

Drivers of Involuntary Career Changes: A Qualitative Study of Push, Pull, Anti-Push, and Anti-Pull Factors

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Caroline Éliane Brazier¹ , Jonas Masdonati^{1,2} , André Borges^{1,2} ,
Laurence Fedrigo¹ , and Marine Cerantola¹ 

Abstract

Although research on work transitions is extensive, little is known about the specific challenges of involuntary career changes. This study focused on how people articulate push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors when facing an involuntarily triggered career change. We conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with people forced to change careers due to health issues, migration, or unemployment in Switzerland. Through a consensual qualitative analysis, we showed that career changes were driven (i.e., facilitated or inhibited) by participants' interests, values, or skills. This resulted in five types of processes of career change, depending on whether participants were aiming to maintain their values, update their values, transpose their interests, resuscitate forgone interests, or valorize their skills despite the involuntary nature of the change they were undergoing. Overall, findings stressed individuals' struggle to regain a sense of control when having to face a career change. Limitations and implications are discussed.

Keywords

career change, career transition, push pull anti-push anti-pull factors, career control, consensual qualitative research

Since the mid-1980s, careers have become decreasingly linear and predictable (Chudzikowski, 2012; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). Traditionally, two transitions prompted career paths: the passage from school to work (e.g., Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019) and from work to retirement

¹Research Center in Vocational Psychology and Career Counseling (CEPCO), Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

²Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES – Overcoming vulnerability: life course perspectives (NCCR LIVES), University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Corresponding Author:

Caroline Éliane Brazier, Research Center in Vocational Psychology and Career Counseling (CEPCO), Institute of Psychology, University of Lausanne, Mouline, Géopolis, Lausanne 1015, Switzerland.

Email: caroline.brazier@unil.ch

(e.g., Froidevaux et al., 2018). In the contemporary context, transitions multiply throughout the lifespan (Fouad & Bynner, 2008), and cover mobilities (e.g., upward or horizontal mobility, demotion), exits from (e.g., unemployment), and late reentries into the labor market (Heppner & Scott, 2006). These transitions might be variably anticipated and desired (Heppner & Scott, 2006; Masdonati et al., 2017). They can be moments of taking control of one's life at work or, in contrast, make it more precarious (Liu et al., 2012).

Career change, also referred to as occupational change (Feldman & Ng, 2007), is a form of career transition consisting of moving to a new occupational field or a new organization along with a work role modification (Ibarra, 2006). A career change implies then moving away from "a typical career progression" (Carless & Arnup, 2011, p. 80). Career changes can be voluntary or involuntary (Zacher, 2019). Changes are involuntary, for example, when the person is forced to find a new occupation for health issues, sectoral unemployment, or non-recognition of a foreign qualification (Masdonati et al., 2017). Involuntarily triggered career changes are critical since they can jeopardize the workers' control over their career path (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Guest & Rodrigues, 2015). However, little is known about the process of involuntary career change. More specifically, no research has investigated the factors that drive the career choices stemming from these career changes. In the present paper, we address this gap by exploring what facilitates or hinders the career choice process of people who experience an involuntary career change in Switzerland, a country with a high level of occupational mobility (Federal Statistical Office [FSO], 2020). In so doing, we aim to capture the ways in which career changers strive to regain a sense of control over their careers.

Involuntary Career Change

While voluntary career changes are self-initiated, involuntary career changes are triggered by unwanted, generally unexpected events (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). The literature shows that three main types of events can prompt involuntary career change. First, health problems may prevent the person from performing their job and force them to find a new occupation where their health issues are not a barrier (Masdonati et al., 2017). Second, redundancy can trigger a career change when the labor market is saturated and workers cannot find a job in their occupational field (Gardiner et al., 2009). Third, migration can lead to involuntary career change when the host country does not recognize migrants' former skills and diplomas, forcing them to identify—and train for—a new occupation (Palic et al., 2023).

Involuntary career changers may encounter several obstacles in navigating their transition. These obstacles include a lack of time, control, information, as well as emotional, social, and financial support (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Individuals may also experience institutional barriers, such as limited access to retraining and counseling services (Masdonati et al., 2022). In need of a rapid source of income, they may be forced to choose a career option without the possibility of making an informed choice (Fouad & Bynner, 2008). In addition, work reentry can involve several broader concerns, most notably for migrant people, such as integration in a host society (Fedrigo et al., 2023) and social recognition (Farashah et al., 2022).

Existing studies on involuntarily triggered career change have explored the challenges of specific populations, such as veterans (e.g., Kulkarni, 2020), artists (e.g., Hennekam & Bennett, 2016; Maitlis, 2009), and athletes (e.g., Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2018). This line of research highlighted that involuntary career changes can engage individuals in emotionally intense transition processes (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2018), often take time (Maitlis, 2009), and are institutionally embedded (Kulkarni, 2020). However, little is known about the general processes underlying involuntary career changes, independent of the characteristics of a specific occupation or career challenge.

Understanding the Process of Career Change

Career transitions refer to “moves across different types of boundaries, that can create both minor discontinuities and major interruptions in an individual career” (Chudzikowski, 2012, p. 298). Career transition processes have been studied through different perspectives that address, for example, reasons for career transitions (e.g., Masdonati et al., 2017), phases of transitions (e.g., Barclay et al., 2011), and adjustment to these transitions (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012). One of these perspectives focuses on the articulation of *push* and *pull* factors that underly a career transition process (Zimmermann, 1996). Push factors refer to what motivates someone to leave their current situation, whereas pull factors refer to what attracts someone to a new situation. For example, Zimmerman (1996) showed that the expatriation process implied both incentives to leave a former country and to move to a new one. Addressing involuntary career change through a push-and-pull-factors perspective seems relevant because, beyond the involuntary trigger, people might be more or less committed to the transition process, depending on their attachment to the job they leave and the desirability of the one they prepare to enter.

