

## How long do sub-Saharan migrants take to settle in France ?

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At a time when the reception of refugees has become a key issue in Europe, there is still little information about how migrants settle in a new country. Using data from the *Parcours* survey, Anne Gosselin and her colleagues estimate the time migrants from sub-Saharan Africa take to obtain a residence permit, a personal dwelling and employment after arriving in France.

What is known about how migrants settle in a new country, in particular how long they take to obtain a residence permit, housing and employment, the basic requirements for a new life? The *Parcours* survey (Box 1) on migration and health gathered detailed information on the trajectories of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. It was designed to provide answers to the public health issues specific to this population group. It recorded their experience year by year after their arrival in France and can be used to examine their settlement process by analysing the time required to obtain a personal dwelling, a residence permit valid for at least one year and an activity that provides enough income to live on, and to determine the order in which these events occur (Box 2).

In 2011, around 800,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were living in France, representing some 13% of all immigrants. [1] Their social and economic living conditions were generally poor; according to the census, in 2010, 42% of them were living below the poverty line, compared with 11% of persons in households with no immigrants, [2] and a disproportionate number were unemployed (16% of men and 20% of women, compared with 7% and 6% of the non-immigrant population in 2010). [1] Are these difficulties restricted to their early days in France or do they persist?

### Frequent insecurity on arrival in France

The respondents in the 2012-2013 *Parcours* survey arrived in France between 1973 and 2013. They come from all over sub-Saharan Africa, but mostly from seven countries in West and Central Africa: Cameroon, DR Congo, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Congo-Brazzaville and Senegal.

The reasons for migration recorded in the survey are, in order of frequency: looking for work and a better life ("trying their luck"), joining a family member, leaving

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(1) See Box 1 page 2.

the home country to escape persecution, pursuing education, and medical reasons. They vary between men and women: 45% of men and 23% of women said they were “trying their luck”, 12% of men and 45% of women were joining family or a spouse, 19% of men and 13% of women had come to study in France, and 22% of men and 16% of women had felt under threat in their home countries. Naturally, as with all surveys carried out in the

### The Parcours survey: HIV, hepatitis B and health in the trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants living in the Paris region (Île-de-France)<sup>(a)</sup>

The ANRS Parcours survey<sup>(b)</sup> was carried out from February 2012 to May 2013 in 74 health structures in the Île-de-France region. It involved a representative sample of three groups of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa: those living with HIV, those infected with chronic hepatitis B, and those free of either, recruited from general practice health centres (some catering specifically for persons in difficulty). Data from the third group were used to study the settlement processes covered in this article.

The conditions of eligibility were: age 18-59, resident in Île-de-France, born in a country of sub-Saharan Africa and national at birth of one of those countries, whatever the nationality at the survey date. Eligible individuals were invited to take part in the survey by a doctor during a medical visit. The interview was conducted by a specialist interviewer, either following the medical visit or by appointment. All the information was recorded anonymously.

This analysis concerns the life trajectories of 513 respondents from sub-Saharan Africa who arrived between 1972 and 2011 at age 18 or over, who were representative of the patients consulting general practice health centres in Île-de-France that are open to all irrespective of residence status. Life histories were recorded using a life event history grid linked to a questionnaire so that the various life events and situations could be dated accurately and ordered correctly.[7] Since 60% of sub-Saharan African migrants in France live in the Paris region, the survey provides information about the situation of the great majority of people from sub-Saharan Africa living in France .

For further information (in French):  
[www.parcours-sante-migration.com](http://www.parcours-sante-migration.com)

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(b) ANRS: Agence nationale de recherche sur le sida et les hépatites virales (French national agency for research on AIDS and viral hepatitis).

host country, only migrants who stayed could be surveyed, not those who went back home.

