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The Effect of the Socioeconomic Status of Ethnic Groups on Educational Inequalities in Switzerland: Which “Hidden” Mechanisms?

Andrés Gomensoro^{*} and *Claudio Bolzman*^{**}

Abstract: Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the major explanatory factors of educational inequalities between ethnic groups. Nevertheless, this relation has rarely been explored in detail, taking into account educational trajectories instead of educational attainment. What is the impact of the SES of ethnic groups on educational trajectories? And by which “hidden mechanisms” SES background concretely influences the educational trajectories of youths? Based on the “Transition from education to employment” (TREE) longitudinal database in Switzerland, we propose a typology of post-compulsory educational pathways and we observe the impact of SES on the odds of taking a given path. Our analysis shows that, compared to other ethnic groups, second-generation from former-Yugoslavia, Portugal and Turkey are overrepresented in vocational and more problematic pathways mainly because of their low SES, but not exclusively. In addition, we conducted 50 biographical interviews with children of Albanian-speaking immigrants. We identified the fact that the SES effect is often nested with other negative factors related to the family, such as a precarious legal status, difficult living conditions, a lack of linguistic and social capital, etc. and related to the educational system that selects students into different tracks, constraints educational opportunities and reproduces educational inequalities.

Keywords: Socioeconomic status, Educational trajectory, Educational inequality, Second-generation immigrants

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Introduction and research questions

Socioeconomic status (SES) is considered as the major explanatory factor of educational outcomes and educational inequalities (Sirin, 2005). Nevertheless, even if the effect of SES on educational outcomes has been studied on many occasions through looking at its effect on different ethnic groups, in different contexts and by gender, this relation has seldom been studied in order to understand how SES concretely impacts on the educational trajectories and outcomes of second-generation individuals. In the majority of cases in quantitative studies, SES is translated into three variables, as the income, occupational status and educational attainment of parents (Sirin, 2005), without examining how SES concretely influences children's education. Thus many issues remain unexplored, among them the following: By what mechanisms do the SES of migrant parents impact on the educational trajectories and educational outcomes of their descendants? What mechanisms take place directly within the family, through the parents? And what mechanisms are related to the educational system, for instance through the tracking system? Finally, is SES related to other life dimensions in the specific case of the descendants of migrants? In fact, as demonstrated by Sirin (2005), school success is highly related to the SES of the family but, at the same time, this relation is moderated in the case of ethnic minorities. This suggests that SES is indirectly linked "through multiple interacting systems, including students' racial and ethnic background" (Sirin, 2005, p. 420) and will have a different impact on them. Thus, the aim of this paper is to contribute to finding the answers to these unexplored questions. In order to do this, we adopt a longitudinal approach so we can identify how SES concretely affects education over time. First, based on the "Transitions from Education to Employment" (TREE) database, we propose a typology of post-compulsory educational pathways and compare the trajectories taken by both second-generation ethnic groups and by natives.¹ Then we control for SES to observe if there are any changes by ethnic group in the odds of taking different pathways. Finally, in order to analyze in detail how SES concretely influences educational pathways, we will look at our qualitative biographical interviews with the

¹ By second-generation we mean every person who was born in Switzerland or who arrived before the age of ten and who has two parents born in the same foreign country. Natives are youths born in Switzerland with both parents born in Switzerland.