However, focusing exclusively on push and pull factors is insufficient to describe the specific challenges of involuntary career changes. Indeed, given their involuntary nature, we expect that these changes are not only characterized by motivations to leave the old job and begin the new job but also by forces that inhibit individuals’ involvement in the change process. The push, pull, anti-push, anti-pull (2PAP) model adds two factors to the push–pull model that can inhibit the career change process: anti-push factors, referring to what ties someone to a previous situation; and anti-pull factors, referring to what repels someone from a new situation. Initially developed by Mullet et al. (2000) to address students’ geographic mobility, this model has been used to study specific adult career transitions, such as athletes’ transitions (Defruyt et al., 2020), transitions to retirement (Chevalier et al., 2013; Fernandez et al., 2006), and work-to-school transitions (Soidet & Raussin, 2019). This line of research stressed the major role that continuity of goals plays in career transition processes (Chevalier et al., 2013). Moreover, the 2PAP model was used to understand career transitions whose intentionality is ambiguous, such as athletes’ decision to retire, which entails both voluntary and involuntary drivers (Defruyt et al., 2020). Surprisingly, literature using the 2PAP model mainly focused on intentions to change (Chevalier et al., 2013; Defruyt et al., 2020) or retrospective narrations of change (Soidet & Raussin, 2019). Yet, we believe this model is also relevant for studying ongoing transition processes.

The 2PAP model allows moving beyond an approach to career change that focuses solely on its more or less voluntary triggers (Soidet & Raussin, 2019). Instead, it emphasizes the very process of a career change and the articulation of factors that facilitate or inhibit this change. In particular, reading career change processes through the 2PAP lens can help understand how people attempt to regain personal control over their career, a concept that refers to “an individual’s beliefs, at a given point in time, in his or her ability to effect a change, in a desired direction, on the environment” (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986, p. 165). Indeed, given their unintentional nature and the barriers faced by people going through it, an involuntary career change might be conceived as one of these events that disrupt the general sense of control over career choices (Guest & Rodrigues, 2015). However, despite not having decided to change career, involuntary career changers might attempt to shape the transition process itself and the career choices it underlies. In other words, while they cannot control the fact that they have to change careers, they can try to control the process and direction of that change, including choosing an occupation that aligns with their personal and professional goals.

Current Study

While voluntary career changes have been extensively studied, involuntary career changes have been overlooked. Yet, involuntary career changers may encounter several and specific difficulties during their transition, such as a lack of time and loss of career control, alongside contextual barriers (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). In contrast to voluntary career changes, which are essentially driven by combinations of push and pull factors, involuntary career changes might also be characterized by career-related inhibitors (i.e., anti-push and anti-pull factors) that make the transition more challenging. Hence, the research question addressed in this paper is: How do people forced to change careers proceed in choosing a new occupation? To answer this question, we draw on the 2PAP model, given its appropriateness to study adult career transitions (Chevalier et al., 2013) and ambiguous career decision-making processes (Defruyt et al., 2020). Specifically, we aim to understand how facilitating and inhibiting factors articulate and drive changers' career choices. Ultimately, tackling this question provides information on how these people attempt to regain control over their careers (Guest & Rodrigues, 2015).

To address the research question, we explored the experiences of workers in French-speaking Switzerland who had to change careers because of one of the three main reasons for involuntary career change: health problems, sectoral unemployment, or qualification recognition. Switzerland is a trilingual country of 8.7 million inhabitants, with an efficient economy, a dynamic labor market, and low unemployment (Masdonati et al., 2019). However, inequalities in access to the labor market and working conditions persist for women and tend to increase for people of foreign origin, young adults, older workers, and low-qualified workers. According to Hofstede's classification, the Swiss culture can be qualified as rather individualist, motivated towards achievement and success, and indulgent (What about Switzerland? 2023). A national survey on job mobility showed that, annually, one out of every five workers experienced a career transition (Federal Statistical Office [FSO], 2020). This transition can be due to several reasons, such as changes in childcare, dismissal, retirement, accident, and end of contract. However, little is known about the intentionality underlying these changes, which confirms the need to explore this dimension in greater depth.

Methods

To reach an in-depth understanding of the push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors of involuntary career change processes, we chose a qualitative approach with semistructured individual interviews. Given its exploratory nature, the study is grounded in a postpositivist paradigm (Morrow, 2005), recognizing each trajectory's singularity while considering that experiences may share similarities (Ponterotto, 2005). Our university ethics committee approved the project (project number C_SSP_052021_00003).

Participants

The participants included 19 individuals, nine women and ten men, aged 29 to 58 ($M = 40$, $SD = 8.4$), undergoing an involuntary career change. Nine participants were forced to change careers for health reasons (accident, physical, or chronic mental illness); five participants were unemployed or had encountered long-term difficulties entering the job market due to the lack of positions in their specific occupations; and five participants needed to change careers due to their migration and attendant linguistic and qualification recognition issues. The inclusion criteria were to have been forced to change careers, to have recently begun a career change process within the year, and to have at least an intermediate level of oral French (CEFR level B1). As indicated in Table 1,

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

Name	Age	Gender	Origin	Education	Career Change Trigger	Previous Occupation	New Occupation	Planned
William	41	M	Swiss/British	VET tourism	U	Flight coordinator	Not yet determined	
Marie	43	F	Swiss	MA literature	U	Bookseller	Librarian	
Sarah	45	F	Swiss	BA tourism	U	Executive assistant	HR manager/job coach	
Louis	46	M	Belgian	High school	U	Airline senior manager	Business executive	
Henry	58	M	Swiss	MA human rights	U	Humanitarian coordinator	Not yet determined	
Frédéric	29	M	French	VET Carpenter	H	Carpenter	Geomatician	
Beatriz	29	F	Swiss	VET Sales	H	Saleswoman	Medical secretary	
Kevin	29	M	French	VET hairdresser	H	Hairdresser	HR assistant	
Jean	31	M	Swiss	VET Truck driver	H	Money transporter	Security manager	
Azarah	41	F	Iranian	BA literature	H	Sales manager/waitress	Cultural interpreter	
Véronique	44	F	Swiss	VET hairdresser	H	Hairdresser	Secretary	
Giuliana	47	F	European ^a	PGT Surgery	H	Surgeon	Judge	
Esteban	48	M	Spanish	SEC	H	Construction worker	Logistician	
Anna	49	F	Swiss	BA Nurse	H	Nurse	Care coordinator	
Said	32	M	Somalian	SEC	M	Printer	Cleaning agent	
Erkan	32	M	Turkish	BA security	M	Policeman	Social worker	
Olga	32	F	Belorussian	BA Nurse	M	Nurse	Dental assistant	
Roxana	41	F	Iranian	High school	M	Weaver	Graphic designer	
Selim	44	M	Syrian	PGT Dentist	M	Dental surgeon	Taxi driver	

Note. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names. F = Female, M = Male, U = Unemployment, H = Health, M = Migration, SEC = Secondary education, VET = Vocational Education and Training, BA = Bachelor's degree, MA = Master's degree, PGT = Postgraduate Training.