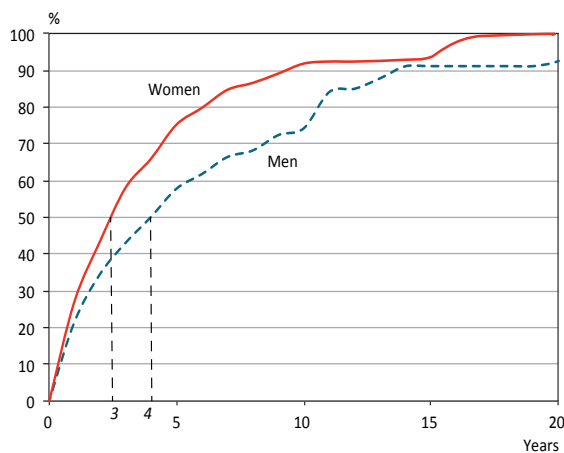
For many of these migrants, their arrival in France is a time of legal insecurity; 79% of the men and 73% of the women stated that their administrative status was precarious during their first year (a residence permit valid for a few months only, requiring frequent renewal, a simple permit application receipt, or no residence papers at all). During this first year in France, 22% of men and 12% of women had to move frequently from one temporary address to another.[3]

### A long period of insecurity

Half the women did not obtain a first residence permit valid for at least one year until their third year in France, and half the men only in their fourth year (Figure 1). Finding a personal dwelling was quicker: half the women had found one by their second year and half the men by their third year. Regarding paid employment, half the women took until their fourth year to find a job, but half the men were in work by their second year. It was not until women were in their sixth year in France and the men in their seventh year that half the respondents had acquired the three components of settlement: a personal dwelling, a residence permit valid for at least one year, and an income-generating activity (Figure 2). The median age at which the respondents had arrived in France was 27, so this long settlement period occurred in the prime of their adult life. Sub-Saharan African migrants thus spend a particularly long time, just when they are building their family lives and careers, in a situation of insecurity because they have either no long-term residence permit, no personal dwelling, or no income. One-quarter of the women still had not acquired all three basics after eleven years and one-quarter of the men after twelve years in France.

This long period of insecurity is not confined to certain categories of migrants. It is found among all sub-Saharan African migrants of whatever background, with a few minor exceptions.[3] More educated men settle slightly faster than the others, as do women who came independently to find a job or pursue their education, compared with those who were joining family members. The period of insecurity also varies according to the date of arrival in France: for women, it now takes longer to find personal dwelling than in the past. Half the women arriving before 1996 found a personal dwelling in their first year, half arriving between 1996 and 2004 by their third year, and half of those arriving since 2004 not until their fifth year (median values). For men, an activity that provides enough income to live on is now taking longer to find (median values of one, two and four years, respectively, for each time period).

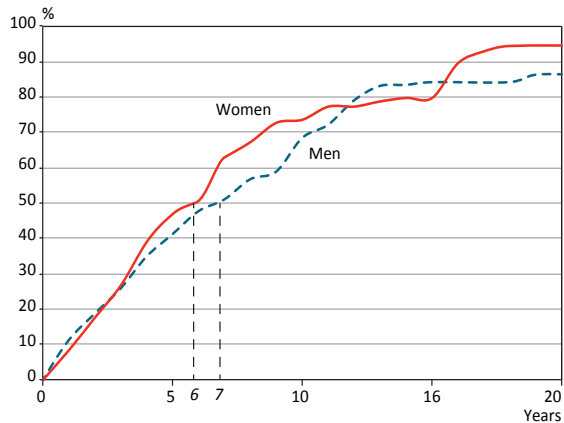
**Figure 1. Proportion of migrants with residence permits valid for at least one year by years spent in France**



	Men	Women
Kaplan-Meier median [Interquartile range: 25%-75%]	4 [2-11]	3 [1-5]

Source: ANRS Parcours survey, 2012-2013.

**Figure 2. Proportion of settled migrants\* by years spent in France**



	Men	Women
Kaplan-Meier median [Interquartile range: 25%-75%]	7 [3-12]	6 [3-11]

Source: ANRS Parcours survey, 2012-2013.

\* With a residence permit valid for at least one year, a personal dwelling and an activity that provides enough income to live on. This composite indicator does not include migrants who came to France to study, who are covered by a specific analysis.

## Gender differences in the settlement process

The settlement process also varies by gender: whereas men start by finding a job, women, many of whom have come to join a spouse or family, find a personal dwelling before obtaining a long-term residence permit.

