Becoming Visible

The Effect of Regularization on Undocumented Workers

Jan-Erik Refle
Claudine Burton-Jeangros
Yves Jackson

with contributions by
Liala Consoli and Julien Fakhoury

Between 2017 and 2018, the canton of Geneva implemented an unprecedented pilot policy in Switzerland: a scaling up of the regularization of undocumented migrants who met pre-established criteria. How has this transition impacted their living conditions and life aspirations? This book presents the results of a prospective study called "Parchemins", conducted over five years among a number of the individuals concerned. Thanks to the rich dataset collected, this study shows how accessing a legal status influences the life course of these people, be it in terms of housing conditions, financial situation, social integration, health, or quality of life. It provides keys for interpreting these unique results, and presents recommendations for action aimed at both policy-makers and associations, with the goal of best accompanying these new citizens.

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Foreword

Migration is a complex global phenomenon. There are many reasons why an individual may choose to migrate from one country to another, but most often, he or she is driven by economic and political factors.

Integrating the reality of an unfamiliar country is a constant effort. This is challenging to achieve alone, especially when migration is forced. The lack of mastery of language and customs is a recurring source of uncertainty in daily life. In many cases, separation from loved ones is a significant concern.

Migrants arriving in a new country face a variety of challenges that slow their integration and make it more difficult. They encounter three major problems: obtaining a residence permit, finding employment, and facing discrimination.

Before my own regularization through the Papyrus program[1] in 2018, I used to live in the shadow. When migrating, one develops internal strength as daily life turns into a new challenge; it is "forbidden to fail".

None of the studies and qualifications I had completed in my home country were recognized in Switzerland. Thus, I lost the opportunity to work and integrate socially. I was relegated to a lower level than other citizens.

Once having overcome my bitterness, finding housing and employment was a significant trial. I was afraid of working without a reference permit, as I could be deported in case of an inspection. I found myself, somewhat by chance, at

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[1] A regularization program for undocumented workers implemented by the Canton of Geneva, which motivated the conduct of the Parchemins study presented in this book.

Emmaüs[2], where I found lodging and work. However, those years—ten years spent without papers—were challenging: working full time, 6 days a week, for a 10-square-meter room and 600 Swiss francs per month. What a misery! One day, I received a pamphlet from the SIT (an interprofessional workers' union) in the streets and became a member.

In 2018, with the support of SIT, I managed to put together and submit an application as part of the Papyrus program. I was elated when I received my first authorization to settle in Geneva. I could finally be visible. I was able to break free from Emmaüs and truly start living, finding a job, having a place of my own… As I started this new job, my commitment to SIT redoubled.

I then worked as a chambermaid because, without recognized training, I could not apply for a job in my original profession as a lawyer. The need to fight to improve the working conditions and salaries of chambermaids quickly became apparent. Invisibility, high workload, extreme fatigue, rapid physical wear, and precariousness: it was impossible not to revolt. I joined the SIT chambermaids' group, took part in the women's strike on June 14, 2019, and fought for minimum wage. And the struggle goes on!

In November 2022, I have been elected as the vice president of SIT, which is a great honor and challenge for me. I want to commit myself to the cause of precarious and migrant women with all my strength and make visible what many do not see. I want to prove to them that when we fight for our rights, the path is open. A single woman is strong, but united, we are invincible.

Nearly 8,000 women work in Geneva as nannies, housekeepers, chambermaids, or caregivers for elderly people. Through their work, they contribute to the economic development of Geneva and provide a better quality of life and greater well-being to the families who employ them. They are women, migrants, often without legal status. After many years of work, as they have not contributed to the social insurance system, they are not entitled to a pension. They must either rely on social aid or return to their home countries, which they may no longer know.

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[2] Emmaüs is a charity movement that supports excluded and vulnerable people.

We should demand that the authorities continue the Papyrus program in order to give these women the opportunity to regularize their status because, after many years of work, they have earned this right.

I would like to thank Professor Yves-Laurent Jackson, a medical doctor at the Geneva University Hospitals, and Professor Claudine Burton-Jeangros from the Department of Sociology at the University of Geneva, as well as the entire team of researchers, interns, and investigators. This incredible human team was able to shed light, through the Parchemins study, on the reality of migrants in this country, whether they have legal status or not. Now, we can step out of the shadow and increasingly contribute to the pursuit of the common good for the entire society that has welcomed us in this beautiful country.

Nancy Aguirre Pereira
Geneva, June 15, 2023

1

Introduction: **Undocumented workers**

Migrant people working in Switzerland, without valid residence permits, make up a significant part of the workforce. These individuals, often referred to as “undocumented”, engage in domestic work, take care of children or dependent individuals, or work informally in the hospitality or construction sectors. As they do not have permits, they are compelled to accept poorly compensated employment, with no or limited social protection against unemployment, accidents, or illness, and no legal safeguards against abuse. Their work in undervalued sectors rarely aligns with the professional training they have acquired in their home countries. Living without a valid residence authorization means hiding to avoid checks, not being able to cross borders—for example to visit family and relatives in the country of origin —, and not having the opportunity to formalize a union through marriage.

For what reasons are these workers willing to live undocumented, accepting so many sacrifices? Financial motives are significant, as global economic inequalities draw them to wealthier countries, while poverty and financial crises affecting many less prosperous countries compel them to leave. Migration offers them the opportunity to try to improve their living conditions and those of their relatives by sending money back home. A participant in the Parchemins study presented in this book exclaimed: “Switzerland is a land of opportunities!” Gains in terms of options and security also matter, as their stay in Switzerland can shield them from violence experienced within the family or resulting from the social and political circumstances of their home country.

The fluctuating migratory policies of destination countries impact the legal status of these workers. Thus, whether they become and stay undocumented does not depend solely on them. The prevailing local legislation and its evolution determine the constraints and possibilities that lead these individuals into or out of their undocumented status (Triandafyllidou, 2023).

Recognizing both the contribution of these workers to the local economy and the precariousness of their living conditions, the Papyrus program, initiated in 2017 in the canton of Geneva, offered them the opportunity to obtain a temporary residence permit, subject to the fulfillment of a certain number of criteria. With this pragmatic and innovative policy, the canton made a commitment to combat undeclared work and acknowledged its duty to protect workers who are especially vulnerable to abuse (Bolomey & Schweri, 2021). This pilot project ended at the end of 2018, after nearly 3,000 individuals were regularized. To date, it remains unique in Switzerland, even though some other cantons have shown interest in replicating it.

Upstream of such policies, cantonal authorities exercise a degree of tolerance toward undocumented workers, for instance by allowing their children to attend public schools or by implementing dedicated healthcare services, such as the community care unit (CAMSCO), which is integrated into the Geneva University Hospitals. With the Papyrus program offering undocumented individuals the opportunity to regularize their stay through a more transparent process, the

Geneva authorities went further by acknowledging their contribution to society and granting them the status of citizens, albeit for a limited time.

At the center of migration policies and measures to control foreign workers, regularization programs generate lively political debates, sometimes fueled by highly polarized opinions. Opponents mention the risk of creating a pull factor, suggesting that regularizing undocumented individuals already present in a country would attract new undocumented workers. Supporters, on the other hand, put forth arguments of social justice and labor market improvement as factors that promote social cohesion.

These debates often remain poorly informed due to shortcomings in observations regarding undocumented workers and the effects of regularization, both in Switzerland and elsewhere. The most recent estimates suggest that approximately 76,000 undocumented individuals reside in the country, primarily in large urban centers where employment opportunities are more abundant (Morlok *et al.*, 2015). However, this is a highly heterogeneous and fluid population, as many people cannot cope with the hardships of undocumented life.

Seizing the opportunity to follow individuals that were regularized under the Papyrus program, the Parchemins study—an independent academic project—aimed to document the situation of individuals living and working without legal status in the canton of Geneva. Primarily, it sought to evaluate how obtaining a residence permit impacted the living conditions and health by following a sample of individuals over several years. Therefore, this work aimed to answer the following question: how does transitioning out of living as an undocumented individual affect the living conditions and health of migrant workers?

Following a description of the main features of the Papyrus program (Chapter 2) and the Parchemins study

(Chapter 3), the effects of regularization on various aspects of life are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Taking a more practical approach, Chapter 6 offers recommendations, which are derived from these results as well as from a dialogue with individuals directly affected by regularization.

This work concludes a research endeavor that has already generated numerous publications, including an initial description of undocumented workers in the canton of Geneva and thematic articles in scientific journals[3]. This book is written for participants in the Parchemins study, individuals interested in the situation of undocumented individuals in Switzerland, scientists, elected officials, and field professionals in regular contact with the undocumented workforce. We hope to contribute to discussions on the role assigned to an invisible population that is nonetheless essential to the functioning of society.

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[3] See the website of the Parchemins study: https://cigev.unige.ch/recherches/research-l/health/parchemins (accessed on 17.10.2023). The observations presented here have been significantly informed by the in-depth analyses conducted by Julien Fakhoury and Liala Consoli as part of their doctoral thesis.

2

The Papyrus program

The “Papyrus” regularization program consists in granting legal status to undocumented migrant workers through the delivery of temporally limited residence permits. In Switzerland, the issue is regularly brought to the political agenda through parliamentary interventions. In contrast to calls for collective regularization made in the early 2000s, the motion for coherent legislation on undocumented migrants, filed in 2018, proposed implementing a more restrictive policy toward undocumented workers. In its response to this motion, however, the Federal Council considered the existing legal framework to be adequate and sufficient (Swiss Confederation, 2020), including in the fight against undeclared work. This legal framework (as defined in the law on undeclared work) defines undeclared work as noncompliance with requirements laid out by the law on foreign nationals, such as respect for social insurance regulations and the withholding of taxes. By not only allowing undocumented individuals to join most social insurance schemes, but also requiring them to do so, the government argues to comply with both the Federal Constitution and the international commitments it has made to protect the economic, social, and cultural rights of all workers. Similarly, the Federal Council reiterated its opposition to both a policy of collective regularization and the adoption of more restrictive measures, as it considered that case-by-case regularization opportunities are sufficient.

This establishes the backdrop against which the Papyrus program, an innovative public policy, was implemented by the canton of Geneva between 2017 and 2018. Without modifying the preexisting federal legal framework, this pilot project aimed to standardize its application at the cantonal level by reducing the degree of arbitrariness observed in the assessment of applications and in the granting of residence permits. The law on foreign nationals already allows undocumented migrants to apply for a temporary, renewable residence permit, known as a "B" permit. This permit, however, is generally granted only in cases of force majeure, often for medical reasons, defined as "hardship cases".

Within this federal legal framework, regularization options remain limited. However, there are significant variations in interpretation from one canton to the next. For example, with comparable populations of undocumented migrants, before the Papyrus program was launched, the canton of Geneva submitted several hundred files each year, while the canton of Zurich submitted fewer than ten. These figures illustrate the significant contrast in policy and practice between French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland.

2.1 The development of the Papyrus program

The first initiatives to regularize undocumented workers in the canton of Geneva date back to the early 2000s. Left-wing political parties and trade unions, who were in contact with associations defending migrants' rights, demanded political solutions for undocumented workers. After several years of fruitless discussions between social partners and cantonal and federal authorities, this demand was once again put forward by migrant rights associations in 2010. This led to the creation of a joint task force. The negotiations led to a consensus on eligibility criteria for regularization, and the Papyrus program was launched in February 2017 for a limited period of twenty-two months as a pilot project (Fakhoury, 2018).

Without altering the preexisting legal basis[4] for the residence of foreigners, the Papyrus program was built around several complementary components. First, it gave well-integrated undocumented workers access to a procedure for regularizing their legal status based on compliance with specific criteria. In addition, various structural measures were taken under the aegis of the Cantonal Office for Work Inspection and Labor Relations (OCIRT): these include better regulation of those sectors of the labor market that were known to rely on undeclared work; a job platform in the domestic services sector to facilitate the integration of these workers; and an information campaign aimed at employers in this sector, highlighting their obligations.

Negotiations between the various cantonal players led to the establishment of objective and verifiable criteria, all of which had to be met to apply for regularization, even without the support of an employer. These criteria, which reflected the importance given to proper integration, included a) a continuous stay of at least ten years in Geneva for single individuals or at least five years for families with children attending school in Geneva; b) financial autonomy (i.e. not being at risk of applying for public social assistance) ; c) absence of criminal convictions; and d) minimal French language skills (equivalent to the A2 level).

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[4] Article 30.1.b of the Law on foreigner nationals (“LEtr”) and Article 31 of the Ordinance on Admission, Residence and professional activity (OASA; RS 142,201).

The goal of this cantonal policy was to systematize administrative procedures by proposing verifiable criteria and thus eliminating, as far as possible, the arbitrariness in the processing of applications. The members of the working group agreed that any application meeting the criteria would receive a positive predecision from the canton; it would then be forwarded to the federal authorities, who would ultimately make the decision to grant a renewable "B" residence permit for a period of one or two years, following an individual examination of each case. A period of three to six months was expected between the cantonal notice and the federal decision.

The implementation of the Papyrus program is therefore the result of lengthy negotiations between three players, each with their own perspectives and interests: the Genevan cantonal administration, the associations and trade unions that are members of the collective for the support of undocumented individuals, and the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) of the federal administration in Bern. This reflects the continuous mobilization of civil society players, i.e. associations and trade unions, which finally convinced the authorities.