^aParticipant has requested not to disclose her country of origin.

interviewees had varied professional and educational backgrounds (ranging from salespeople to senior managers, and from vocational education training to postgraduate training). They came from diverse occupational domains (healthcare, services, and tourism) and sectors (public and private). According to [Super's \(1957\)](#) classification, they were at two different career stages: 13 were in the establishment stage (25–44 y.o) and six in the maintenance stage (45–64 y.o). Various public and semipublic institutions followed and supported them, both socially and financially. They were all enrolled in Swiss welfare services, such as Public Disability Insurance, Public Unemployment Insurance, or Migrants Reception Institution.

Procedure

We contacted 13 public and semipublic institutions in Switzerland that offered adult employment integration programs. After receiving permission from the institutions' management, we presented our study to career counselors and job coaches working with career changers who met the inclusion criteria. The coaches and counselors provided contact details of interested and eligible participants, and we scheduled one-on-one video conference interviews ([Archibald et al., 2019](#)). Each participant was recruited voluntarily and agreed to participate with informed consent. We reached 29 potential participants, and 23 answered positively and 19 were analyzed. Four interviews were consensually discarded because participants did not exactly meet our inclusion criteria. Two of them were undergoing an involuntary transition but without any change of occupation, which distances them from our definition of career change. For two others, it became clear during the interview that their oral French was insufficient for effective communication. An intermediary report was sent to thank our participants and partner institutions ([Brazier et al., 2022](#)).

Three team members conducted the interviews in French, lasting 66–146 min ($M = 99$). Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. To preserve confidentiality, we pseudonymized participants' names with respect to their national origins and anonymized other names, locations, and companies' information in the transcriptions.

Interview Guide

We divided the interview guide into seven parts (see [Appendix A](#)). The first part focused on participants' demographic information. The second part focused on participants' career paths (jobs, events, subjective career situation, and previous and current career situation). The third part concerned the involuntary career change (reasons, importance, associated feelings, anticipation, perceived continuity, if any, and reversibility). We also asked them to discuss on a table of push, pull, anti-pull, and anti-push factors through four sentence completion tasks: "About my former profession, I am going to miss..." (anti-push); "I am glad I no longer have..." (push); "In my new profession, I fear..." (anti-pull); "In my new profession, I am looking forward to..." (pull). The fourth part focused on vocational, personal, and social identity and possible selves. The fifth part encompassed resources and barriers. The sixth and seventh parts investigated participants' relationships to work and training. To ensure the participants' well-being, we ended the interview by asking them if they wanted to add anything, how they felt after the discussion, and whether they had questions. The interview guide included institutional resources, such as emergency psychiatric contacts, that could be shared with participants if needed. In addition, all interviewers are also qualified psychologists who are able to manage possible distress during the interviews.

For the purpose of the current study, we mainly focused on the third part of the interview. We specifically analyzed the answers participants provided to the push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull sentence completion task. When the information provided during this task was insufficient to

depict fully the articulation of facilitators and inhibitors of career change processes, we sought further details in previous parts of the interview.

Analysis

Our analyses were informed by the principles of consensual qualitative research (CQR; Hill et al., 2005), which was tailored for an abductive, process-oriented procedure. Recent research in vocational psychology has shown the relevance of CQR in studying major work and life transitions, such as women and migrants' work integration processes (e.g., Autin et al., 2018; Fedrigo et al., 2023; Scalise et al., 2019) and retirement (e.g., Záhorcová et al., 2021). Conventional CQR is deployed in three distinct steps: domains identification, construction of core ideas, and cross-case analysis. To address our research aims, we modified the standard CQR procedure in two ways. First, inspired by existing CQR in the field of career development (e.g., Li et al., 2021; Tate et al., 2015), we opted for an abductive rather than an inductive approach and organized our analysis within a predefined theoretical framework (i.e., the 2PAP model). Second, to reflect the processual nature of involuntary career changes, in addition to core ideas, we focused on identifying patterns of articulations between push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors, which we called "drivers." Our cross-case analysis consisted of identifying and grouping "processes" within drivers. Previous works based on the 2PAP model informed this second modification (Soidet & Raussin, 2019).

Research Team. The research team comprised five members, aged 26 to 45, all White, and affiliated with the University of Lausanne. Four members were PhD students (three women, one man) in diverse stages of their theses in vocational psychology. They had previous experience in consensual qualitative research together and were responsible for coding the data. The fifth member was a professor in vocational psychology and an expert in qualitative research with experience in CQR. As an auditor, he gave feedback on the codebook the coders provided, mediated disagreements in the analysis, advised the first author in the analysis, and supervised the writing. The auditor and the first author guided the team through the process, which comprised six meetings to perform analysis, lasting 3–4 h each. Following Hill et al. (2005), we met a first time to discuss our possible biases in this study. Based on the team's work experiences, we highlighted sensitivity to the theme of migration and health situations and the influence of our training as career counselors and volunteers with this population. We also considered differences in career control and adaptability, advocacy, and social justice awareness regarding our academic trajectories. As academics, we acknowledged we had opportunities and means to make career choices, deploy adaptability when facing obstacles, and exert control on our careers. None of us had experienced an involuntary career change. The analysis procedure consisted of going through the CQR steps as Hill et al. (2005) suggested and we adapted them for the study aims: domains identification (i.e., identifying 2PAP factors within each participant), core ideas (i.e., providing each participant's drivers based on the articulation of their 2PAP factors), and cross-analysis (i.e., comparing and grouping drivers in processes).

Domains Identification. The first author went through each interview transcription and identified the four domains of push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors. Then, all the coders independently read three interviews to apprehend how these factors manifested in these participants. Based on this careful reading, the team met a second time and concurred that each participant had an articulated pattern of push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors (2PAP). Thus, the team agreed on the necessity of considering each participant's articulation of the four factors as a meaning unit to preserve the complexity and uniqueness of their career change processes. Following the example

of [Soidet and Raussin \(2019\)](#), we then focused our analysis on each participant's driver as we considered it as an articulated whole instead of artificially separating push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors. We submitted the rationale of this analysis strategy to the auditor, who validated it.