children of immigrants. In this part, we will focus on second-generation Albanian-speaking immigrants, an important group in Switzerland, characterized by a low SES and by their vulnerable situation in the educational system (Meyer, 2003; Fibbi, Lerch & Wanner, 2007). The study of these issues in Switzerland is of great relevance given the significant proportion of the young population with a migration background, the diversity of origin countries and the wide range of SES among ethnic groups (see Annex 1). According to our estimations from the TREE database, more than 40% of youths who completed compulsory education in 2000 have a migration background. The second-generation represents 20% of the total population (youth with Albanian-speaking parents are the largest group, 3.9% of the cohort, followed by Italians 3.4%, former-Yugoslavians 3.1%, Turks 2.4%, and Portuguese 2%, etc.), the 1.5 generation represents 18% and immigrants 4%². In addition, the correlation between ethnic origin and SES is high. Given this evidence there is a tendency, which is totally relevant, to explain educational inequality between ethnic groups mainly by taking SES into account. Bolzman, Fibbi and Vial (2003) showed that, when controlling for SES, the second-generation from Italy and Spain achieves better than natives because they tend to have higher educational aspirations. Nevertheless, other studies have demonstrated on the contrary that, when controlling for SES, educational disadvantages persist for the second-generation from the former-Yugoslavia, Turkey and Portugal (Meyer, 2003; Bauer & Riphahn, 2006; Laganà, Chevillard, & Gauthier, 2014).

Socioeconomic status in studies on the descendants of immigrants

Given the important effect of SES shown in classical studies on educational inequalities, ethnicity and race were almost automatically

² Fibbi, Lerch & Wanner, (2006) and Bauer & Riphahn (2006) noticed close but not identical rates because of differences in the delimitation of the second-generation. Unfortunately, it is not possible to use official statistics given that nationality is considered rather than the ethnic origin or language. In 2013, persons of Kosovar nationality represented respectively 1.1%, 1% and 1.8% of the Swiss, Vaud and Geneva populations (OFS; OCSTAT; SCRIS). Nonetheless, Albanian-speaking immigrants and descendants of migrants from the former-Yugoslavia represent between 7 and 9% of the total Swiss population (Burri Sharani et al., 2010).

combined with SES and with social class inequalities theories to explain, if not entirely all, but certainly some differential educational outcomes between ethnic groups (Payet & Henriot-Van Zanten, 1996). Many researchers (for instance Hutmacher, 1987; Meyer, 2003; Kristen & Granato, 2007; Krause, Rine, & Schüller, 2014) explained the poor educational outcomes of some ethnic groups by looking at their SES or at their belonging to the working class, and Stevens (2007, p. 156) pointed out that “social class differences are larger than ethnic differences, which are in turn larger than gender differences”. Thus, in general, children of the working class, independent of their racial/ethnic origin, tend to have lower educational performances and lower educational aspirations, to be tracked into lower ability groups and to have a certain type of culture which is unappreciated in schools, etc. (Stevens, 2007).

Another strand of the literature argues that SES is not the only explanatory factor for the educational gap between ethnic groups and natives. Other factors related to migration background are also important in the explanation of this educational gap. In the United States, key studies by Gans (1992), Portes & Zhou (1993) and Portes & Rumbaut (2001) questioned the idea of the “straight line assimilation” of the second-generation. According to them, there is a “segmented assimilation” process with three different variants that depend on the parental background, on intergenerational patterns, on the context of reception (racial discrimination, labour market, inner-city subcultures) and on the size of the ethnic community in the receiving country. Thus, among other characteristics, SES is still considered as an important, but not the only factor in the explanation of inter- and intra-ethnic group educational differences and of insertion in the class stratification (Zhou & Xiong, 2005).

In the European context, many authors (for instance Vallet, 1996; Bolzman, Fibbi, & Vial, 2003; Brinbaum & Guégnard, 2012) have pointed out that youths with a migration background tend to close the gap or even they reach higher educational attainment compared to natives of similar social background. According to these authors, the reduction in the educational gap is due mainly to higher educational aspirations in migrant families. In addition, the structure of the educational system, and more specifically the type of tracking and permeability of the system, is also considered as capital in defining educational opportunities (Meyer, 2003; Crul, 2013; Griga & Hadjar, 2014; Schnell, 2014). Early and strong

tracking systems tend to lower the probabilities of people with a migration background/low social origin attaining a higher education degree and thus reproduce social inequalities. Lüdemann and Schwerdt (2010) mention the fact that people with a migration background who are of low social origin in this type of educational system cumulate a double disadvantage: first their school performance is weaker so they are less oriented into the highest track and, second, they are less likely to be oriented into the highest track because of their low SES (after controlling for school performance). On the contrary, late tracking educational systems tend to reduce the gap between ethnic groups because migrant families have more time to adapt to the new educational system (Vallet, 1996) and because the systems are more permeable (Crul, 2013; Schnell, 2014).