2.2 The implementation of the pilot program

Between February 2017 and December 2018, 2,883 people received a "B" permit, 1,676 (58%) of whom applied as families. Most applications came from people employed in the domestic work sector. OCIRT identified that 30% of the applications from this sector involved abusive employment relationships (noncompliance with wage requirements, nonpayment of social security contributions). The majority of these cases were brought into compliance under the Papyrus program. Under pressure from workers who have obtained legal status and through the information campaign targeted at employers, new declarations to employers' social insurance in the domestic work sector via the "Chèque Service"[5] scheme increased social security contributions by 5.7 million Swiss francs between 2016 and 2019 (République et canton de Genève, 2020).

In implementing the Papyrus program, the cantonal government assigned various responsibilities to civil society players: informing migrant communities, but also offering support in preparing individual applications for "B" permits by checking compliance with eligibility criteria and acting as representatives of applicants during the administrative procedure. This important intermediary function delegated to civil society actors was intended to reduce the burden on the Geneva canton's administration. The very low permit rejection rate (less than 1%) indicates that this support ensured a high level of compliance with the established criteria.

In practice, major administrative delays reduced the number of residence permits actually issued within the three to six months initially planned. As a result, many eligible persons who had applied for a permit found themselves in an administrative limbo, having stepped out of anonymity after submitting their application to the authorities but still awaiting the security of a residence permit, for periods of up to eighteen months.

Since the end of this pilot program, despite a change in political leadership, the canton has continued to process regularization applications that meet the established criteria. As a result of reduced administrative capacity, the number of applications treated each year has fallen, although it still amounts to several hundred new applications every year.

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[5] Chèque Service is a platform for declaring wages to the social security authorities in Geneva, with the aim of facilitating administrative procedures to avoid illegal employment.

The cantonal government commissioned an independent assessment of the Papyrus program during its implementation, focusing primarily on economic issues (Ferro-Luzzi *et al.*, 2019). The assessment concluded that the data did not confirm the hypothesis of new "pull factors" in the employment sectors concerned. This evaluation also showed that regularized workers managed to secure financial independence after obtaining a residence permit and therefore, with very few exceptions, did not seek social assistance.

The Geneva pilot scheme has aroused national interest. Political discussions occurred in various cantons but, to date, they have not led to the project being replicated. It should also be noted that, following various referenda, the canton of Geneva has set itself apart from the rest of Switzerland by implementing various measures to protect precarious workers. At the end of 2020, the canton adopted a law guaranteeing a minimum wage of 24 Swiss francs per hour[6] by 2023. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a compensation fund targeting the most precarious workers—regardless of whether they had a residence permit—was approved in March 2021. At the federal level, politicians as well as associations have demanded that the special situation of undocumented individuals be taken into account in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[6] 24 Swiss Franc equal 25.49 EUR, 21.90 GBP or 27.82 USD at the time of writing.

3

The Parchemins study

Initiated in the context of the Papyrus program, the Parchemins study aimed to measure the impact of regularization on the living conditions and health of undocumented and newly regularized migrants. In addition, the study aimed to document how these people experienced the transition from undocumented to regular status after obtaining a residence permit.

This research angle was chosen based on theories related to the life course and to the social determinants of health. According to the first perspective, which advocates an interdisciplinary approach (Levy *et al.*, 2005; Spini & Widmer, 2023), migration is a major life transition. For people settling in a new country and being undocumented, this rupture is associated with multiple forms of vulnerability. Regularization, as made possible by the Papyrus program, can then be seen as a second major transition in the migratory journey of these workers, who have long remained undocumented, considering that obtaining a residence permit is likely to reduce their precariousness in several areas such as employment and housing. From the perspective of social determinants of health, it is expected that the changes induced by regularization exert a positive influence on the health status of newly regularized people through improvements in their living conditions and access to social and health services (Castañeda *et al.*, 2015).

In order to measure the consequences of regularization, the study followed newly regularized people over several years to assess the extent and temporality of the various changes in their lives. The study aimed to respond to the following questions: to what extent do employment opportunities and conditions change after obtaining a residence permit? When and how do regularized migrants improve their housing conditions? What are the effects of becoming regularized on their physical and mental health and on their life satisfaction?

Given the restrictive conditions of the Papyrus program and the lingering effects of years spent as undocumented, it was important to assess both the opportunities and constraints of regularization. Indeed, regularization was likely not only to have positive effects on newly regularized people but also to place new burdens on them, such as tax payments, health insurance costs and exposure to other administrative obligations.

To grasp the complexity and specificity of these migrants' life paths, several facets of their living conditions were studied while taking into account their expectations and life projects.

3.1 Scientific design of the study

The Parchemins study involved collecting two types of data over a five-year period in order to gain a better understanding of the changes observed (Jackson *et al.*, 2019). Standardized information (quantitative data) on the different areas under study was collected via questionnaires. Every 12 to 18 months, participants were invited to a new data collection session, during which they were interviewed by one of the team's field investigators. The questionnaires were available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English, the four main languages spoken by the study population. The data collectors—trainees and students in medicine, social sciences and economics—were selected to cover these languages.

In addition to the participants' sociodemographic data, the questionnaires covered their living conditions (housing, family situation, quality of life), employment, financial situation, health status, and access to healthcare. Some questions were phrased identically for each wave of data collection to monitor changes in these indicators. Others were modified from one wave to the next, among other reasons to account for changes that had occurred in the intervening period, such as the introduction of the minimum wage or the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To the extent possible, the wording of the questions was aligned with that used in other studies of the resident population, enabling comparisons with statistics from the canton of Geneva's statistical office as well as the Federal Statistical Office.

In addition, in-depth interviews (qualitative data) were carried out at regular intervals with a smaller number of people engaged in the process of regularization who had responded to the questionnaire. The interviews focused on their transition experience and sought to understand how their aspirations changed over time. The cross-interpretation of these two types of data provides a more thorough understanding of the standardized observations collected from study participants. Excerpts from these interviews are included in the presentation of results in Chapters 4 and 5.

The Parchemins study took advantage of the unprecedented quasi-experimental situation that the Papyrus program created. To assess the consequences of regularization, it was decided to compare people engaged in the process of regularization with migrant workers who remained without a residence permit and who thus formed a control group, which was also monitored over time. The goal of this comparison was to identify changes specifically induced by regularization within a relatively homogeneous study population. The Parchemins study ran from 2017 to 2022, while the Papyrus program ended in with 2018.

In compliance with the Human Research Act (HRA), the study protocol was approved by the research ethics committee (CCER) of the Canton of Geneva in 2017, prior to the start of data collection. It was particularly important to protect the identity of the study participants, especially those without legal status, and to put in place measures guaranteeing the security of digital data. In line with current scientific research standards, the quantitative data from the study have now been made available via the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), enabling other researchers to continue analyzing the entirely anonymized data (Jackson *et al.*, 2024).

3.2 Study participants

By definition, undocumented migrants do not appear in population records unlike foreign residents with residence permits. In the absence of data on their sociodemographic profile, it was impossible to gather a fully representative sample of undocumented individuals living in the canton of Geneva, contrary to studies targeting the general population (e.g. the Swiss Health Survey[7] or the Swiss Household Panel[8] in which participants are drawn at random). The recruitment strategy attempted to reflect the diversity of undocumented workers living in Geneva, based on the best-informed sources, namely professionals working in migrant support associations and dedicated care facilities.

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[7] Federal Statistical Office (2017). Enquête suisse sur la santé, https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/sante/enquetes/sgb.html (accessed on 13.11.2023)

[8] FORS (2023). Swiss Household Panel: https://forscenter.ch/projects/swiss-household-panel/ (accessed on 12.10.2023).

It was also important that the two groups included in the study—those in the process of regularization and the undocumented control group—should be as comparable as possible. Recruitment therefore took several factors into account, including the age of the participants (at least 18 years old), the length of their stay in Geneva (at least three years), their intention to remain in Geneva (at least three more years), their administrative status (excluding asylum seekers), and finally their origin (countries outside European Union or European Free Trade Association [EFTA] countries).

Significant efforts were made to disseminate information about the study to all potential participants, with the aim of giving all interested parties a chance to take part. Investigators were thus present for several weeks in various places frequented by undocumented workers: these include the community care unit (CAMSCO) of the University Hospital of Geneva (HUG), which provides them with healthcare, as well as information sessions about the Papyrus program organized by associations and unions in 2017 and 2018.

Particular attention was given to creating a bond of trust grounded on transparent information about the aims of the study and the security brought by firewall protecting the personal data collected. This phase of establishing a trusted relationship, which was largely supported by the close partnership with associations and trade unions, was the cornerstone of participant recruitment. Anyone who indicated an interest in contributing to the study was contacted by the interviewers to set up an initial meeting and formalize the conditions of participation. At the end of each meeting with an interviewer, the person was invited to indicate whether he or she wished to continue participating in the study.

Four hundred and sixty-eight people participated in the first phase of data collection, which took place between 2017 and 2018. As with any research conducted over several years, some participants left the study between each phase, a phenomenon called attrition. Thus, the second phase of data collection (these will hereafter be referred to as waves), carried out in 2018–2019, involved 379 participants; the third, in 2020–2021, brought back 312 people; and the fourth, in 2021–2022, 260 participants (Figure 3.1).

Participants were divided into two groups at the onset of the study: 1) those who either were in the process of regularization and had submitted an application or had received a residence permit less than three months before, hereinafter the "regularized" group; and 2) those who did not meet the eligibility criteria or did not (yet) wish to be regularized, hereinafter the "undocumented" group.

The group of undocumented participants shrank more rapidly over time. This can be explained by the regularization of some participants during the course of the study, but

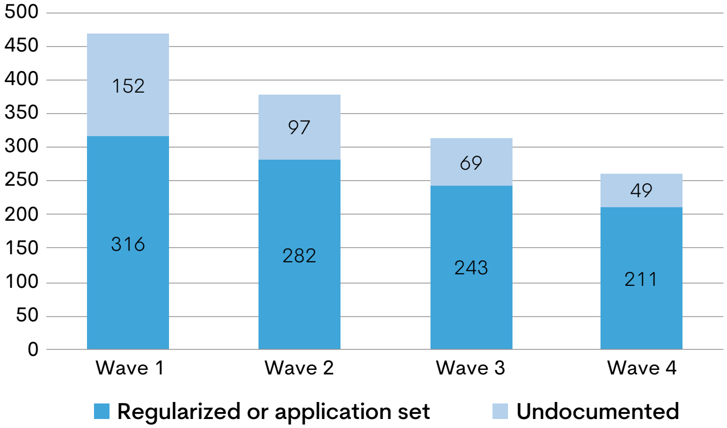

Figure 3.1 Number of participants per wave and legal status.

also by the greater social and economic instability of this group, notably during the pandemic period. Despite the loss of some participants between waves, the sociodemographic characteristics of the people in the study remained relatively stable, with the exception of their origin (Table 3.1). In the presentation of the results that follow in Chapters 4 and 5, variations in numbers between waves are not shown in the various figures for the sake of readability.

Table 3.1 Study participants' characteristics

		Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Average age (years)		44,1	45,7	47,2	47,7
Women		72,0%	72,9%	74,4%	74,6%
Origin:	Latin America	64,0%	66,2%	66,3%	70,0%
	Asia	19,9%	20,8%	21,8%	19,2%
	Africa	7,5%	5,8%	5,8%	6,2%
	Eastern Europe	8,6%	7,2%	6,1%	4,6%
Number of participants		468	379	312	260

Quantitative longitudinal data can be analyzed in two ways. On the one hand, we can examine how the factors measured change within each group over time, which is the approach adopted in this book. It is important to point out here that variations in the size and composition of each group between the four waves affect the ability to attribute the observed changes to regularization itself. Indeed, these variations, due to attrition but also to the passage of some participants from the undocumented group to the regularized group after filing a regularization application, can also explain the changes observed over time. It is therefore important to bear in mind the diversity of factors that can induce changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic, whose consequences are difficult to isolate.

On the other hand, we can look at the evolution of each individual between waves by observing his or her personal evolution on each indicator. This approach, which was frequently used in the scientific articles resulting from the study, may lead to findings that are partially contradictory to those resulting from the first analytical approach described above. This does not diminish the results of the study, but it does suggest that the proposed interpretations should always be considered in the context of these two analytical approaches.

The participation of people in the process of regularization in in-depth interviews was voluntary and, guided by the interviewers in order to enable different comparisons and illustrate the heterogeneity of situations. In the first wave of interviews, in 2018–2019, 39 people were interviewed. Thirty of them took part in a second interview in 2020, and 19 in a third interview in 2021–2022.

3.3 Challenges for implementing the study

Before presenting the results, it is necessary to discuss a few issues specific to the implementation of the Parchemins study, with a population that is difficult to access and complicated to track due to its mobility, particularly with regard to undocumented workers.

Both the configuration of the Papyrus program and the partnerships with the various associations involved in its implementation greatly facilitated access to the study population. However, the collection of longitudinal quantitative and qualitative data was especially costly in terms of human and financial resources. The interviewers had to be highly flexible, in order to adapt to the participants' schedules and constraints. The interviewers' language skills in the main languages spoken by the participants were crucial in setting up appointments and collecting data. The importance of these factors—questionnaires in several languages and scheduling flexibility —is also reported in the literature (Stoop, 2005).