Core Ideas. Each team member wrote a case summary of the articulation of 2PAP factors for three to four participants. During this step, following Hill and colleagues' (2005) recommendations, we stayed close to the participants' words. Based on the case summaries, the coders outlined the key 2PAP markers of each participant to generate core ideas and drivers (i.e., patterns of articulations among these markers). For example, Erkan's 2PAP summary included the following core ideas: *political context* as a push; and *same skills studied, social contact, and capitalized migration experience* as pulls; *previous training investment, skills adequation, and social recognition* as anti-pushes; and *skills deficit* as anti-pulls. Erkan's driver was then related to *Skills*. How this driver manifested in Erkan's new career choice was a career change *process*. His process was thus considered to refer to an articulation of factors revolving mainly around skills and experiences in a context of sociopolitical influences. It was labeled "valorizing skills and experiences." After the third meeting, where the research team discussed the core ideas and drivers identified, each coder independently reviewed and validated the analysis of another team member through rotation. The first author reviewed each synthesis and incorporated the team's suggestions. Finally, the core ideas and driver labels were exposed to the auditor for validation.

Cross-Analysis. During the cross-analysis stage, as [Hill et al. \(2005\)](#) suggested, the team gained in abstraction by being more interpretative. The coders independently read the 15 case summaries and driver labels and they grouped similar main drivers of articulations of 2PAP factors. During the fourth and fifth meetings, each coder submitted their grouping to the research team, and convergences and divergences were reviewed. The research team agreed on a final classification of participants into three types of drivers and five processes of career change (see Results section). Although individuals could refer to different types of drivers, the coders were easily able to identify a dominant driver for each participant consensually. Frequencies within each type and subtype were calculated. Because the cross-case analysis step was directed toward identifying typologies, our goal was not to contrast core ideas, processes and drivers based on their frequency, as is the case in conventional CQR. For this reason, frequencies were provided for informative purposes but not used to understand our data. The first author returned to raw data to ensure this classification was consistent with each case. In a sixth and final meeting, the classification was discussed with the auditor, who sorted out slight discrepancies and recommended a few changes, such as revisions to the drivers' labels, and processes, to gain precision.

Trustworthiness

Following [Morrow's \(2005\)](#) suggestions, we ensured trustworthiness through parallel criteria related to the postpositivist paradigm in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We preserved credibility by writing first impressions, syntheses, and reflexivity after each interview and by the interactions of the four coders during data analysis. We reached transferability by stating our biases, origins, and relations to the topic and addressing the study context and limitations. We guaranteed dependability through the auditor's work and the detailed description of the analysis procedure. We secured confirmability through intensive exchanges within the team and several returns to the data at various stages of the analysis to challenge our results.

Results

Our analyses indicated three main types of drivers, which comprised facilitators (i.e., push and pull factors) and inhibitors (i.e., anti-push and anti-pull factors) of career change processes. These three distinct drivers of change are (1) value-driven career change processes ($N = 7$), (2) interest-driven career change processes ($N = 9$), and (3) skill-driven career change processes ($N = 3$). These types covered five distinct processes of career change: (1a) maintaining work and personal values ($N = 3$), (1b) updating work values ($N = 4$), (2a) transposing interests ($N = 4$), (2b) reactivating an old interest ($N = 5$), and (3a) valorizing and transferring skills ($N = 3$). Table 2 provides an overview of this classification.

Value-Driven Career Change Processes

Seven participants' drivers of career change processes were essentially based on their value systems. Most of their core ideas covering 2PAP factors referred to personal and professional values, such as *stimulation* ($N = 8$), *autonomy* ($N = 6$), *altruism* ($N = 3$), *social achievement* ($N = 2$), *creativity* ($N = 2$), and *authenticity* ($N = 1$). Beyond naming specific values, some participants referred to value-related processes, such as the desire to avoid *work ethics misalignment* ($N = 3$), to align with conventions, *conformism* ($N = 1$) or to shift from *commercial* to *transmission values* ($N = 1$). Two processes emerged within this group. First, three career changers aimed to consolidate both their work and their personal values in a new career project. Second, four career changers intended to preserve some values but also to update their work values in their new project (Table 3).

Table 2. Drivers and Processes of Involuntary Career Change.

Drivers	Processes	Participants (trigger)
(1) Value-driven career change processes	(1a) Maintaining work and personal values	Kevin (H) William (U) Henry (U)
	(1b) Updating work values	Saïd (M) Marie (U) Louis (U) Véronique (H)
(2) Interest-driven career change processes	(2a) Transposing interests	Roxana (M) Jean (H) Anna (H) Esteban (H)
	(2b) Reactivating an old interest	Beatriz (H) Sarah (U) Olga (M) Frédéric (H) Giuliana (H)
(3) Skill-driven career change processes	(3a) Valorizing and transferring skills	Erkan (M) Selim (M) Azareh (H)

Note. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names. Triggers of involuntary career change: U = Unemployment, H = Health, M = Migration.

Table 3. Processes and Core Ideas of Value-Driven Career Change.

Processes	Inhibitors			Facilitators	
	Anti-push	Anti-pull	Push	Push	Pull
Ia. Maintaining work and personal values	Kevin	Work ethic misalignment	Inauthenticity	Altruism	
	Henry William	Lack of autonomy Skills deficit	Work ethic misalignment Work ethic misalignment	Stimulation Stimulation	
	Marie Louis Said	Autonomy Altruism Stimulation Stimulation Social contact	Skills deficit Loss of social achievement	Commercial values Lack of autonomy Lack of autonomy	Transmission values Autonomy Stimulation Autonomy Stimulation Conformism Working conditions
Ib. Updating work values	Véronique	Lack of stimulation	Commercial values		

Note. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names.