Thus there is now a general agreement about the important impact of SES. However researchers' interpretations of the mechanisms by which SES affects education differ widely. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) argue that the reproduction of educational attainment and social position from one generation to the next is stimulated by the educational system and its actors through the definition and reproduction of a valorized cultural arbitrariness, a given type of cultural and linguistic capital. Children who share the same valorized cultural and linguistic capital with their teachers (in general, children with educated parents) are judged favorably and obtain more educational opportunities. At the same time, the reproduction of social positions and living conditions is also related to the cultural capital of students and their families. The cultural capital of a given individual and his or her family provides a world view that legitimates (or sometimes illegitimates) living conditions and the social position and so self-limit educational aspirations (Bourdieu, 1984). In summary, education is shaped by mechanisms of "selection" related to the educational system (structure and actors) or to the individual him- or herself according to his or her cultural capital.

According to Boudon (1973), educational attainment and educational trajectories, on the contrary, are related to social group variations in both school performance (known as the primary effect) and educational choice that still persists after controlling for school performance (known as the secondary effect); this means that fewer students with low SES tend to continue to general secondary education compared to students with high SES yet the same level of school performance. In summary, Boudon explains the differences in education mainly by the influence of SES on

choice rather than by taking into account the different mechanisms of selection and limitation by SES that take place within the educational system— this was one of the main argument of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1970) book.

From another perspective, Coleman (1988) proposes to take into account social capital, defined as relations between persons that facilitate action, as a central element in the transmission of human capital from parents to children. According to him, "Social capital within the family that gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by adults to the child" (Coleman, 1988, p. 111). Thus the transmission of human capital from parents to children is not a given but depends on parents' available time and resources (as, for instance, the social network that can be mobilized to obtain help or information), on the nature of the relation between them and on the willingness of parents and children.

The Swiss educational system³

At the start of lower-secondary school, around the age of 12, pupils are channeled into 3 tracks according to their performance and potential at the end of primary school. However, many studies demonstrated that tracking is also dependent on the gender and the cultural and family background of pupils (Hupka & Stalder, 2004; Meyer, 2011; Stalder & Nägele, 2011). This first selection is considered as one of the most important bifurcation points in education, mainly because it often predetermines the type of post-compulsory education and possible access to general tertiary education (Meyer, 2011). Around 30% of students finish compulsory education in a basic track (see Annex 1).

Upper-secondary education can be subdivided basically into two types of education: vocational education and training (VE) and general education (GE). GE access is granted only to students who succeeded having followed extended or baccalaureate requirement tracks. Students who finished compulsory education on a basic requirement track are practically constrained to continue to a VE, unless they obtained really good school

³ The Swiss educational system is decentralized. We will introduce main characteristics of the system without introducing cantonal differences.

assessments and decide to undertake bridge-year courses. VE is the norm for upper-secondary education in Switzerland, given that seven years after the end of compulsory school, 58% of a cohort reached that certification. Only 26% obtained GE certification and 16% had not at the time gained any certification (Bergman, Hupka-Brunner, Keller, Meyer & Stalder, 2011).

Tertiary education is divided into two types: vocational tertiary (VT) and general tertiary (GT or universities). VT is reachable by students who obtain a professional certificate and who accumulated experience on the labor market. Universities are directly reachable by students who obtained a general baccalaureate. Ten years after the end of compulsory education, 17% of TREE cohort obtained a university certification and 12 % obtained a tertiary professional certification (TREE, 2014).