The engagement of Bachelor's and Master's level students throughout the project was conducive to the specific conditions of data collection. Over the course of the study's successive waves, several cohorts of interviewers were trained and coached in fieldwork. The importance to prepare them to meet vulnerable and often invisible people was underlined. In addition, from the participants' perspective, the ambiguity between the support offered by the associations in preparing their regularization applications and the request to take part in a scientific study was noted on many occasions. In fact, in some cases, the investigators helped participants with certain administrative formalities.

Studying life trajectories is valuable but costly. A longitudinal approach involving repeated questionnaires and interviews was necessary to assess the effects of regularization. Gathering these data required additional resources over and above the study's initial budget, but this investment nonetheless proved beneficial, as it increased response rates and reduced participant attrition between waves (Duvoisin *et al.*, 2023).

The quasi-experimental research design, which aimed to compare regularized and undocumented people over a four-year period, was disrupted by various structural elements that affected the course of the study. For instance, administrative delays in granting residence permits made the comparison between undocumented and regularized people more complex than initially planned. Meetings with participants highlighted the difficulties and suffering caused by these delays.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck Geneva as early as February 2020, just as the second wave of questionnaire data collection was coming to an end and in-depth interviews were underway. Semi-lockdown measures severely affected the ability to meet participants, so they were interviewed remotely, either digitally or by telephone. In view of the extent of the impact of the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus on the study population, additional data were collected, solely online, during the first period of the pandemic, from April to May 2020.

Generally speaking, the pandemic had a profound impact on various study domains, particularly during the first semi-lockdown period in the spring of 2020, when many participants found themselves in a situation of dire social and economic precariousness due to the loss of their jobs and income (Burton-Jeangros *et al.*, 2020; Duvoisin *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, analyses of the data collected since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic have, to the extent possible, attempted to differentiate the effects linked to regularization *per se* from those linked to the consequences of the pandemic. Both events may have slowed or accelerated certain changes in living conditions.

4

Occupational trajectories and living conditions

The results presented in the following chapters aim to document the changes brought about by regularization in several areas of life. The assessment of multiple domains was crucial for grasping the complexity of trajectories lived in the absence of a legal status and for showing the tight relationships that exist between legal status, employment conditions, living conditions, and health status among these workers. The combination of standardized measures (e.g. employment conditions, chronic illness) and more subjective data (e.g. life satisfaction, aspirations) helps better understand these exceptional destinies. In addition, successive data collections among the same people—providing longitudinal data—offer the possibility of assessing changes in life trajectories after regularization.

This chapter looks at the occupational trajectories and living conditions of the people who participated in the study. After an overview of the participants' profile at the start of the study, the changes in employment sector and economic conditions are discussed, as these changes are at the heart of undocumented individuals' life. Changes in household composition and housing conditions are described afterwards.

Bearing in mind the limitations outlined in the previous chapter, the analyses are descriptive, highlighting the main trends observed over time in the two study groups. Changes at the individual level are described in various scientific articles, for which references are proposed in the following sections[9].

4.1 The characteristics of undocumented workers in the Canton of Geneva

The population of undocumented workers remains poorly known in general, and studies focusing specifically on people in the process of regularization are even scarcer. At the start of the study in 2017, available quantifiable information for the canton of Geneva was mainly based on interviews with professionals in the field, with an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 undocumented workers living and working in the canton (Morlok *et al.*, 2015).

The Parchemins study has collected data that now enable us to better describe this population and the effects on their living conditions of obtaining a residence permit. However, it must be emphasized that, due to the strict regularization criteria under the Papyrus program, the results presented relate to a specific population of migrants who have lived undocumented for a long time and who therefore have different characteristics compared to recently arrived people without residence permits.

Given the lack of preexisting knowledge about this population, it is worth first presenting the profile of the participants in the study[10]. The majority of them were women (72% of the sample) from Latin America (mainly Brazil, Peru, and

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[9] See also the publications of the study: https://cigev.unige.ch/recherches/research-l/health/parchemins (accessed on 26.11.23)

[10] A detailed description of their profile at the start of the study is also available in Jackson *et al.*, 2022.

Bolivia) or Southeast Asia (the Philippines). Most of them had arrived in Switzerland with a visa and remained after its expiry, which distinguishes them from undocumented migrants who have been refused asylum. In line with the eligibility criteria for regularization, this population has spent an average of twelve years in the canton, and its average age is 44. Women are slightly older than men, have migrated at a later age, and have more often left their children in their country of origin. The migration of these workers was mainly motivated by economic factors, which were mentioned by 74% of wave 1 participants. The desire to improve their children's future was more often reported by women (54% of women vs. 44% of men), while political, religious, ethnic, or sexual orientation reasons, more rarely mentioned, were reported slightly more often by men (20% of men vs. 5% of women).

Three quarters of the study participants had at least secondary education, with one in four women having a university degree, compared to 17% of men. These people work primarily in the domestic work sector, but also in hospitality and construction, with the distribution between these sectors strongly influenced by gender. In fact, women are overrepresented in the domestic work sector, while construction includes only men (Figure 4.1). The vast majority of participants were employees, and only 5% were self-employed. Employment conditions differ markedly between sectors, as employees in the domestic work sector often accumulate numerous contracts at low rates and with greater turnover, whereas those working in construction or hospitality have more stable and less dispersed contracts.

The profile of people who took part in the Parchemins study reflects the characteristics of undocumented migrants described in the most recent Swiss report devoted to this population (Morlok *et al.*, 2015). The study data have the advantage of providing more information about their profiles based on a particularly large sample, given the difficulty

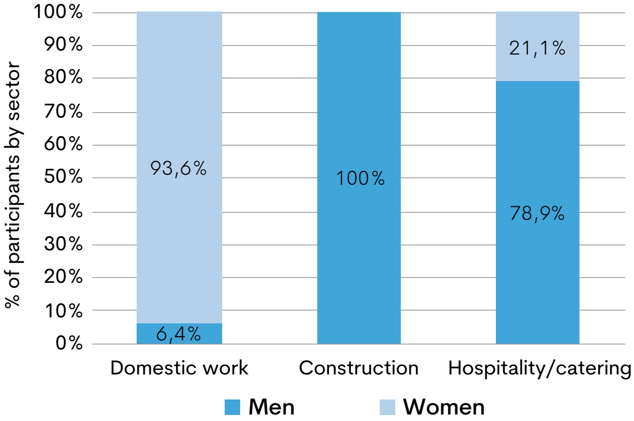

Figure 4.1 Employment sectors in Wave 1.

of motivating people without legal status to take part in a scientific study (Agadjanian & Zotova, 2012; Jackson *et al.*, 2023). The presence of these workers is a response to a lack of local manpower in certain sectors that are not socially valued. The particularly high needs in the domestic work sector explain why the majority of the sample is made up of women, an observation already made on a local scale (Carreras, 2008), in Switzerland (Niklaus, 2013) as well as in other European countries (Ambrosini, 2011).

On the basis of these characteristics, the results relating to life trajectories after regularization, presented below, compare participants according to two criteria likely to affect their opportunities. First, legal status is central, and individuals who remained undocumented throughout the study are distinguished from those who obtained a residence permit. Second, given the gender inequalities observed in both countries of origin and countries of destination, comparisons between men and women are also proposed.

It should be noted that while the study was able to follow participants over several years, the observation period remains limited in terms of the individuals' entire life course. While some changes take place quickly, sometimes even just after the application is submitted (e.g. health insurance enrollment), others take longer (Figure 4.2). Therefore, the results presented here reveal relatively short-term transformations after regularization. It is likely that other effects of obtaining a residence permit will unfold over the long term, or even only in the next generation.

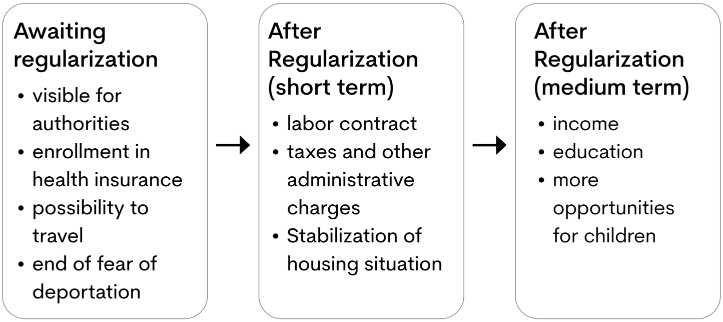
Awaiting regularization
• visible for authorities
• enrollment in health insurance
• possibility to travel
• end of fear of deportation
→
After Regularization (short term)
• labor contract
• taxes and other administrative charges
• Stabilization of housing situation
→
After Regularization (medium term)
• income
• education
• more opportunities for children

Figure 4.2 Temporality of transformations among participants who applied for a residence permit.

4.2 Changes in working conditions after regularization

The typical contractual conditions in the relevant employment sectors (limited duration, low activity rate [i.e. number of hours]) force undocumented migrants, especially women working in the domestic work sector, to cumulate jobs in order to generate sufficient income. However, they encounter major difficulties in doing so. Even when regularized, women have consistently reported a lower capacity to contribute to social insurance (which requires a minimum number of hours worked in the domestic sector). They remained in a situation of greater occupational instability throughout the study and suffered more intensely from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employment and income.

The structural occupational instability of these workers is reflected in differences in the number of hours worked. While some migrants work long hours (10% reported working 50 hours or more a week), the average remains relatively low, and most are unable to achieve a full-time equivalent (42 hours in Switzerland) (Figure 4.3). These results are in line with the findings of other studies about this population, which indicate that undocumented migrants work between 23 and 57 hours a week (Coppola & Kalbermatter, 2012).

Generally, undocumented workers work fewer hours per week than regularized workers (28 vs. 35 hours), reflecting the greater difficulty for them in finding stable employment. Women work fewer hours per week than men. In wave 3, which corresponds to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the decrease in the number of hours worked is particularly visible among undocumented migrants. Although some

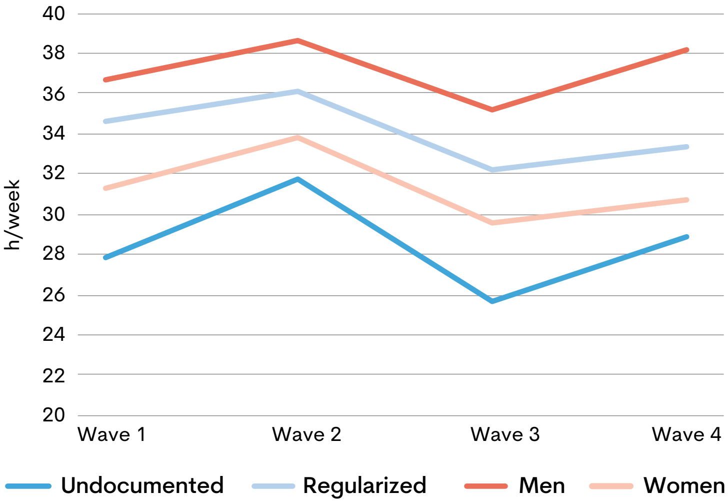

Figure 4.3 Average number of hours worked per week.

catching-up was observed during wave 4, there was no return to the pre-pandemic situation in either group.

The differences between men and women mostly come down to their respective sectors of activity. Construction workers averaged 42 hours/week, while this number was 31 hours/week for domestic workers. In the latter sector, the cumulation of jobs with multiple employers often results in long, but unpaid, commute times. The minority of workers who live with their employers is especially vulnerable.

The pressure to generate income is constant, even for those who are regularized. Indeed, at the end of the study, more than one third of participants indicated that they had to continue working even when ill (Figure 4.4). These proportions, which changed with the COVID-19 pandemic, have decreased over time.

The success rate in finding a new job was greater among those who had obtained a residence permit. Moreover, job stability increased over the course of the study for regularized

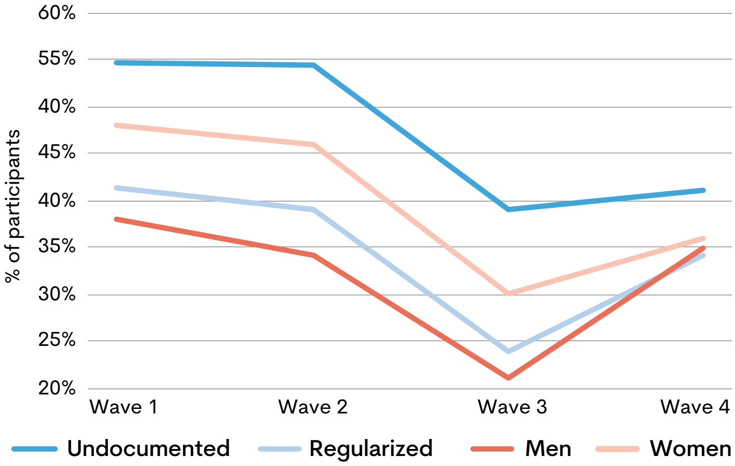

Figure 4.4 Individuals continuing to work while ill.

workers and for men. Workers with a residence permit are more successful in having their rights respected in terms of working hours and vacations. They are reassured by the fact that they are entitled to unemployment insurance because even if they do not necessarily wish to make use of it, the possibility of benefiting from it in the event of dismissal enables them to better defend themselves against abuse. Moreover, regularization opens the door to new job-seeking strategies, such as submitting job applications. This participant's comments clearly demonstrate the effects of regularization on working relationships:

> In my life and that of my children, everything is positive, yes. I saw that especially when I fell ill. Even if the bosses did not agree and were not happy, they had to respect the law. At least then I felt protected [...]. Even if you have more responsibilities in terms of payments and all that [...], it is also good to have peace of mind, to feel at least respected and to have the right to be ill, to let go when you cannot take it anymore. (Woman, 39, Latin America, 1 year and 11 months after regularization)

However, switching employment sectors remains rare, with the majority of workers continuing to be employed in the same field as before their regularization. Moreover, due to a lack of time and financial resources, only a minority of respondents underwent career development training. The lack of mobility between employment sectors can also be explained by the fact that participants find it difficult to gain recognition for the professional qualifications they had acquired in their country of origin as well as the experience they gained in Switzerland while working undocumented:

> My eight years of experience here, [including] five with an elderly woman with Alzheimer's [...] and then with

> an elderly gentleman, do not count as experience. They do not accept it, I do not know why. (Woman, 48, Latin America, 8 months after regularization)

In addition, the individuals' level of written French is often insufficient for skilled jobs. However, women working in the domestic work sector have reported that, rather than changing sectors, they have experienced significant improvements in their employment conditions by working for a cleaning company instead of the multiple private employers they previously had.

