as follows: “the concept of a people comprising a citizenry, a sovereign, a nation and a group of solidarity remains salient, but these different embodiments are not thought of as congruent and territorially bounded” (323)

is also useful to recall here the definition of nomadism given by another researcher: “nomadism is characterized (...) by fidelity to a place of origin, by the absence of an inherited professional specialization, and by the postponement of the prospect of integration; and, sometimes, by the temporary exploitation of citizenship”⁵⁰ (Tarrus 2002: 32). This quotation, given in this conclusion as food for thought, reveals many aspects that could (and probably should) be taken into account when talking about Somali refugees. It also points to a question that has not so far been raised in this research: are Somalis to be considered as (only) refugees? We will not answer this question here; but, without denying their need of international protection, it should be borne in mind that Somalis, are also active agents with economic, social and professional skills and resources. Their widely recognized competence in business, for example, could classify them in the category of “migrant entrepreneurs”, to use Tarrus’s term again. As such, their need for proper documentation, for a better status than they have in Switzerland, and the suffering they feel from the lack of freedom, take on another meaning, as these would allow them to regain this part of their identity that they are denied at present, as well as allowing some kind of integration. The high numbers of Somalis moving to the UK from the European country of which they became citizens (mentioned above) is another sign of this urge to settle but only with a view to being able to move again. Last but not least, the movements of Somali refugees must be set in the context of in larger collective livelihood strategies: a person is often not only responsible for him or herself, but also for a larger group of people (on that issue, see Al-Sharmani 2004a, 2004b). When the conditions found in a place are not sufficient to assume this responsibility and to help the family or the clan members who expect it (through remittances, for example), this can motivate a decision to move on.

This more anthropological perspective on the motivations and strategies at stake when talking about secondary movements should not obscure the other aspects that have been mentioned, as both perspectives are to be understood as parallel to one another, rather than mutually exclusive. It remains very clear that people in general (including Somali refugees) will tend to stay in a place where they have found what they were looking for. And one must also keep in mind that not all Somalis have the power to take such decisions on their lives. Those who do not have much choice or who decide, for other reasons, to stay in Switzerland, should be given opportunities for a decent future and long-terms perspectives when it seems plausible that they might stay for a longer time than was first expected. This would be in the interest of

all parties involved, the persons directly concerned (Somali refugees) as well as the receiving State and the host society. The Swiss policies and practices toward Somalis are consistent with the national and international legislations (even in terms of human rights, although sometimes only just), but they show signs of contradictions and (human) irrationality when we consider that most Somalis have been here for many years and have little chance of going back to their home country in the coming years.

⁵⁰ Free translation.

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