To summarize, we can affirm that the Swiss educational system is considered to be one of the most unequal of OECD countries, with the highest rates of SES reproduction from generation to generation (OECD, 2009). This trend is mainly due, firstly, to an early and strong tracking into different performance-based groups that define, and often constrain, post-compulsory educational opportunities. Second, even if bridge-year courses exist, there are no easy paths to take because they entail more educational investment. Third, the early tracking often defines post-compulsory trajectories and reproduces SES at every level of these educational trajectories (Bergman, et al., 2011; Meyer, 2011).

Data and methodological design

Our aim in this paper is, as a first step, to describe educational pathways in Switzerland by ethnic group and to observe the effect of controlling for SES. We use the longitudinal TREE database (www.tree-ch.ch). In a second step, we investigate in detail how SES concretely impacts on students' educational trajectories by analyzing the qualitative biographical interviews we conducted with the children of Albanian-speaking immigrants from the former-Yugoslavia.

Quantitative data and longitudinal analysis

TREE is the first longitudinal survey in Switzerland that focuses specifically on post-compulsory educational and work trajectories. It is an

annual follow-up to a representative sample of about 6400 youths who participated in the PISA survey 2000. In this database, we first recoded variables related to the educational and occupational status of every participant in order to obtain individual educational trajectories from 2001 to 2007. These individual trajectories are composed of seven annual educational and occupational states. *Transitional Solution* (TS) regroups every institutional and non-institutional solution as bridge-year courses, pre-apprenticeship programs, au pair, language travel, etc. At the upper-secondary level we distinguish between *Vocational Education and Trainings* (VE) and *General Education* (GE). At the tertiary level, we consider *Vocational Tertiary* (VT) and *General Tertiary* (GT). Finally, we take into account two states outside the educational system: *Employment* (EM) and *Not in Employment, Education or Training* (NEET). Once we had reconstructed the individual trajectories, we ran an optimal matching and a cluster analysis⁴ to produce a typology of post-compulsory educational pathways (Gabadinho, Ritschard, Müller, & Studer, 2011). Finally, we observed the distribution within the typology by ethnic origin and-compared the odds of being in a given type compared to natives. To measure SES, we use two variables: the parents' highest educational attainment (ISCED) and highest International Socioeconomic Index (HISEI).

Our first intention was to study the young offspring of Albanian-speaking immigrants using both types of data. However, due to the limited sample of second-generation immigrants in TREE, we had to regroup them with youths from the former-Yugoslavia (Slavic languages). Nonetheless, both groups arrived in the same period in Switzerland and have followed similar SES and educational trajectories. Other groupings were carried out based on the SES and on the arrival period of the parents.

Qualitative data and thematic analysis

We conducted 50 biographical interviews (Gomensoro & Burgos, forthcoming) with the children of Albanian-speaking migrants aged from 18 to 28 years old, equally distributed by gender and between the cantons

⁴ This method regroups close individual trajectories into the same type and separates distant trajectories into different types. The number of seven different types has been considered as optimal after observing the Silhouette Index (Gabadinho, Ritschard, Müller & Studer, 2011) and after the qualitative interpretation of different types by authors. All results based on TREE are weighted to balance out longitudinal attrition (Sacchi, 2011).

of Geneva and Vaud,⁵ in order to investigate precisely how SES influences educational trajectories. These interviews focus on the three principal dimensions of the transition to adulthood: the transition from school to work, family transitions, and changes in citizenship status (residence and work permits). We performed a thematic analysis on the interview data. For the qualitative part, we focused specifically on this particular ethnic group, firstly because they represent an important part of the new second-generation in Switzerland. Secondly, in comparison with other ethnic groups and with natives, they appear to be more vulnerable in the Swiss educational system and therefore more likely to experience downward assimilation. Earlier studies suggest that this population cumulates several disadvantages that influence their educational pathways, such as a high rate of selection onto basic requirement tracks that limits post-compulsory educational opportunities (Meyer, 2011), a low parental SES (Meyer, 2003), the parents' precarious residence status (Fibbi, Lerch & Wanner, 2007), ethnic discrimination on the apprenticeship and labour markets (Fibbi, Lerch & Wanner, 2006; Imdorf, 2006), etc. Thirdly, there is a lack of knowledge in Switzerland on this specific ethnic group, given that they are often regrouped with Portuguese and Turkish respondents in quantitative surveys.