> Things are going well. The year has started well. I have tried to change jobs because I have two employers, and I have not succeeded. I have sent out CVs, I have registered on Jobup[11] and other job websites, I have been to the Cité des métiers[12]… and at the same time, I have tried to adapt, because the second job I got, thanks to my driving license, is a permanent job in a company, but it is still cleaning. (Woman, 48, Latin America, 2 years and 5 months after regularization)

These difficulties in improving their occupational trajectory are a major source of frustration in the post-regularization period, especially in the presence of labor shortages in sectors in which participants are skilled, such as home care.

The increase in the number of declared jobs and social insurance contributions is noticeable following regularization (Figure 4.5). However, the use of Geneva's "Chèque-Service" scheme[13] remains significant in the case of domestic work, even after obtaining a residence permit, and concerns two

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[11] Job offers website.

[12] Geneva job fair.

[13] See footnote 4 above.

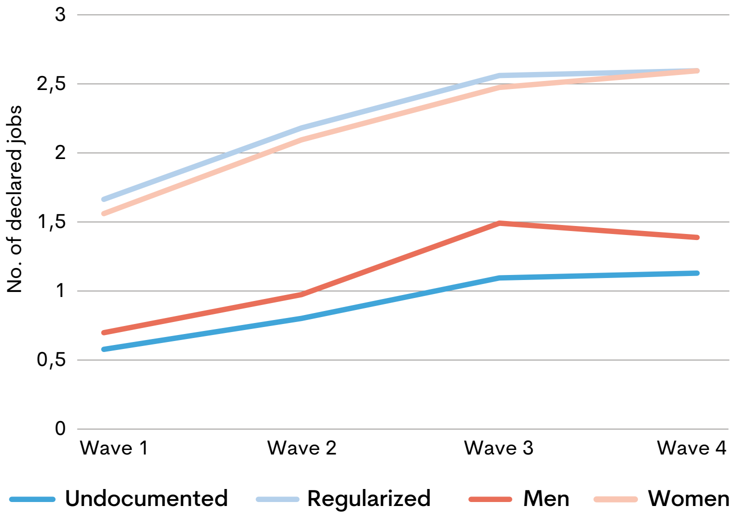

Figure 4.5 Average number of declared jobs.

thirds of jobs in this sector. This increase also applies to the construction and hospitality sectors, but concerns less than one in ten jobs.

With regard to occupational trajectories, the "Parchemins" study confirms that working conditions are arduous (Lenko *et al.*, 2024) and correspond to jobs that are devalued in society and avoided by the local population. They are often referred to in the literature as "3D jobs" (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). A high percentage of people without residence permits—and therefore without social protection, working even while ill—has been observed elsewhere, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Page & Flores-Miller, 2021). The multiplication of work opportunities, in particular the possibility of finding a new job after regularization, is an effect mentioned in other publications (Bailey, 1985). However, differences persist between men and women. The latter, being employed mainly in the domestic work sector, are less likely to succeed in making their employers follow applicable labor regulations. In addition, the splitting of their occupational activity between numerous employers restricts their ability to contribute to social insurance schemes.

4.3 An improved economic situation?

Considering that changes in employment conditions remain limited in the first few years after regularization, what about changes in income? The median annual equivalent individual income[14] of undocumented migrants was 18,000 Swiss francs in wave 1. It fell by 13% in wave 3, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, before rising again in wave 4 to 31% above the first wave. However, the undocumented migrants still participating in the study in wave 4 were those who already had a higher income during wave 1, which might point to a selection bias. Similarly, the most economically precarious participants more often stopped participating in the study or even left Geneva during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The median annual equivalent individual income of regularized individuals rose from 30,000 Swiss francs in wave 1 to 32,400 Swiss francs in wave 4 (+8%). In addition to the low professional mobility discussed above, this modest evolution probably reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which offset the potential positive effects of regularization on income. As a result, it will likely take several years before regularized workers substantially improve their income.

The median equivalent individual income of men is consistently higher than that of women (29,470 vs. 26,610 Swiss francs in wave 1 and 33,936 vs. 30,000 Swiss francs in wave 4) and has increased more over time.

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[14] It is calculated on the basis of an approximation of equivalent household disposable income divided by household size (OECD definition).

The high percentage of participants at risk of poverty (earning less than 30,185 Swiss francs per year for individual equivalent income in 2021; FSO, 2021) illustrates the particularly precarious economic situation of these workers (Figure 4.6). This percentage is 18.4% among the Genevan population (OCSTAT, 2023 b).

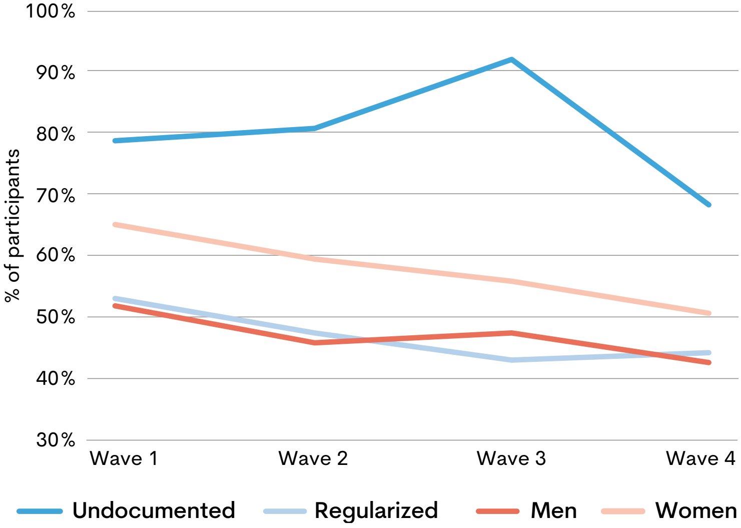

Figure 4.6 Median equivalent individual income at risk of poverty[15].

While the data suggest that the new minimum wage in Geneva has been applied among regularized workers since its introduction in 2020, the income levels observed among participants remain far from the Genevan average. Indeed, according to data from the canton's statistical office, the median income is 90,660 Swiss francs per year for a standardized 40-hour-per-week job (OCSTAT, 2023 a).

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[15] This threshold corresponds to 60% of the median equivalent disposable income of the Swiss resident population in 2021 (calculated by the Federal Statistics Office on the basis of the SILC survey).

Their level of income rarely allows the study participants to build savings. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 80% of undocumented migrants had no savings at all, while this was the case for only two thirds of those who had been regularized. This initially limited saving capacity even lowered over time, reflecting the adverse economic impact of the pandemic and its corollary, i.e. the need to compensate for lost earnings by using savings accumulated up to that point.

The precariousness of the participants' economic resources is illustrated by the fact that two thirds of them declared themselves unable to cope with an unplanned expenditure of 1,500 Swiss francs. This finding was differentiated according to legal status (61% of regularized migrants vs. 86% of undocumented migrants over the whole study) and gender (55% of men vs. 71% of women).

The small increase in individual disposable income among regularized migrants is linked to the fact that they face new financial expenses such as taxes, social insurance, and health insurance, as well as higher rent. These additional expenses were often difficult to estimate before initiating the regularization procedure. Added to this are the costs of visits to their country of origin (Consoli *et al.*, 2022 a).

In the canton of Geneva, various social benefits aim to combat economic poverty by supplementing the work income of the working poor. In principle, regularized residents have access to these benefits after they obtain a residence permit. However, because of their feeling of indebtedness to the state that regularized them and their fear of losing their newly acquired residence permit, they rarely call upon such resources. Moreover, lack of knowledge and the complexity of administrative procedures hamper the use of assistance. In fact, newly regularized migrants who are beginning their lives legally must quickly familiarize themselves with many administrative procedures from which they were previously deliberately excluded.

Thus, after regularization, there was an increase in the percentage of participants with debt (Figure 4.7). At the end of the study, workers who had obtained a residence permit were as often in debt as undocumented migrants. For the latter, the decrease in debt over the years illustrates the economic selection bias inherent in their status, which allows only those with a minimal and stable economic capacity to remain in Switzerland. This process is all the more marked in times of crisis.

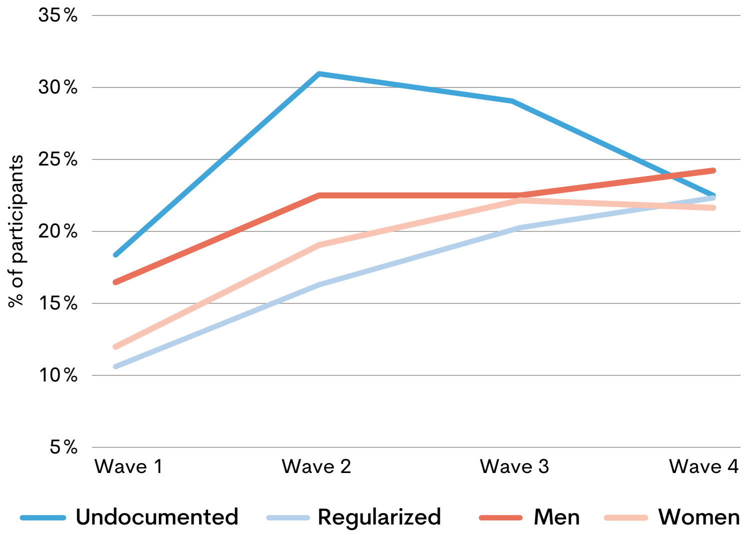

Figure 4.7 Percentage of indebted individuals.

This participant spoke of the economic pressure associated with regularization:

> Now, the problem is how to keep a permit if you cannot afford it. There are things you cannot say, such as: "this month I cannot pay, he must understand." No, that does

> not exist; there are many, many more responsibilities, you can no longer say that, because now you have bills to pay. (Woman, 39, Latin America, 1 year and 11 months after regularization)

Sending money home, also known as remittances (Page & Plaza, 2006; Massey & Parrado, 1994), is a topic widely discussed in the literature. Remittances play an important role for family members left behind in the country of origin and can represent up to 40% of a country's gross domestic product. However, these remittances also represent a source of economic stress for migrants. Two out of three participants reported sending money on a regular basis at the start of the study, with no significant difference according to legal status, but women were more likely to send money to their relatives (70% of women vs. 56% of men). Over time, the monthly amount sent decreased, from an average of 440 Swiss francs in wave 1 to 340 Swiss francs in wave 4. Relative to income, this represents a significant financial burden. At the start of the study, almost half of all undocumented migrants sent more than 15% of their household income each month, whereas by the end of the study, only a third did so. Among those who were regularized, this proportion remained stable over time, at approximately 20%.

A gradual reduction in the amount sent can lead to various hypotheses. Is it an effect of the pandemic or of regularization, which has led to greater economic pressure? Or is it a sign of growing independence and weaker ties with the country of origin? In the literature, this decline has been noted during recent economic crises, which could explain the effect observed (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2010). At the same time, it can be argued that children who remain in the country of origin gradually become adults, and their financial needs may diminish over time.

Due to a lack of detailed information and to the number of workers with multiple employers, the wages of undocumented workers are rarely discussed in the literature (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021); the observations of the Parchemins study allow us to partly fill this gap. They reveal that most undocumented and newly regularized workers live on a very low income in the short term. The improvement in their financial situation after obtaining a residence permit has been hampered by the new burdens affecting the budgets of regularized workers, as well as by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Income inequalities between men and women have also increased. A relative improvement in the economic situation following regularization has been found in similar research, including in the United States (Kossoudji & Cobb-Clark, 2002; Kossoudji 2016). However, researchers have questioned whether such an effect does not depend above all on favorable general economic development and the absence of economic crises (Chauvin *et al.*, 2013). It will thus be important to monitor the evolution of the economic situation of regularized people in the medium term in order to determine whether a catch-up effect with the general population occurs and within what timeframe.