Maintaining Work and Personal Values. For three participants, the struggle to maintain continuity in their work and personal values marked the career change process. For example, Henry (58, a former humanitarian coordinator forced to change careers because of employability issues) was happy to leave an unethical work environment but feared losing the stimulation and autonomy of his previous job. He consistently aspired to find in his new career the same stimulation he benefited from in the humanitarian sector. Henry said,

It's all this excitement...and all this newness. The fact that there's...no routine there. I mean, you work 2 years in [African country], and then you go to [European country] for 2 years. I mean you're rediscovering something totally new; it's super interesting! . . . What...I could be happy about is learning something new, that's right!

Avoiding value misalignment was also crucial to these participants. For example, while inhibited by the fear of losing autonomy and altruism, Kevin (29, a former hairdresser forced to change due to an allergy to HR assistant) was happy to leave a job where he could not be authentic. Kevin stated, "I'm glad I don't have to fake it with some people who exasperate me. . . Spending 3 hours doing highlights with a client whose boots I have to lick and that I can't stand." However, his career change process was inhibited by the fear of experiencing personal value conflicts in terms of loss of autonomy and altruism, but also work ethics misalignment in his new career. Kevin explained,

If anything scares me, it will be the lack of respect for my own values. . . If I have to work for a company where I see that there is injustice . . . I don't fear many things in my new profession, except the nonrespect of values that, for me, are mandatory . . . and nonnegotiable.

In sum, these participants' processes show that work and personal values played a significant role in their career change experience. The perspective of preserving values facilitated the career change process, whereas the fear of value misalignments inhibited it.

Updating Work Values. Four participants' career change process were facilitated by the perspective of updating their work values or were inhibited by the impossibility of doing so. Unlike the previous process, this process mainly focused on attempts to embrace new values. For example, Marie (43, a former bookseller having to transition to library work because of unemployment issues) was happy to access an occupation valuing culture and literature transmission over commercial values. Marie stated, "Booksellers promote the books at the level of the product, and then the librarians promote the reading, the practice, the culture—the patrimonial side. . . What counts is to share knowledge or culture, not to sell books." However, participants' reflections around values were not so univocal and contrasted, and the desire to update work values could also align with the fear of losing other work values characterizing the former job. This was the case for Louis (46, a former senior manager in an airline forced to change his career due to unemployment), who simultaneously aspired to a job where he could benefit from more autonomy and feared losing the social achievement and prestige associated with his former job. Louis stated,

What I will miss about my former profession is the business card. . . You were proud to work for the company. . . Finally, you brought your business card with you; it impressed people. . . Freedom. That is, I decide what I do...it's the freedom to do as you want finally. To invent the life that goes around you, that's freedom. So, no boss and [having] freedom are clearly what I will gain in this career change.

Table 4. Processes and Core Ideas of Interest-Driven Career Change.

Processes	Inhibitors			Facilitators		
	Anti-push	Anti-pull	Push	Anti-pull	Push	Pull
2a. Transposing interests	Roxana	Craftsmanship	Misaligned vocational interests	Social restrictions	Social restrictions	Craftsmanship Choice opportunity
	Jean	Working conditions	Misaligned vocational interests Skills deficit	Working conditions	Working conditions	Security Progression opportunity
	Anna	Patient healthcare	Working conditions	Working conditions	Working conditions	Patient healthcare Socialization opportunity
	Esteban	Social contact Building	—	Working conditions	Working conditions	Social contact Progression opportunity
2b. Reactivating an old interest	Beatriz	Social contact	Misaligned vocational interests	Working conditions	Working conditions	Dream career reactivated (psychologist)
	Sarah	Working conditions	Working conditions	Work-life balance	Work-life balance	Dream career reactivated (social worker)
	Olga	Patient healthcare	Skills deficit	Working conditions	Working conditions	Dream career reactivated (physician)
	Frédéric	Social contact Craftsmanship	Misaligned vocational interests	Working conditions	Working conditions	Dream career reactivated (3D drafter)
	Giuliana	Patient healthcare	—	—	—	Social contact Dream career reactivated (Judge) Healthcare rights

Note. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names.

In the first process, the career change process primarily revolved around preserving value stability, whereas participants in the second process were predominantly driven by a quest for new, fulfilling values or a shift in values. All individuals reassessed their work values and identified occupations that could potentially fulfill them. Otherwise said, a change in values acted as a deterrent (i.e., an inhibiting factor) in the first process and as an attraction (i.e., a facilitating factor) in the second.

Interest-Driven Career Change Processes

Career interests played a central role in the articulation of inhibitor and facilitator factors of nine career change processes. In this driver type, most core ideas referred to specific interests, such as *patient healthcare* ($N = 4$), *craftsmanship* ($N = 3$), *social contact* ($N = 5$), the professional field of *security* ($N = 1$), *healthcare rights* and *building* ($N = 1$). Beyond identifying specific interests, some participants referred to interest-related processes, such as avoiding *misaligned vocational interest* ($N = 4$), seeing a *dream career reactivated* ($N = 5$), or experiencing an *opportunity* to choose, progress, or socialize ($N = 4$). They also included *working conditions* ($N = 10$). These drivers covered two distinct processes. First, four participants were driven by the possible transposition of their actual interests in a new emancipating project. Second, five other participants aimed to reactivate in their new project a forgone career interest (Table 4).

Transposing Interests. The first process within interest-driven processes concerns involuntary career changers who sought to transpose into their new occupation professional interests that characterized their former occupation. These participants also reported they wanted to take the opportunity of having to change careers to move toward a broader range of possibilities and leave a restrictive environment. This double movement of interest transposition and broadening of opportunities was found, for example, in the words of Jean (31, a former money transporter forced to change into security management due to an accident). While working conditions both pushed and “antipushed” Jean, he was drawn by the opportunity to maintain a career aligned with his interests in the security domain, but also by the opportunity to pass from an operational to a managerial role. Jean explained,

[What] changes a lot and what I find very pleasant...is that it's a whole other way...of functioning. . . It's a position higher than what I was doing before. It's quite different, the missions are different. And I'm also happy because, at this level of the job, everything is explained. . . If the management wants something, it will explain to me why they need it...but when you're at the bottom of the ladder, they say to do this because it has to be done; they won't tell me why.

This was also the case for Roxana (41, a former weaver forced to change careers due to migration and she was planning to become a graphic designer), who both enjoyed and missed craftsmanship and the calm and meticulous artistic work. While the same fear of career interest misalignment inhibited Roxana's process, she was happy to step out of her previous limits. Roxana stated,

I think [retraining is] very good for me because, in my country, there is no choice . . .for me to do something like this work, for all women. But here I can choose, I can learn. There are many choices for me.