Post-compulsory educational pathways in Switzerland

The seven different types of post-compulsory educational pathway are represented by distribution plots on *Figure 1* (Annex, 2). On every distribution plot we observe the evolution of the rate of annual distribution of educational states. The first four pathways regroup mainly individuals who went through VE at the upper-secondary level and the last three pathways are composed mainly of individuals who received a GE education.

The first pathway, *Vocational Education then Employment* (VE-EM) regroups mainly individuals who begin with a VE (about 87% of them) and then work (about 70% were employed in 2007). Seven years after the end of compulsory education, 13% had no post-compulsory education, 81% of

⁵ Major French-speaking areas in Switzerland.

them obtained VE certification and 4% tertiary certification. This pathway was undertaken by 36% of the cohort.

The second pathway, *Transitional Solutions then Vocational Education, then Employment* (TS-VE-EM) regroups mainly individuals who did not continue directly to VE and so went through transitional solutions. Given that apprenticeship posts are limited in Switzerland and that students on basic requirement tracks are often in direct competition with students on higher requirement tracks on the apprenticeship market, many students are oriented towards “waiting rooms” which are transitional solutions (OFS, 2003). This type of educational pathway can be considered as discontinuous, but also as problematic because many students are lagging behind in education (34% of them obtained no post-compulsory certification in 2007, although about 58% obtained VE certification).

The third pathway, *Vocational Education then Employment or NEET* (VE-EM/NEET) regroups mainly individuals who began post-compulsory education with a VE and then had a discontinuous insertion on the labor market. In fact, from 2004 to 2007 about 90% of them spent at least one year NEET. In addition, as for the previous pathway, 31% of them obtained no post-compulsory certification in 2007 (67% obtained VE certification). This pathway can thus also be considered as problematic.

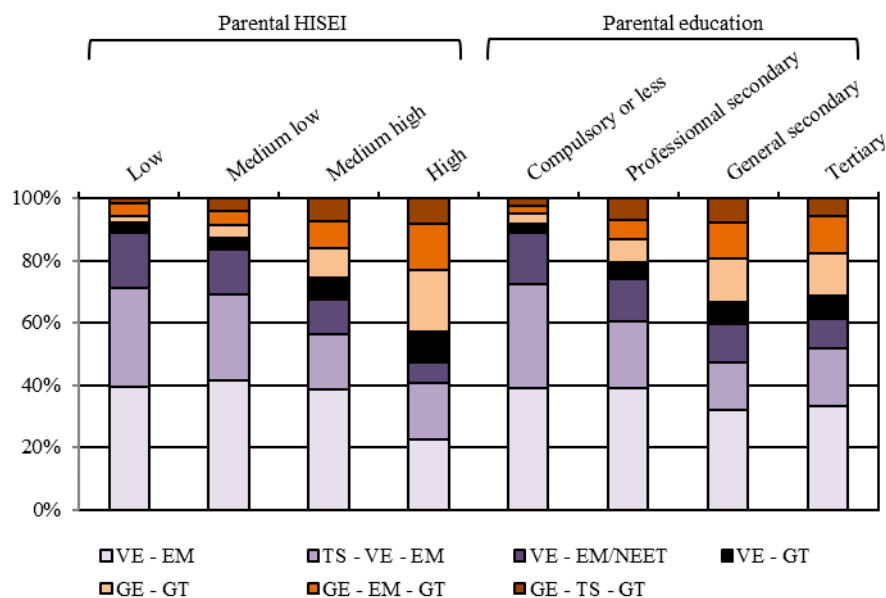
The fourth pathway, *Vocational Education then General Tertiary education* (VE-GT) is an upwardly mobile educational pathway. This type is mainly composed of individuals who obtained a professional baccalaureate certificate (83%)—and continued to GT. In 2007, 98% were involved in GT.