4.4 The effects of regularization on family relations

The unstable living conditions of undocumented workers are often cited in other studies. They depend not only on a country's migration policy, but also on local circumstances (Chacko & Price, 2021). Researchers in the US have shown that undocumented migrants' instability also affects their family life (Schueths, 2015). While the participants' legal status has little bearing on their family situation, there are significant differences based on gender. In line with their greater financial stability, the percentage of men living with a partner and

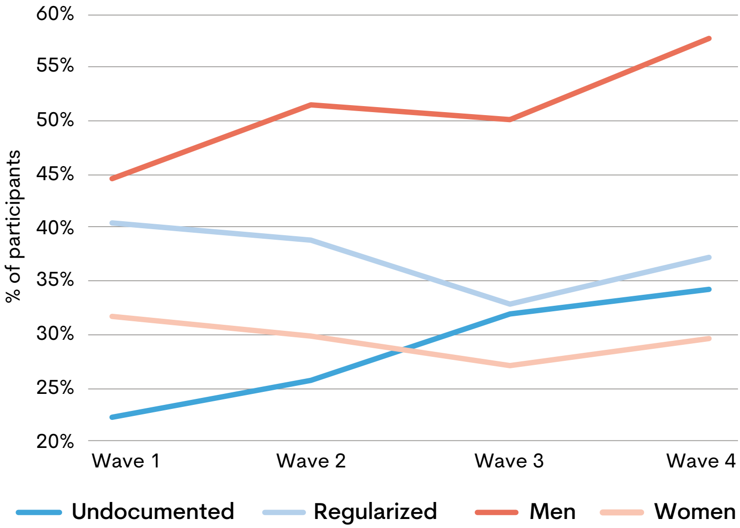

Figure 4.8 Participants living with minor children.

the percentage of men living with minor children have both increased over time (Figure 4.8).

At the onset of the study, the 468 participants were parents to 644 children. The fact that two thirds of these children lived in their country of origin confirms the importance of transnational families in the context of irregular migration (Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Bryceson, 2019), especially for women who are more often parents but whose children more frequently live in the country of origin, far away from them. While a visit to the country of origin is often a priority for them after regularization, in-depth interviews show that these trips are not easy, as their children have grown up and family ties are no longer the same as when they left (Consoli *et al.*, 2022 a). Men, on the other hand, tend to have their family life anchored in Geneva, as illustrated by the fact that they more often reported the birth of a child in Switzerland during the course of the study. Furthermore, participants who were living with minor children in the first wave of the study were more often regularized; this could be explained by the fact that the requested length of stay in Switzerland to apply for regularization was reduced to five years in presence of minor children.

The literature on major life events among undocumented migrants is very scarce. During the study period, 40 marriages, 19 divorces and 31 births were recorded, demonstrating that life went on despite being precarious or undocumented. Nearly half of the participants reported having experienced at least one major life event (marriage, divorce, birth, job loss, or relocation) from one wave of the study to the next. This was particularly true for men.

Half of the participants lived as couples, with this proportion remaining stable over the course of the study. This rate remains lower than that of the Geneva population, 70% of which was cohabiting in partnership in 2018 (OCSTAT, 2021). In our study population, the percentage of married people increased over time (one in five participants in wave 1 vs. one in four in wave 4). This may be the result of a change in the sample, with married people continuing to participate more than single people, or it may reflect the new freedom to marry after regularization. A greater proportion of men than women engaged in a relationship during the course of the study. The importance of the legal status of life as a couple was evoked by this participant:

> I have been dating someone for almost two years now. Before we were dating, it was complicated because when I got to know someone, I did not want to talk much about my life, my situation. Then, little by little, we met and now we have been together for almost two years and we have gone to Ecuador together, and now we will see how things progress and where this story takes us. (Woman, 43, Latin America, 2 years and 3 months after regularization)

In this respect, it is worth noting that the family situations of undocumented workers are complex and change regularly over time, which is in line with transnational configurations that can involve several generations. Regularization seems to stabilize family life, especially for men, as a residence permit gives access to transitions in terms of unions (marriage or divorce) and parenthood. The analysis of major life events is therefore crucial for explaining certain differences between undocumented and regularized people (Kulu & Milewski, 2007) and complements the literature on the life course as undocumented (Windzio *et al.*, 2011).

4.5 Changes in housing conditions

The housing market in Geneva is marked by its extremely high rental costs and very low vacancy rate (less than 1%). Thus, living without a residence permit and with little financial capacity leaves no choice but to sublet an apartment, often of unsatisfactory quality and without the legal protections afforded by tenancy laws, and at a high price. In some cases, access to housing is linked to employment, as is the case for domestic workers living in their employer's home.

The data collected clearly show the vulnerability of undocumented migrants in regard to housing. At the beginning of the study, 70% of participants were subletting their accommodation, and two thirds of undocumented migrants said they feared losing their home in the short term. The high occupancy density of the accommodations also reflects this precarious situation: the average number of people per habitable room in the accommodation was 1.5 for regularized individuals and 1.9 for undocumented individuals in the first wave. Over time, this density decreased among the regularized individuals but remained high among the undocumented individuals. Women live in more densely populated dwellings than men (1.8 occupants/bedroom vs. 1.5), a disadvantage they have retained over the years, even though density has declined overall. At the start of our study, the housing density among the participants was twice that of the local resident population (FSO, 2022).

Given the conditions and costs of housing, it is not surprising that undocumented migrants move frequently. Half of them moved during the first year of the study. In wave 4, fewer moves were reported, and the legal status gap narrowed, again indicating a relative stabilization of the situation of undocumented migrants who continued to take part in the study. The COVID-19 pandemic induced significant housing insecurity, with relocation rates at their highest during wave 3.

While the quality of housing remains mediocre over time among undocumented migrants, it improves among regularized residents, notably thanks to their greater financial capacity and access to a lease in their own name (Figure 4.9). Signing a lease in one's own name is a particularly important source of satisfaction:

> What's changed for me [with regularization] is, first of all, being able to have my apartment in my own name because I was always looking for people to rent me out an apartment, and it was always complicated. Now, with the permit, I can have an apartment in my own name. (Woman, 43, Latin America, 2 years and 3 months after regularization)

Such leases reduce housing density. Throughout the study, women had less access to them than men.

Rents weigh heavily on study participants' budget: while it represented 30% of household expenses in wave 1, it increased over the course of the study (Figure 4.10). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which frequently caused a drop in income, rent represented up to 40% of the budget of

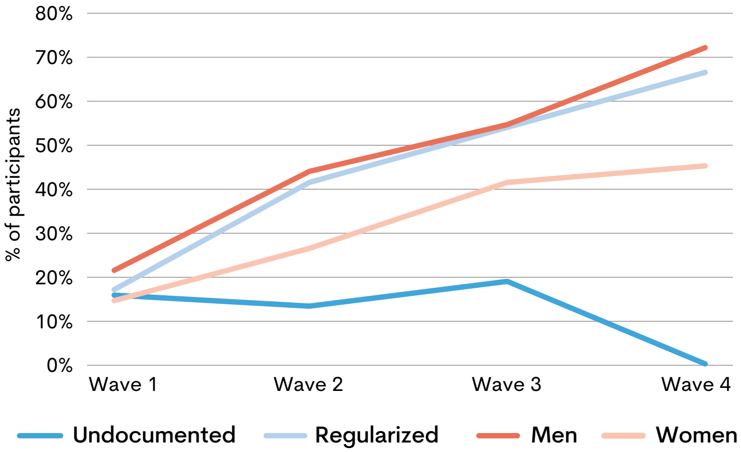

Figure 4.9 Lease in the participant's name (or a family member's).

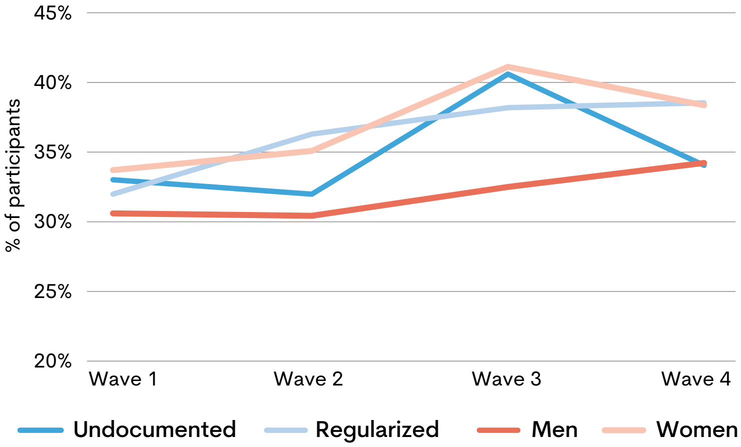

Figure 4.10 Share of rent in household budget.

women and undocumented migrants in wave 3. Among regularized migrants, the continued growth of rent could contribute to the increase in their debt.

> I moved there two years ago, but then everything changed. From March last year, I only worked 60% [of a full-time equivalent], and my income drastically dropped. My children need a lot more money for schooling than before because they have to eat out all the time. At the start of the school year, it was catastrophic: approximately 3,000 Swiss francs for all expenses in a single month. This is a complicated situation. That is why we are doing everything we can to get social housing. We're just waiting for the administration to reply. (Woman, 39, Latin America, 1 year and 11 months after regularization)

The Parchemins study adds to a body of literature on the subject of housing that is still underdeveloped. The very precarious situation of undocumented migrants encountering particularly unstable housing conditions has already been observed in other European countries (Wirehag *et al.*, 2021; Myhrvold. & Småstuen, 2019). The central role of housing conditions was emphasized by the participants in our study, and the importance of having dignified housing with a lease signed in one's own name was especially highlighted by newly regularized individuals. Obtaining a residence permit helps reduce occupancy density and improve housing quality. In this way, regularization helps combat the informal housing market, in which the risk of abuse is high. However, these improvements can also contribute to debt. Housing conditions also differ between men and women and remain more difficult for the latter (rent, quality of housing), whose economic situation is inferior to that of men. This confirms the greater vulnerability of undocumented women, as noted in other studies (Magalhaes *et al.*, 2010).

This chapter, devoted to occupational trajectories and living conditions, sheds new light on the population of undocumented workers. Indeed, the scientific literature often focuses on other groups of migrants in precarious situations, such as asylum seekers and refugees, or rejected asylum seekers. Their living conditions are different from those of the people encountered in the Parchemins study, which explicitly excluded these profiles in order to stay as close as possible to the candidates for the Papyrus program. Furthermore, variations in legal frameworks and benefit entitlements between countries or between Swiss cantons make it difficult to compare studies carried out in different contexts. Nevertheless, even though the Geneva context presents particular social and political features, it seems plausible that the findings reported here reflect the living conditions of undocumented workers in other urban areas in Europe, particularly in Switzerland.

5 Health status and life satisfaction

This chapter looks at changes in health status and use of the healthcare system. It assesses the consequences of obtaining a residence permit, as well as those of the COVID-19 pandemic. An assessment of the regularization process is then presented and discussed, focusing on changes in life satisfaction in relation to the participants' aspirations.

5.1 Consequences of regularization on health

The health conditions of migrants and their limited access to healthcare are well documented in the scientific literature. The Parchemins study, however, sheds new light on factors linked to health status, particularly mental health, in the context of regularization.

At the start of the study, a large majority of participants (80%) declared themselves to be in good health, a proportion comparable to that of the resident population of Geneva (82%; Zufferey, 2020). Their self-assessed health status did not change significantly across the four waves of the study, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial difference between undocumented (67%) and regularized (90%) migrants may be explained by the better socioeconomic conditions of the latter (Fakhoury *et al.*, 2021 b). While self-assessed health generally remained stable over time, undocumented migrants were more likely than regularized migrants to report an improvement. Men reported a slightly better health status than women, with no major changes over time between the sexes. This finding can be associated with the "healthy immigrant effect", which has been widely discussed in the literature, according to which people who migrate are particularly healthy when they leave their country of origin (Kennedy *et al.*, 2015; McDonald & Kennedy, 2004). On arrival, they may even be in better health than the native population of the destination country. However, after a few years, this gap disappears, and the health status of migrant workers becomes comparable to that of the native population. This is also the finding of the Parchemins study.

Lifestyle habits (health behaviors) remained stable over the course of the study. The majority of participants (58%) engaged in regular physical activity, with no significant difference according to legal status, albeit with a greater percentage observed among men. However, this activity declined with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tobacco and alcohol consumption, which is relatively low compared to that of the Genevan population, has changed little over time. However, a majority of participants are overweight. This rate increased over the course of the study, from 54% in wave 1 to 65% in wave 4, with no difference between regularized and undocumented migrants but with a slightly greater proportion among women and a significantly greater proportion than in the Genevan population (Zufferey, 2020).

The rate of chronic illness (diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, etc.), which was relatively high at the start of the study given the (rather young) average age of the participants, did not change significantly over time and did not differ according to legal status or sex. Polymorbidity (defined as the presence of at least three chronic illnesses) occurred in more than one in four participants at the end of the study, which is very high considering their age. The increase in polymorbidity between the first wave (21%) and the last wave (27%) can be explained in part by the aging of the study population, but also likely by other factors. It can be assumed that some of the positive effects of regularization on health—especially with regard to chronic diseases—will occur in the longer term, thanks in particular to improved living conditions and access to healthcare.

The Parchemins study clearly illustrates the deleterious effect of being undocumented on mental health. There is a striking contrast between the fact that a large majority of participants reported good health, while a high percentage reported the presence of symptoms suggestive of psychological suffering. At the start of the study, one third and half of the participants reported symptoms of anxiety and depression, respectively. By the end of the study, these proportions had risen to almost 45% and 60%, respectively, suggesting, among other things, a negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the participants' psychological condition (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). We can, however, hypothesize that regularization partially offset the negative consequences of the pandemic by reducing certain stress factors experienced on a daily basis. These rates of psychological illness reflect measurements taken at the level of the study group rather than at the individual level.