In sum, redesigning the same career interests in a more valued occupation that overcomes certain previous constraints may facilitate the process of an involuntary career change.

Table 5. Process and Core Ideas of Skill-Driven Career Change.

Process	Inhibitors			Facilitators	
	Anti-push	Anti-pull	Push	Push	Pull
3a. Valorizing and transferring skills	Erkan	Previous training investment Skills adequation Social recognition	Skills deficit	Political context	Same skills studied Capitalized migration experience Social contact
	Azareh	Skills adequation	Skills deficit	Unemployment	New skills developed Capitalized migration experience
	Selim	Skills consolidation Skills outcomes Nostalgia	Work-life balance	Conflicts	New skills developed Capitalized migration experience

Note. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' names.

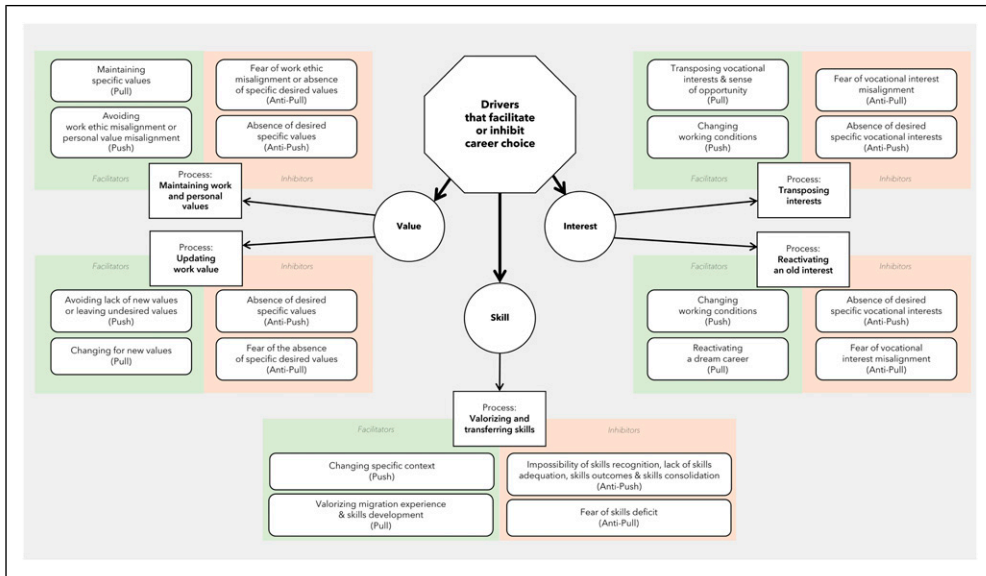


Figure 1. Drivers and Processes that facilitate or inhibit the Career Choice of Involuntary Career Changers.

Reactivating an Old Interest. The second process within interest-driven career change processes relates to a reactivation of a previously dormant vocational interest. For five participants, while the potential loss of interesting tasks inhibited the change process, the possibility of getting closer to an abandoned vocation facilitated it. When considering her possible new occupation as a medical secretary, Beatriz (29, forced to change due to chronic illness) feared monotony and not being able to meet some of the interests she could meet when she was a saleswoman, such as customer contact and advice. In contrast, her new career plan appealed to her because it also represented the possibility of being in a work environment that partly allowed reviving her abandoned vocational interest as a psychologist. Beatriz stated,

If I had stayed there [in her European country of origin, left when she was a teenager], maybe I would have pursued my dream of being a psychologist, so, in both cases, yes...there is something that broke something. [About the involuntary career change], ... At the beginning, I really wanted to go to prisons, to youth shelters, well...[because] I couldn't do my psychology degree...I wanted to sneak into a place where I would have felt good as a psychologist, you could say.

The same pattern occurred with Sarah (45, forced to change from executive assistant to HR or job coach because of unemployment issues), who associated her new career plan with her former vocational interest as a social worker:

[16 years ago], my objective was to work for a year in an institution to discover this field [of secretary] and then to do a training course at the social school. But it turns out that...I started, I found a job...in the rather administrative sector. . . Well, [now] I see myself more as a social worker, except that I don't have the training [laughs]. So...a little bit of social work that allows me to help people but [as a] job coach or...uh, HR manager.

Thus, old, abandoned passions drove the career change process toward an occupation that was perceived as close to it and reachable. While both focused on interests, these two processes imply

different articulations of facilitating and inhibiting factors. Transposing interests' process refer to an objective, short-term continuity of interests in which people change to similar occupations with greater control over their lives. In contrast, reactivating interests' process seem to refer to a long-term subjective continuity: People return to past vocational dreams and try to change to an occupation that is as close to those dreams as possible.

Skill-Driven Career Change Process

Skills were the key drivers of three participants' career change processes (Table 5) and was associated with a single process. Most core ideas pertained to skills, including the importance of finding a new occupation that aligned with previous skills, *skills adequation*, or apprehension of *skills deficits* ($N = 2$). Other core ideas related to the past possibility of *skills consolidation* through investment in training and the appreciation of *skills outcomes* ($N = 1$). Additionally, transposition processes were identified with the use of *capitalized migration experience* ($N = 3$), while learning processes include the possibility of *new skills development* ($N = 2$) and the *same skills studied* ($N = 1$) between former and new training. Unlike other drivers, this process only concerned participants with a migration background.

Valorizing and Transferring Skills. Skill-driven career change processes associated with one process covering situations where the challenge was to value and transfer past skills into a new occupation. Thus, the impossibility of transferring skills inhibited the career change process. This was the case for Erkan (32, a former policeman forced to change to social worker due to migration): "More or less, I try to value the skills that I have acquired, but I can say it's a loss...of my training as a policeman, you see." In addition, interviewees mentioned they feared having skills deficits regarding language barriers. This prevented them from achieving a new stimulating career or finding a job with comparable requirements to their former occupation. Again, this was the case for Erkan: "It...scares me a little bit, sometimes because...even though I'm told that...'you can express yourself, you can get by,' but it's not enough."