The type of work and housing obtained also varies between men and women because of these differences. For 35% of men, work starts with temporary casual jobs.<sup>(1)</sup>

For nearly one-quarter, the period of casual work lasts more than ten years. On the housing front, one-quarter of men start with a room in a workers' hostel, which is a form of settlement in itself. [4] Fewer women have to start with period of casual work (20% of those who ultimately get a stable job). Only 7% of women live in a hostel when they arrive and they stay there for a shorter time than men (median seven years for men, two for women).

After many difficult years, sub-Saharan African migrants manage to escape from insecurity, but often only by working in the casual labour market and living in workers' hostels.

However, the differences between men and women are changing. Whereas in the 1970s most migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were men looking for work, followed in the 1980s by wives coming to join their families, subsequent immigration policies have severely tightened these rules. Earlier research has shown that female migration, like male migration, is increasingly labour migration. Women now move to France alone, either as singles or without their husbands. Consequently sub-Saharan African immigration has become more feminine over time: by 2008, women made up the majority of immigrants from West and Central Africa. [5] This can also be seen in the Parcours survey, where 57% of the respondents were women. However, the women who have arrived in France since 2005 exhibit distinct migratory characteristics. More of them have had to flee their home countries: 13% of the women arriving before 2005 and 23% of those who arrived between 2005 and 2013 were refugees. At the same time, the proportion of women immigrating for family reunification fell from 49% before 2005 to 34% for 2005-2013, while the proportion of women "trying their luck" remained stable at 23% for both periods.

## Students settle differently

Of sub-Saharan African migrants, 16% of men and 24% of women attend higher education when they come to France. Logically, they enter employment rather later than the others: half of them studied for at least four years after arriving in France, entering paid employment after their fifth year. Compared with other migrants, students more quickly obtain personal dwelling (men by

(1) The survey defines "casual labour" periods as years when respondents state that they frequently changed jobs. Casual labour may be declared or cash-in-hand. It is one marker of high occupational insecurity, but there may be other forms of insecurity, such as temporary work, which are not included in this indicator.

## Box 2. Measuring the settlement process

The Parcours survey questionnaire was used to retrace the respondents' individual housing, administrative and occupational trajectories. Settlement is defined as acquiring a minimum of security: one's own home, freedom to move without fear of identity controls, and a job that pays a living wage. We use the following indicators to measure the settlement process:

- **Time taken to acquire first personal dwelling**

Housing that does not depend on someone else (living with a friend) or on the uncertainties of emergency accommodation (charity shelters, frequent moves), whatever the occupancy status (owner, tenant, other).

- **Time taken to acquire first residence permit valid for at least one year**

A residence permit that not only removes the risk of being arrested after a police identity check but usually also entitles the holder to work (unlike certain short-term permits).

- **Time taken to find a first activity, whether declared or undeclared, that provides enough income to live on**

(based on respondent's declaration, when asked to look back at each year and say if the income from their activity at that time was enough to live on).

We then measured the time required to obtain all three elements (combined indicator).

their second year, women in their first) and a residence permit valid for at least one year (in their first year for both sexes). Higher education is an effective way of settling in France, particularly for women.

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Even after six or seven years in France, half of sub-Saharan African migrants still do not have all three basic elements of a settled life: a residence permit valid for at least one year, a personal dwelling and an activity that provides enough income to live on. After eleven or twelve years, a quarter are still in this situation. This long period of insecurity after arrival in France is due more to the conditions in France (lengthy red tape, segmented labour market, discrimination [6]) than to the migrants' individual characteristics. The settlement process starts in hostel accommodation and employment in the most marginal sectors of the labour market. The position of

these sub-Saharan African migrants eventually stabilizes but many of them go through a long period of insecurity. This has consequences for their later lives in France and for those of their children, because insecurity affects their long-term health and the educational outcomes of the second generation. [6]

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## Abstract

Six or seven years after arriving in France, half of sub-Saharan African migrants still do not have all three basic elements of a settled life: a residence permit valid for at least one year, a personal dwelling and an activity that provides enough income to live on. After eleven or twelve years, one-quarter still do not. This long period of insecurity after arrival is due more to the conditions in France (lengthy red tape, segmented labour market, discrimination) than to the migrants' individual characteristics. The situation of sub-Saharan migrants ultimately stabilizes, but for many only after a long period of insecurity.