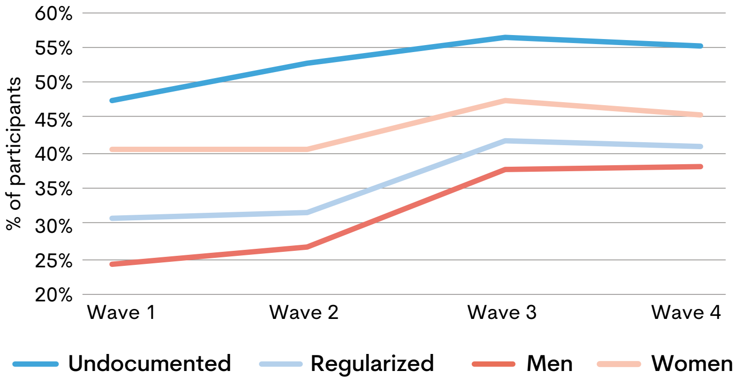

Figure 5.1 Anxiety symptoms (GAD-7 index[16] ≥ 5).

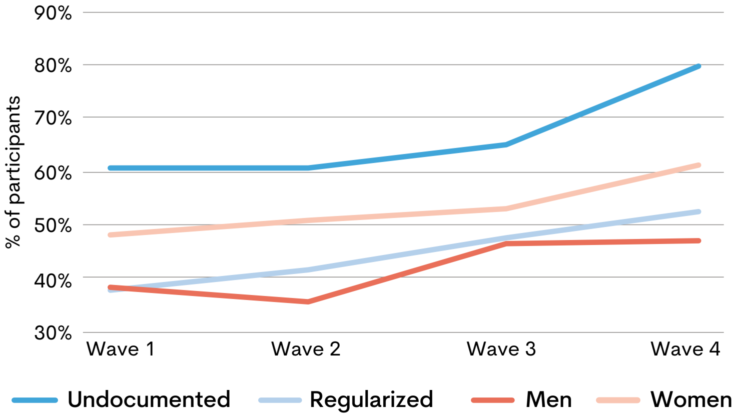

Figure 5.2 Depression symptoms (PHQ-9 score[17] ≥ 5).

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[16] The GAD-7 scale measures the presence and intensity of generalized anxiety symptoms.

[17] The PHQ-9 scale measures the presence and intensity of depressive symptoms.

During face-to-face interviews, obtaining a residence permit was mentioned to be associated with significant stress relief in several areas of life, as well as with increased stability. The pressure of life without documents was clearly underlined by this participant when he explained what regularization meant to him:

> For example, having more confidence in my future. As I told you, I had no hope of having a profession, of having a future, even, as a person, so I even talked to the doctor about it; at the time, I was in an existential crisis and I wanted to ask for euthanasia. (Man, 41, Latin America, 6 months after regularization)

Finally, it should be noted that most people identified as suffering from psychological disorders have not received any medical diagnosis or treatment. This confirms the difficulty that health services have in providing an appropriate response to these issues for populations in precarious situations.

The study also examined the impact of working conditions on health. Only a small percentage of participants (11% to 17%, depending on the wave) reported no exposure to occupational health risk factors. On the other hand, more than two thirds reported exposure to at least three occupational risks that could affect their health, which is very high. Regularized workers are more exposed than undocumented workers, and men are more exposed than women. This can be explained by the high proportion of men employed in the construction sector. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic may have had a positive effect on the health of a number of participants, as result of the decrease in work activity during confinement. This was particularly noticeable among women.

The results presented in this section point to a population in relatively good general health, but suffering psychologically in the context of harsh living and working conditions.

The Papyrus program favored undocumented workers who considered themselves to be in good health, as those who were in poorer health or unable to work did not manage to stay undocumented long enough to apply for a permit. It is likely that they returned to their country of origin, or remained in Geneva in a situation that does not allow them to apply for regularization due to lack of employment. Furthermore, it may be asked why the pandemic did not have an adverse influence on self-assessed health among participants, which has also been observed elsewhere (Van De Weijer *et al.*, 2022). The discrepancy between this indicator and more objective measures of health, such as the number of declared chronic illnesses, suggests a form of bias leading migrants to declare themselves to be in good health since this is an inevitable requirement for work (Refle *et al.*, 2023).

Standardized mental health indicators (the GAD-7 and PHQ-9 scales) confirm the negative consequences of being undocumented on anxiety and depression that have already been observed elsewhere (Andersson *et al.*, 2018; Teunissen *et al.*, 2014). The extent of undocumented migrants' fear of being checked and sent back to their country of origin, and of not being able to reach their economic goals, has indeed been found in other studies (Achermann & Chimienti, 2006). The Parchemins study, however, showed the benefits of regularization, which reduced the level of depression when this measure was repeated over time with the same individuals (Refle *et al.*, 2023; Fakhoury *et al.*, 2021 a).

It should be noted, however, that the prevalence of anxiety and depression is much greater among participants than among the Genevan population (Zufferey, 2020). This may be explained by the precarious living conditions and cumulative uncertainties faced by undocumented workers. The stress of a hidden life therefore seems to have lasting effects on people's mental health, even among those who have regularized their situation. Women are particularly affected in this respect. While regularization alleviates certain concerns and provides access to social rights and various forms of security, the instability of the residence permit—which must be renewed after one or two years—and the new difficulties associated with regularized life contribute at the same time to the persistence of the various sources of stress with which the participants must contend.

Finally, regarding the link between employment conditions and health status, it has already been shown that undocumented migrants are exposed to more risks at work than the resident population, as the law provides them less protection (Woodward *et al.*, 2014). In the case of the Parchemins study, we can highlight an unexpected positive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the domestic work sector, since the restrictions in this case had a favorable effect on the self-assessed health status of people who could no longer work (Lenko *et al.*, 2024).

5.2 Evolution of health service consumption

The scientific literature shows that access to healthcare for undocumented migrants is often problematic in Europe due to administrative barriers and the financial costs at charge of individuals (Suess *et al.*, 2014). In Switzerland, all residents, even undocumented ones, have the right and duty to contract a health insurance after three months of residence. However, even with the most affordable offers (roughly 400 Swiss francs a month per adult in Geneva), the cost remains often inaccessible. In the canton of Geneva, undocumented migrants can receive medical care at CAMSCO, a public service unique in Switzerland.

In wave 1, 12% of the undocumented migrants were enrolled in a health insurance scheme, a percentage that remained stable until the end of the study. However, this proportion increased fastly among those filling an application for regularization, reaching almost full enrollment among those regularized by the end of the study. The trend was similar for men and women with a regular status.

As far as the children were concerned, 98% already had health insurance at the start of the study, and almost all were followed by a pediatrician, regardless of their parents' legal status. This shows not only the participants' commitment to their children's health but also the healthcare system's ability to care for these children. Notably, in Geneva, undocumented children can receive cantonal subsidies for the payment of health insurance premiums.

While almost all regularized participants were eligible to receive a cantonal health insurance subsidy due to their low income, only a small proportion actually received it. Although the percentage benefiting from this subsidy increased over time, the rate remained below 50% in wave 4 (Figure 5.3), illustrating the difficulty encountered by participants in

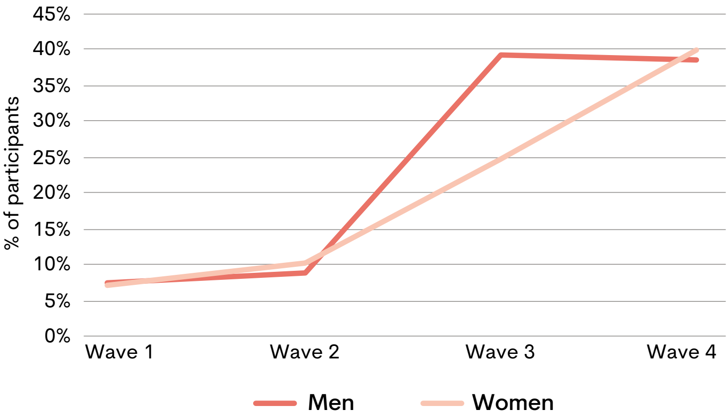

Figure 5.3 Health insurance subsidies among enrolled individuals[18].

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[18] The question was only posed to participants who declared that they have health insurance. As the proportion of regularized participants is low, the breakdown by legal status is not indicated.

exercising some of their rights or in feeling legitimate in asking for help from the state. This finding is similar to that for other social rights and financial benefits, as described above.

Regarding the use of the healthcare system, three out of four participants consulted a physician at least once a year since wave 1, which is slightly less than among the resident population (Fakhoury *et al.*, 2022). Undocumented migrants tended to consult more often than regularized migrants, while men did so significantly less often than women (Figure 5.4).

Renunciation to medical care was a frequent observation, with approximately a quarter of participants saying they had to forgo care for economic reasons; this proportion was far higher than among the Swiss population, in which 5% of people in the lowest income bracket renounced medical care for financial reasons (FSO, 2023). While approximately 20% of

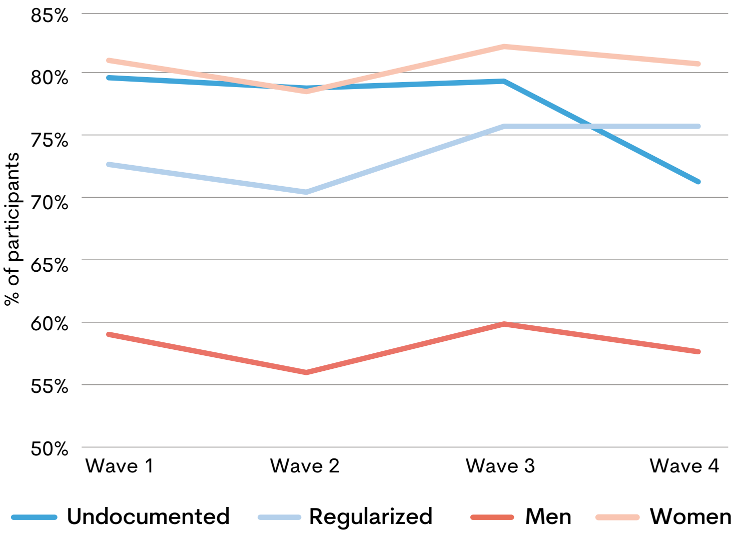

Figure 5.4 Proportion of participants who had consulted at least once in the previous 12 months.

regularized migrants declared having renounced, over 30% of undocumented migrants were forced to do so, even though the direct costs at their charge were generally lower in the public sector. Women whose economic situation was less stable were more likely than men to forgo healthcare, but the gender gap narrowed over time (Figure 5.5). The participants mentioned the difficulties of accessing healthcare in the absence of a residence permit:

> Because before [having the permit], if you did not feel well, you could not go to the hospital because... it is expensive. In addition, sometimes they do not want to accept you if you do not have health insurance. It is better now because I can go whenever I want. Because I already have my insurance. That is good. [...] If I do not feel well, I can go to the doctor to check that I'm not sick. It is not like before, when I just bought paracetamol and did not know what was going on. Now it is fine (Woman, 53, Asia, 2 years and 5 months after regularization).

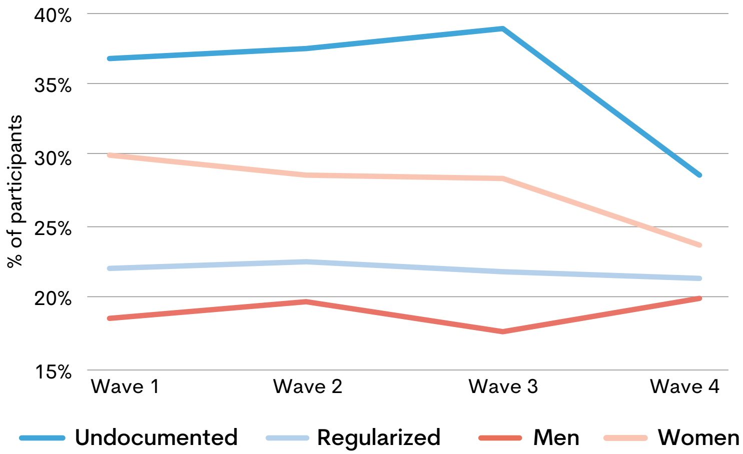

Figure 5.5 Renouncing healthcare for financial reasons.

The literature on the renunciation of healthcare among undocumented migrants is well developed and distinguishes between systemic factors—such as the configuration of access to healthcare—and individual factors—such as financial means or the fear of being identifiable and *in fine*, deportable (Hacker *et al.*, 2015). The Parchemins study documented the non-use of medical care for individual reasons, such as limited financial resources, which persist after regularization. The rate of renunciation observed is greater than that of the Genevan population (15.7% in 2019 for all reasons combined) and is especially high among undocumented migrants, as observed elsewhere (De Mestral *et al.*, 2022). In particular, the use of specialists is lower than that in the general population (Gea-Sánchez *et al.*, 2017).

A specific feature of the study was the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic between the second and third waves of data collection (Burton-Jeangros *et al.*, 2020). We know that the pandemic has, in many contexts, worsened the situation of the most precarious people (Mengesha *et al.*, 2022), and this was also the case in Geneva. However, data from the Parchemins study show that, compared with undocumented migrants, newly regularized migrants have already been able to benefit from a better social safety net, particularly in terms of access to healthcare. On the other hand, access to vaccines against COVID-19 has been particularly difficult for undocumented migrants, requiring the implementation of dedicated schemes (Page *et al.*, 2022).