Within this process, the lack of opportunity to consolidate specific skills in their new career also inhibited the change process. For example, Selim (44, a former dental surgeon forced to change to taxi driver) related the loss of skills progression: "I organized...my life for this work...every year there's a conference, a congress...to [which] I went to represent [to train, to get inspired, and see new things]."

Facilitators of these participants' career change processes also linked to skills. For example, Erkan was happy to study the exact subjects again as at the police academy but also to reintegrate his migration experience into his new career as a social worker:

The human contact...because I tell myself that I am a person at ease in contact with people. . .If I work, for example, in the future as a social worker with refugees [and] with migrants, I think I understand their...experiences better. I can [have] more effective empathy.

In sum, aspiring to an occupation where one can draw on skills developed in the former occupation or build on the experience of migration might facilitate the change process. In contrast, a lack of recognition of experiences or qualifications and language issues seem crucial inhibitors of this process. Figure 1 summarizes drivers and processes.

Discussion

Our aim was to provide a better understanding of how individuals forced to change careers proceed in choosing a new occupation through the lens of the 2PAP model (Mullet et al., 2000). Findings highlighted a vast array of different articulations of facilitators and inhibitors that characterize involuntarily triggered career change processes. Values, interests, and skills were guiding threads to participants' experiences and conveyed diversified processes for choosing a new career. Indeed, we identified three types of drivers and five processes of career change. Value-driven career changes covered two specific processes: those of participants aspiring to maintain their preferred values in their new occupation, and those of participants aspiring to update certain values and to embrace new elicited work values. Interest-driven career changes also covered two types of processes: those of participants aiming to transpose their former interests to a new career, and those of participants reactivating a dormant career interest. Skill-driven career change processes specifically concerned skilled migrants who struggled to find a career aligned with their qualifications and that values their migration experience. A general observation was also that participants were all under the influence of various and complex configurations of facilitators and inhibitors in their career change process. Nevertheless, every participant misses a feature from his or her previous occupations and feared these regrets prevented them from experiencing a new satisfying career. These results echo previous studies that applied the 2PAP model to the transition to retirement (Chevalier et al., 2013) and midcareer retraining (Soidet & Raussin, 2019). What seems to differentiate our findings from those of earlier research is that the involuntary nature of the career change trigger in this study likely resulted in more intense struggles for participants to perceive control over their situation. These results lead to several observations on how people try to regain control over their careers.

The Struggle to Recover Career Control

Despite being forced to change careers, some participants aspired to maintain coherent values, interests, or skills throughout the career change. Others tried to retrieve what they had lost, such as a dormant career interest or a high-skilled profession. These dynamics can underlie participants' attempts to regain control (Guest & Rodrigues, 2015) over the process and outcome of the career change while they had no control over its triggering.

Each process of career choice seems to refer to specific forms of attempts to recover career control. First, career changers who sought to maintain their elicited values (process 1a) also aspired to work in environments that better promoted their own ethics and personal values. This aspiration can be understood as an effort to increase control over their careers. Second, updating a new favored value in a career choice (process 1b) might be understood as an opportunity to gain back some control, especially for those participants who aspired to more autonomy in their new career. Third, participants aimed at transposing their interests into their new occupation (process 2a) were drawn by the perspective of broadening their career opportunities, which can also represent a means to enhance control over their career. Fourth, reactivating a dormant career interest (process 2b) eventually allows participants to feel closer to their dream career and regain a sense of control over their trajectories in the long run. Fifth, the pull factors of skill-driven career change processes (process 3a) included drawing on the migration experience in a new career to help others facing migration challenges. Turning what one has learned during an adversity experience into a career plan is an attempt to transform a constraint into a choice. However, participants experiencing skill-driven change processes seemed to put more effort into strengthening their sense of control than the other participants did. Their process refers to struggles mainly focused on how not to lose control over their careers rather than on increasing it. Should

this observation be supported by other studies, it would further confirm that the migrant population's professional integration challenges are of major importance (Farashah et al., 2022; Fedrigo et al., 2023).

One common thread in these processes is that the attempts to regain control over one's career involved identifying what was most salient in one's career change process and eventually relinquishing less significant facets. For some participants, these salient aspects were their values; for others, their interests; and for others, their skills: Efforts to regain control were channeled around these facets of change. This process of focusing on specific aspects of career change might reveal the existence of selected forms of continuity, echoing previous research on the career change of injured veterans, whose narratives revealed a search for continuity of goals, values, or work (Kulkarni, 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has four main limitations. First, at the time of the interviews, participants were at diverse stages of implementing their career change. Some were still considering multiple career options, while others were already on the verge of starting retraining in their new career. This might have affected their perceptions and recollections of their transition experience and how they shared their experience with the interviewers. For example, participants with clearer plans, such as those already enrolled in a retraining program, might have had a more accurate picture of pull and anti-pull factors than those who were still uncertain about their next career step.

Second, we reached out to our participants through diverse public and semipublic institutions that delivered career coaching and counseling and supported occupational integration in varied ways and intensities. For example, some participants had met with a career counselor twice a month for a year, while others had only benefited from a few meetings; some were supported in their search for an internship, while others were undergoing a comprehensive skills assessment. Participants who attended intensive, high-quality programs might have been more likely to share a more positive and accurate experience of change than those who did not receive such support. To address both the first and the second limitations, future research should either target a more homogeneous population or address these temporal and institutional variations within the sample.

Third, the articulation of facilitators and inhibitors of involuntary career changes might vary over time, particularly because these changes often last for a long period (Maitlis, 2009). Thus, our research is limited to a momentary analysis of this articulation, which prevents us from understanding how it unfolds over time. Longitudinal qualitative research would help fill this gap and provide insight into how the struggle for maintaining or regaining control and the hierarchization of needs evolve during the career change process.

Fourth, our analyses did not address the variety of emotions associated with participants' career change process and the struggle to regain control over their career. For some participants, the career change offered a new start and prompted positive emotions despite being involuntarily triggered. In contrast, others felt a sadness at being forced to abandon a career in which they had invested a great deal. Thus, further research could address emotions in work-related identity loss and recovery (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014).