Generally, it remains difficult to assess the consequences of obtaining a residence permit on the health conditions of newly regularized workers over a relatively short observation period. If we consider the types of jobs done by the participants, particularly women in the domestic work sector, it is likely that the consequences of heavy loads and painful positions on their physical health will be observed over the longer term. From the perspective of life-course epidemiology

(Burton-Jeangros *et al.*, 2015), it would be interesting to compare undocumented migrants, regularized migrants, and the general population at the time of retirement. Nevertheless, migrant workers, whether regularized or not, will not necessarily retire in Switzerland. At the end of the study, 32% of participants reported planning to return to their country of origin when they retire.

5.3 Changes in life satisfaction and aspirations for the future

The results presented thus far have shown how precarious the living conditions of the population studied are in terms of employment, income, housing, mental health, and access to healthcare. The study participants live far below the average standard of the resident population. Moreover, the hope for an improvement in economic situation associated with regularization remains very limited in the short term, probably because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from some positive effects of changing legal status, the data underline the disadvantaged situation of women in all areas of life, a gap that is not bridged by obtaining a residence permit. For undocumented migrants, they are the most disadvantaged, with indications suggesting that only the least precarious of them manage to continue their stay in Geneva over time and to continue taking part in the Parchemins study.

Considering the multiple transitions and living conditions of these people, it is important to look at their own assessments of their life trajectories. Measures of life satisfaction, now commonly included in population surveys, enable us to obtain an overall assessment of living conditions by the people involved. Asking participants to rate their satisfaction with life on a scale from 0 to 10 forces them to put into perspective the costs and benefits of their clandestine lives.

On average, life satisfaction was relatively high among Parchemins study participants and comparable to that of the Genevan population (Schaerer, 2021). Undocumented migrants were the least satisfied, while women, who were more satisfied at the start of the study, have been joined by men over time (Figure 5.6).

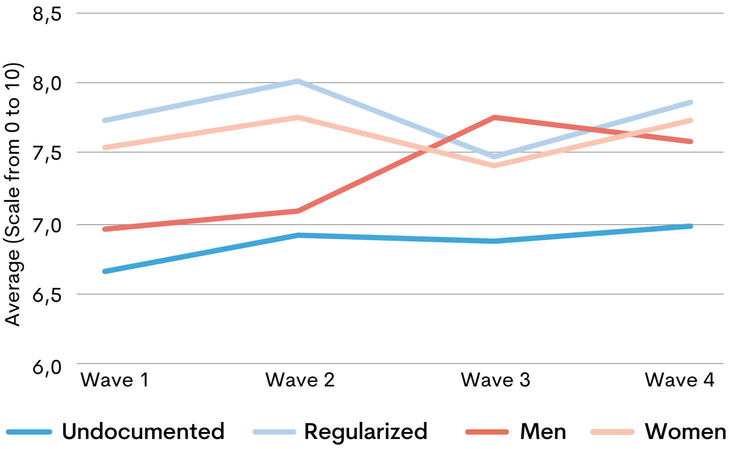

Figure 5.6 Life satisfaction.

Assessing life satisfaction has a particular connotation in the context of migration. Migrants can be expected to compare their situation with that of their country of origin and/or that of the country of destination. They were therefore asked to assess their quality of life in relation to each of these contexts. Participants rated their situation as much better than that of their home country but worse than that of the local population. Over the course of the study, these comparisons remained relatively stable (Figure 5.7). They may help them to justify their decision to migrate while revealing their awareness of the wide gap that separates them from other Geneva residents, even after obtaining a residence permit.

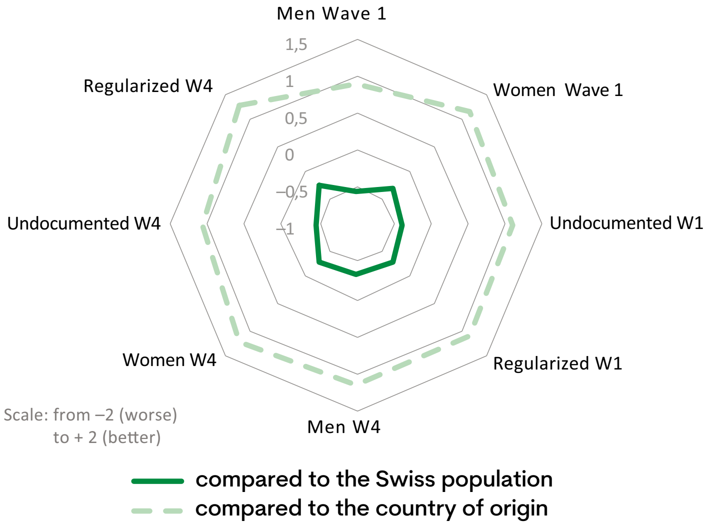

Figure 5.7 Quality of life compared to the Swiss population and the participant's country of origin.

This overall high level of satisfaction with life may also reflect the various aspirations that prompted people to leave their country and stay in another country for a long time without authorization, whether such aspirations are economic (providing financial support for relatives left behind) or whether they indicate the hope of a better future than that offered by the place of origin. Having long endured the hardships of undocumented life, the possibility of obtaining a residence permit under the Papyrus program was therefore highly valued by those eligible, including in terms of benefits for the next generation:

> My children will have opportunities. If they do things right, they will have a good future. As for me, I can still hope to change my line of work to enjoy my life slightly more. (Woman, 39, Latin America, 1 year and 11 months after regularization)

In the last data collection, participants who had obtained a residence permit were asked to indicate the positive and negative aspects of their regularization. While most did not identify any negative effects, a few mentioned their financial situation. On the other hand, many stressed the positive consequences of regularization. Having a residence permit gave them access to previously unthinkable prospects:

> And now I feel normal. I can access a lot of things, study in Switzerland, have my experience from Bolivia recognized. I can enroll in a training school in my profession, for example. Maybe that is what I want to do next year. (Man, 47, Latin America, 1 year and 2 months after regularization)

The opportunity to travel and cross borders was broadly welcomed as a newfound freedom after years of enforced immobility. This was reflected in visits to the country of origin, which were particularly frequent among newly regularized workers, and as a source of great satisfaction. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic severely restricted travel opportunities from 2020 onward. The positive effects of regularization on employment and housing conditions (Figure 5.8) are consistent with the results presented above. More generally, the benefits of being able to project oneself into the future were highlighted by this participant:

> It gives me a different perspective on my future, on my family's future, it truly reassures us for the future. (Man, 45, Latin America, 9 months after regularization)

Regularization represents a major event in the lives of undocumented workers and, as observed elsewhere (Paparusso, 2019), obtaining a residence permit improves their life satisfaction. As in other studies, a higher level of

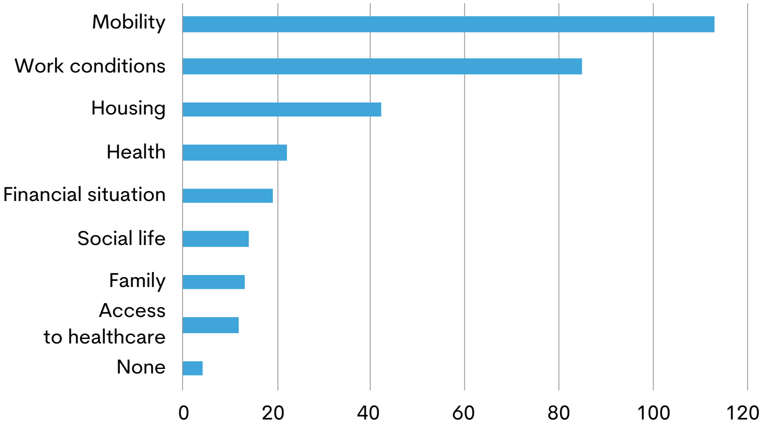

Figure 5.8 Positive aspects of regularization.

Note: Number of mentions among the 179 participants who answered the question; multiple aspects could me mentioned.

income is associated with greater satisfaction (Olgiati *et al.*, 2013). However, this relationship is complex, as women declared themselves more satisfied with their lives than men, except at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, even though they systematically had a lower income level.

Some aspects, such as the importance attached to transnational mobility after regularization (Consoli *et al.*, 2022 a), have not yet been thoroughly documented in the literature. This study highlights the importance of being able to cross borders and to return to Switzerland after a visit to one's home country, something that is made possible through regularization (Consoli *et al.*, 2022 a). The camouflage strategy (i.e. the need to hide to remain secure; Chauvin & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2014), as well as the impossibility of visiting family and friends in the country of origin, are significant restrictions in the lives of undocumented migrants (Cobb *et al.*, 2017). A trip to the country of origin was in fact one of the first achievements of newly regularized people;

this allowed some to see their families, including their children, for the first time in a long time. On the other hand, problems stemming from adjustment to regularized life are not documented in the literature. In this respect, the Parchemins study showed that social security and tax obligations, as well as the possibility of applying for state aid, were new sources of stress.

From a life course perspective (Spini *et al.*, 2017), the data presented here shows that undocumented workers are a population with many personal resources, enabling them to cope with the hardships of clandestine life in the long term. Although regularization has reduced their vulnerability and may have been experienced as a liberation, they nevertheless remain in a precarious situation from an economic point of view. Moreover, while regularization may have reduced their uncertainty about the future and made it possible for some of their aspirations to be realized (Consoli *et al.*, 2022 b), it is undeniable that the weight of the years spent as undocumented will mark the rest of their life course. As a result, their “new” life, lived in the open, is not devoid of ambivalence. It will only be possible to measure the full extent of the various benefits expected from regularization over the long term and certainly mainly within the next generation.

In summary, the participants in the study—whether regularized or undocumented—can be considered “survivors” of a highly selective migratory process. Indeed, given the competition for access to the job market and the precarious living conditions endured over many years, only those with the most resources and ability to adapt, on the one hand, and those least targeted by police controls and subject to discrimination, on the other hand, were able to remain in Geneva over the years. This may help explain their generally positive assessment of their trajectory.

While the Parchemins study showed that regularization has a positive impact on this selection process, the transformation of their living conditions and their convergence with those of the Geneva population are far from complete. Indeed, in many areas, it is likely that it will take longer to observe the effects of the change in legal status or that they will only be felt by the next generation. Similarly, for some participants, regularization may be perceived as occurring too late in their life course.

The strength of these results lies in the cumulative nature of the ordeals to which undocumented workers are subjected. Even if some of them have interrupted their participation in the study, thus reducing the sample size, its relatively stable composition allows us to conclude that they systematically encounter difficulties affecting their long-term development.

6

How to accompany undocumented and newly documented migrants?

The Parchemins study presents original scientific findings related to a regularization program that was unique to the Swiss context. Based on the knowledge acquired, it is possible to formulate recommendations that can support public policies on regularization, as well as the work of associations accompanying undocumented or newly regularized workers.

The recommendations presented in boxes in the following sections are based on a participatory approach and have been developed together with some of the study participants. Once the data collection was complete, all individuals who took part in the Parchemins study were invited to a deliberative session with the research team. The purpose of this meeting was to gather their reactions to the main findings of the study and, above all, to develop with them the recommendations to be made at the end of the project. Their proposals were presented by two participants at the study's final public conference[19].

[19] The final public conference of the Parchmins study was held on February 15, 2023, at the University of Geneva https://cigev.unige.ch/recherches/research-l/health/parchemins/conference-parchemins-2023/ (accessed on 17.10.2023).

Approximately 30 study participants took part in the discussion session. After the results were presented, they were divided into thematic discussion groups. Each group formulated several recommendations, which were then put to a collective vote—involving all those present—in order to rank priorities. The results of this participatory process are presented in this chapter. The recommendations are organized around a series of topics: the regularization and integration of regularized workers, employment, health, and housing.

6.1 Regularization and integration

- Give undocumented workers access to regularization.
- Support integration into society through access to social rights and the renewal of residence permits

The participants interviewed at the end of the study particularly emphasized the complexity of the administrative procedures to which they are exposed once they have obtained their residence permit. Given their very limited previous experience in this area, they expressed a need for support, as they lack information on the assistance available and the steps to be taken. The results obtained throughout the study's successive waves clearly demonstrate these needs. Indeed, while applications for health insurance subsidies increase with regularization, they remain limited, even if almost all participants are eligible due to their low level of income. From the point of view of entering a "new" life post-regularization, this finding is not surprising, and the difficulties could quite easily be alleviated. Ensuring better social and economic integration of newly regularized migrants will reduce their debt and ensure their prosperity in the longer term.

The variable duration of the permit—one or two years depending on cases—was also raised as an issue by participants. In view of the many changes involved in obtaining a residence permit, they asked for permits to be issued systematically for a period of two years in order to reduce the risk of losing it if renewed after only one year of legal residence. This would enable them to better demonstrate the stabilization of their situation following regularization.

These points should not obscure the fact that the participants met during the deliberation session expressed a great level of appreciation for the possibility of regularization, as has been set up in the canton of Geneva.

Associations continue to offer support to undocumented migrants by helping them apply for regularization when they meet the same criteria as those required by the Papyrus program. Indeed, regularizations continue to take place, even if their volume has decreased after Papyrus. In addition, these partners have put in place support measures for newly regularized people, focusing on their rights to access various social benefits (e.g. supplementary family benefits, health insurance subsidies).

6.2 Working conditions

- Improve regulation of the domestic work sector.
- Facilitate access to social benefits for people working in the domestic work sector.
- Recognize the trainings and qualifications acquired in the country of origin and the experience gained during the years of undocumented work.
- Encourage training and the development of occupational skills.
- Ensure safe working conditions.

During the deliberative session, the regularized people expressed their desire to integrate quickly into the formal job market and contribute to their retirement pension. They reported, however, that they were encountering difficulties in several respects. The non-recognition of training and occupational experience acquired prior to migration confines them to employment sectors requiring little or no professional qualifications (domestic work, hospitality and construction). In these sectors, they find themselves in dual competition with undocumented migrants who work in illegal conditions and with European workers.

Moreover, various obstacles stand in the way of starting a training course leading to certification after regularization, such as age, lack of time, or cost. They regretted that it was so difficult for them to acquire a diploma or have their skills certified, as this would help them in their occupational development. The participants therefore recommended facilitating access to vocational training during and after regularization in order to improve their chances in the job market.

The advantages of regularization in terms of job security, vacation entitlement, unemployment, and sick leave were appreciated. However, the people we met also mentioned the costs of regularization, which sometimes result in a decrease in income. The results presented in Chapter 4 support this view since the median income after regularization, taking social security contributions into account, is only slightly higher than that of an undocumented worker who, in fact, pays no social security contributions.

The results of the study and exchanges with participants confirm that working in the domestic work sector raises specific issues, including difficulties in paying social insurance contributions in the case of multiple employers with few hours that do not abide by minimum wage regulations. The particularities of this sector call for targeted policy interventions. Participants stressed the importance of better informing employers about their entitlement to paid leave, time off in the event of illness or accident, and minimum wage. They also called on the authorities to monitor employers' compliance with these rights more closely, for example through affiliation with Chèque-Service.

While the existing legislative framework should ensure dignified working conditions in all sectors, noncompliance with the existing measures still seems to be frequent, as illustrated by the high percentage of participants who continue to work while ill. In connection with the very specific conditions of the domestic work sector, participants expressed the desire to contribute to the occupational pension system (OP), even when the required minimum annual salary cap (22,050 Swiss francs in 2023) was not reached.

6.3 Health status

- Reduce the cost of accessing healthcare for the working poors.
- Increase the offer in the field of mental health.
- Facilitate access to cantonal health insurance subsidies.

Participants were keen to emphasize the constant psychological pressure associated with undocumented life. This pressure is induced by the fear of losing one's job, not being able to pay one's bills, or being deported. It often persists after regularization, despite the guarantees afforded by the residence permit. These sources of stress help explain the high prevalence of anxiety and depression in the study population. During the deliberative session, participants also testified to the detrimental effects of this long-term stress on their general state of health, as well as on their ability to work. In their view, regularization could have a positive impact on their quality of life by gradually reducing psychological pressure. This is why the participants asked to relaunch a regularization process like Papyrus, which they feel is essential for alleviating the constant stress associated with undocumented life.

In Chapter 5, it emerged that enrollment in the basic health insurance scheme (LAMal), which increases with regularization, does not prevent some participants from forgoing medical care because of for financial reasons. Participants pointed to the high costs of access to healthcare due to health insurance premiums and copayments. Moreover, these costs are difficult to anticipate due to a lack of knowledge of administrative procedures and delays. It is therefore necessary to facilitate access to the cantonal subsidy for these people to reduce their risk of debt and renunciation of care. It also seems important to help newly regularized people find their way around the various services offered by the healthcare system (e.g. prevention and oral health).

6.4 Housing conditions

- Facilitate access to housing for undocumented and newly regularized workers.
- Protect against abuse (exploitative landlords).

Discussions during the deliberative session highlighted the central role of housing in the lives of undocumented migrants. Subletting, a very common strategy and necessity, allows to keep invisible but also severely hampers the feeling of being at home. It is associated with a marked sense of insecurity and residential instability. The participants' testimonies confirmed the constant mental load associated with relocation and poor housing conditions, identified in Chapter 4.

They also stressed the difficulty of finding new accommodation after obtaining a residence permit. Receiving housing subsidies would enable them to reduce occupancy density and improve housing conditions. Facilitating access to subsidized housing was thus also mentioned as a solution. Participants also stressed the importance of combating exploitative landlords, to whom undocumented migrants are especially vulnerable since they are captives of the subletting market.

6.5 Contextualization of recommendations

This deliberative session with some of the Parchemins study participants not only confirmed the interpretation of the results, but also enabled the research team to draw up recommendations that take into account the point of view of the workers involved. While the main recommendation remains to make it easier to obtain a residence permit through a standardized and transparent regularization procedure, other interventions linked to labor and worker protection are deemed necessary to give this public policy its full measure. It should be emphasized that regularization lies at the conclusion of a long process that begins even before a residence permit is granted, since the relatively restrictive eligibility criteria must first be met and be maintained after a residence permit is obtained within different timeframes in the medium and long term, depending on the areas concerned. The reduction in social, economic, and health inequalities between regularized migrants and the general population is therefore very gradual. This underlines the importance of continued support for regularized migrants from public services and partner associations.

This population, which has remained on the sidelines of many administrative procedures for years living in the shadows, needs time and support to master the procedures and take advantage of the opportunities associated with their new status. Even though a minimum level of French is among the eligibility criteria for regularization, mastery of the language is often limited, which adds to the difficulties.

It seems imperative to monitor the wage progression of these workers over time, as average incomes just after regularization remain close to the risk of poverty. Guaranteeing an adequate income will reduce the risk of these workers having to resort to undeclared employment or to social assistance. It is therefore important to continue raising awareness among employers and the Geneva population in general of the legal obligations in terms of employment conditions. Supporting the development of entrepreneurship in employment sectors typically occupied by undocumented workers (domestic work in particular) can also help to regularize these undervalued areas.

From a research point of view, the Parchemins study highlighted the importance of documenting the trajectories of undocumented and newly regularized workers in order to better grasp the multiple issues at stake in lives littered with successive hardships. To further understand these life course trajectories, however, there is a need to extend the duration of the observations to better understand the effects on retirement plans and living conditions. The costs involved in pursuing such a study limit the possibility of doing so and therefore encouraged the investigators to actively invite these people to take part in surveys carried out among the general population, especially the new SPECCHIO digital cohort[20].

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[20] This study of the health of the Genevan population is carried out by the Geneva University Hospital (https://www.specchio-hub.ch/etudes/specchio [asccessed on 17.10.2023]).

7 Conclusions

The Parchemins study has drawn a portrait of life across the transition from being an undocumented migrant to becoming a regularized worker. It shed light on the complexity of the forms of integration into the society. This reveals both the strength of these workers and their highly disadvantaged position in the Genevan context. Work and the ability to generate associated income are at the core of their trajectories. Their working capacity intimately depends on their good health, which they predominantly judge as very good. This is necessary to fulfill often strenuous tasks in precarious employment sectors in which they are confined (domestic work, construction, hospitality). Their relatively high life satisfaction allows them to justify the efforts and sacrifices they make. The study also suggests that the challenges faced in Geneva are perceived as less significant than what they would have endured had they stayed in their home countries. However, the multiple pressures associated with life without legal documents take a toll on mental health, linked to the fear of deportation and the inability to plan for the future.

The opportunity to obtain a residence permit is therefore experienced as a form of recognition. The metaphors used by participants are telling: legal status allows them to “get out of the box”, “get out of prison”, “become a human being” or start “a new life”. Improvements in working and housing conditions, as well as in mobility, were also highlighted. However, dashed hopes have also led to disillusionment. Indeed, a residence permit is not synonymous with a new life immediately freed from the constraints of undocumented life. The ideal of social justice associated with legal status comes up against a variety of realities: competition in the job market, discrimination against foreigners, administrative difficulties, and so on.

However, this does not call into question the principle of regularization. Undocumented workers occupy jobs that are often neglected by the local workforce, as they are not rewarding. However, regularized workers are motivated to obtain the necessary qualifications to remedy the lack of personnel in sectors where needs are set to grow, such as home care. Regularization supports their integration into the social insurance system, giving them protection against illness and accidents while at the same time bringing in new tax revenues.

While the Geneva government’s efforts are to be saluted, it is important to remain humble in the face of the effects of the Papyrus program. The challenge of cleaning up the labor market is closely linked to Switzerland’s migration policies. Beyond the local scale, the issues addressed in this book resonate at an international level, reflecting global economic inequalities and political conflicts superimposed on systematic inequalities between men and women.

The comparisons made in Chapters 4 and 5 between the living conditions of workers who took part in the Parchemins study and those of Geneva residents measured in various population surveys show the gap that exists between these population groups. Undocumented and recently regularized workers are particularly disadvantaged in terms of employment conditions, income, and housing. They are also subjected to high levels of stress, as revealed by symptoms of depression and anxiety. The fact that they declare a relatively high level of satisfaction with life, in view of their great precariousness, should in no way serve to relativize this gap. Rather, it should be interpreted as revealing the extremely harsh living conditions from which these people have managed to extricate themselves, though at the cost of persistent vulnerability, even after a long stay in Switzerland. In this respect, women's disadvantages in the various fields studied show that despite perceived gains, migration keeps them in a subordinate economic position; in other words, gender inequalities are reproduced on a transnational scale.

The realities experienced by undocumented workers are therefore not in line with the principles of social equity formulated on a national and international scale. Moreover, it is well known that precarious groups are particularly exposed to the deleterious effects of crises and economic downturns. It is therefore necessary to document in detail the situation of the most vulnerable in order to inform political debates and public policy. This is what the Parchemins study has done. This study offers unprecedented results thanks to a methodology combining data collected over several years by means of questionnaires from a sizeable sample as well as in-depth interviews. Taken together, these data make it possible to document the many facets and diversity of life as undocumented and the years following the granting of a residence permit. The very local anchoring of the study, the canton of Geneva, must be emphasized, as it illustrates a singular context of undocumented life. However, it has the advantage of ensuring the homogeneity of the context in which the trajectories studied took place. Nevertheless, the results may apply well to other urban centers in Switzerland or other European countries.

This book provides insight on the living and health conditions of undocumented migrants in Switzerland. It shows the benefits of regularization, while underlining the fact that regularized workers remain exposed to various forms of vulnerability resulting from journeys marked by adversity, perseverance, and resilience.

Afterword

Any public policy regarding migration issues stems from a legal framework that defines who can come, settle, work, and who cannot or must leave. When this body of laws and implementing regulations is not in line with the labor needs of the economy and with international humanitarian crises, it inevitably leads to the emergence of populations living "here" but remaining outside this legal framework: these are the undocumented migrants.

In February 2017, the Geneva authorities announced the launch of the Papyrus program. In respect to migration policies in Switzerland, this was a small revolution. While public authorities in Switzerland and Europe continue to perceive migration as a problem—building walls, tightening laws on entry and residence, criminalizing the so-called "illegal" or "clandestine"—the Geneva government, in agreement with federal authorities and in collaboration with community stakeholders, took the opposite stance: regularizing individuals who had been living and working in Geneva for many years, based on objective and transparent criteria.

This pragmatic policy thus acknowledged a well-known yet often overlooked reality. Thousands of people live and work in our canton, predominantly women active in the domestic work sector, meeting a demand for labor and contributing to the financing of social insurance. Domestic work includes childcare, support for elderly individuals, housekeeping, and maintenance and service in private homes. The true societal impact of work in the domestic work sector is underestimated. By broadening the perspective, it becomes evident that it enables numerous employers—often women and frequently single-parent families—to access the work market while ensuring the care of elderly and dependent relatives at home. In essence, it represents a partial and unofficial outsourcing of essential services that should typically fall under the responsibility of the state.

Regularizing these workers has allowed for their better integration into society, combating undeclared work and providing a future for their children attending our schools. All parties stood to gain from it—the individuals who were regularized foremost, as they could emerge from the shadows and continue working with no fear of expulsion; the employers who legally hired this workforce and aligned themselves with the laws; and the state, which witnessed an increase in social contributions and tax revenues on one hand and a decrease in precarity that created various forms of exploitation within its borders on the other.

The Parchemin study has enabled the documentation of the effects of regularization on the individuals concerned. This ongoing monitoring is invaluable, because it highlights daily benefits in terms of integration and health, identifies the specific needs of this population after regularization, explores any unforeseen side effects, and ultimately dispels a widely held myth: a regularization process—if well supported, as was the case in the Papyrus program—does not lead to an influx of newcomers.

In the global context of increasing transnational mobility and the diversified labor needs of the economy, coupled with demographic changes leading to a greater proportion of retirees than of contributors, the continuation of this well-framed and supported regularization policy, along with the study of its effects, is necessary and highly advisable.

This is the profoundly innovative aspect of the Papyrus program. By aligning the concrete interests of various stakeholders—the government, employers, “undocumented” employees, and civil society—, by favoring a pragmatic rather than dogmatic approach, this policy has succeeded in reconciling economic, social, and ultimately and not least, fundamentally ethical needs. Regularizing individuals living and working here is also an acknowledgment of their existence, of the significance of their work, and of their contribution to common well-being.

Alessandro De Filippo
Swiss Protestant Aid
June 28, 2023

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