Practical Implications

Career professionals supporting involuntary career changers, such as career counselors, coaches, and HR managers, might adopt a subjective and nuanced approach to this phenomenon. Indeed, individuals might be torn between the facilitators and inhibitors of change, which could hinder a successful transition. Thus, it seems important to understand accurately how people experience an involuntary career change and how they perceive what attracts and repels them toward change. In

this sense, it is essential to identify what is most central to a person undergoing career change, between their values, interests, and skills. Based on this, support should be focused on the driver that is most significant for them. Moreover, our findings suggest that particular attention must be given to involuntary career changers' sense of control and strategies to increase control despite the fact that the career change was not chosen. Finally, the migrant population encounters specific challenges and may need more tailored and intensive support. This could involve giving visibility to their struggle and advocating for the recognition of their skills, prior experiences, and qualifications.

Conclusion

Our study showed that diverse articulations of push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors shaped involuntary career change processes. These articulations revealed various types of career change drivers depending on what individuals emphasized in their careers (i.e., values, interests, or skills). Beyond their specific process, all participants seemed to attempt to regain a sense of control over their careers despite having to cope with an involuntarily triggered career change. However, their career control was constrained and limited to what they considered salient in their career.

Appendix A

Interview guideline

1. Sociodemographic information

Age, living situation, family situation, education level, country of origin

2. Career path

Can you tell me what occupations you have held throughout your career and how long they lasted?

In the past, what made you change jobs?

What life events have affected your career path?

Here, you can see images that represent career paths.¹ Which image would best describe the evolution of your career path? Which image best describes your sense of control over your journey?

How satisfied were you in your last job?

What is your current professional situation?

3. Career change process

Can you tell me what brought you to this point professionally?

What are the reasons for your career change?

How has the pandemic situation influenced the transition process?

To what extent do you feel that you have been able to choose this career change?

To what extent did you expect this career change?

What is the likelihood that you will be able to return to your previous occupation?

What did you say to yourself when you learned that you had to change careers?

What did you feel at that moment?

What links do you perceive between the job you had before and your current career plan?

Could you please complete the following sentences? "What I'm going to miss about my former profession is ____." "What I'm glad I no longer have is ____." "What I fear in my new profession is ____." "What I'm looking forward to in my new profession is ____."

How do you feel about changing occupations/leaving your occupation/entering a new occupation?

How important is this change in your life?

4. Identity

Which occupation do you identify with? Can you explain this choice?

How did you choose your new occupation?

To what extent does this new occupation suit you?

How does your career change also change how you see yourself as a person?

More generally, what roles define you today?

How does your career change influence these roles?

To what extent has this career change had repercussions for those around you?

With whom do you discuss your career change?

How do you talk about this situation to people around you?

How do these people react when you talk to them about your career change?

What are people's perceptions of you as you undergo career change?

Try to project yourself into the distant future, for example, ten years from now. Who do you think you will be at that moment professionally? In about ten years, what would your ideal situation be, and what situation would you like to avoid?

5. Resources and barriers

What resources help you cope when you face the challenges of a career change?

What do you have or what would you need to help you in this transition?

What is standing in your way?

6. Relationship to work

How important is work in your life?

If you won the lottery, would you still work? For what reasons and under what conditions?

What puts you in a good mood in the morning, anticipating a day at work? To what extent was this the case at your previous job?

How has your career change affected the importance and meanings you attach to work in your life (if at all)?

7. Relationship to training (when pertinent)

How do you feel about entering a new training program?

What expectations do you have of the training process?

What role does training play in your career change?

How do you feel about undertaking a new learning process?

8. Closing reflections

Is there any additional information that is important for understanding your career change?

Do we have a complete picture of your situation?

Do you have any questions for me?

After this interview, I always ask how people are feeling because sometimes we talk about difficult things and people feel a bit down. Sometimes, because we're talking about a project, people feel a bit euphoric. How do you feel?

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ORCID iDs

Caroline Éliane Brazier  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6459-9310>

Jonas Masdonati  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1897-1425>

André Borges  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2398-9467>

Laurence Fedrigo  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7739-1503>

Marine Cerantola  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3655-5468>

Note

1. See Reitzle, M., Körner, A., and Vondracek, F. W. (2009). Psychological and demographic correlates of career patterns. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74(3), 308–320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.02.005>

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Author Biographies

Caroline Éliane Brazier is a fourth-year PhD student in vocational psychology at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, where she also earned her Master's in career counseling psychology (2020). With a previous master's in Literature and Art History (2011) and professional experience as a teacher, she's now researching involuntary career changes at the Research center in vocational psychology and career counseling (CePCO). Her research focuses on involuntary career changes and their identity, emotional, and relational dimensions through a longitudinal qualitative lens. Caroline's interests include narrative identity, the meaning of work, access to decent work, vulnerabilized trajectories, and innovative qualitative research methods. Outside academia, she enjoys art museums, medieval literature, wellness, spa, and hiking.

Jonas Masdonati is a professor of career counseling at the Institute of psychology of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, where he is head of the Research center in vocational psychology and career counseling (CePCO) and member of the Education and training observatory (OBSEF) and the Swiss center of expertise in life course research (LIVEs). He is president of the European Society for Vocational Designing and Career Counseling (ESVDC). His research interests and activities mainly focus on career transitions, the meaning of work, decent work, occupational identities, and vocational education and training. In his free time, he enjoys photography, reading, cycling and hiking.

André Borges studied political science and psychology, and graduated with a master's degree in counseling psychology at the University of Lausanne. He is now a third-year PhD student and counseling psychologist at the Research center in vocational psychology and career counseling (CePCO) using the notions of dirty, precarious, and decent work to investigate the work experiences of paid domestic cleaners in Switzerland. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with family and friends and playing football.

Laurence Fedrigo is a senior researcher at the Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training and at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Western Switzerland. She received a PhD in psychology from the University of Lausanne at the Research center in vocational psychology and career counseling (CePCO). Her research focus on the population of refugees and their access to education and work, meaning of work, career choices, and PhD holders' trajectories outside academia. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, photography and cinema.

Marine Cerantola graduated with a master's degree in counseling and guidance psychology in 2020. She is now a teaching and research assistant and fourth-year doctoral student at the research center in vocational psychology and career counseling (CePCO) of the University of Lausanne. Her current research focuses on environmental issues and the meaning in life and work in career choices. In her spare time, she enjoys yoga, running and surfing. She also likes to relax by spending time in nature or with her pet bunnies over a cup of tea.