The fifth pathway, *General Education then General Tertiary education* (GE-GT) regroups individuals who took the more direct and valorized path to classical universities. They obtained a general baccalaureate certification and continued directly their education in the GT stream. In 2007, 93% obtained at least GE certification, and 15% had already obtained GT certification just seven years after the end of compulsory education.

The sixth pathway, *General Education then Employment then General Tertiary Education* (GE-EM-GT) regroups mainly those individuals who undertook a GE after the end of compulsory education (100%) then spent at least one year working or NEET (95%) and undertook general or professional tertiary education. In 2007, 3% of this group had no post-compulsory certification, 61% obtained a baccalaureate certificate and 21% had already obtained a tertiary certificate.

The seventh educational pathway, *General Education then Transitional Solution and General Tertiary* (GE-TS-GT) regroups mainly individuals who needed TS (that allowed them to reach universities or universities of applied sciences) between 4 and 7 years after the end of compulsory education in order to reach tertiary or another type of secondary education. In 2007, 8% of individuals on this pathway obtained no post-compulsory certification, 24% obtained VE certification, 56% acquired the baccalaureate and 10% reached tertiary certification.

Chart 1. Distribution onto educational pathways according to parental HISEI and education



Source: Our elaboration on TREE data

An interesting fact is that the educational pathways taken by youths are highly correlated to the SES of their parents. Youths with low SES or with poorly educated parents tend to take a vocational and/or problematic pathway (purple color on Chart 1).

Which educational pathway by ethnic origin?

Distributions by ethnic origin onto educational pathways are represented on *Chart 2*. Natives are less represented on the pathways we identify as being problematic (TS-VE-EM and VE-EM/NEET) while those of the second-generation with a low SES – from the former-Yugoslavia/Albania and from Portugal/Turkey – are more represented. In addition, those from the former-Yugoslavia/Albania and from Portugal/Turkey are clearly underrepresented in the four pathways leading to tertiary education (respectively 8 and 10% of them). Second-generation pupils from Italy/Spain are located in between, with 35% situated on the two problematic pathways and 19% on pathways that lead to tertiary education. We can link the situation of the different ethnic groups to their SES level and tracking⁶ (see Annex 1). The second-generation from the former-Yugoslavia/Albania and Turkey/Portugal have, on average, a low SES and are underrepresented on baccalaureate and extended tracks, while natives and the second-generation from other origins have a high SES and are overrepresented on the baccalaureate track.

Chart 2. Distribution by ethnic origin onto educational pathways

	VE-EM	TS-VE-EM	VE-EM/NEET	VE-GT	GE-GT	GE-EM-GT	GE-TS-GT	Total	N
Natives	39%	20%	11%	7%	8%	9%	6%	59%	2334
2G. Italy Spain	46%	26%	9%	2%	12%	3%	2%	4%	165
2G. F. Yugoslavia Albania	36%	27%	28%	1%	4%	2%	1%	7%	277
2G. Portugal Turkey	31%	40%	20%	4%	3%	2%	1%	4%	173
2G. Other	33%	25%	13%	7%	9%	8%	4%	4%	150
1G.	15%	57%	18%	2%	5%	2%	2%	3%	134
2.5G.	31%	27%	10%	5%	12%	9%	6%	18%	700
Total	36%	24%	13%	6%	9%	8%	5%	100%	3933

Source: Our elaboration on TREE data

⁶ Correlations between educational pathways with HISEI, HISCED and tracks are respectively “.291”, “.204” and “-.441”.

When we look at the odds ratios by ethnic origin compared to natives on *Chart 3*, we can see that the second-generation from Italy/Spain has a greater likelihood compared to natives of being on the continuous pathway “VE–EM”, and a lesser one of being on two pathways that both lead to GT (VE-GT, GE-EM-GT).

Those from the former-Yugoslavia/Albania and from Portugal/Turkey are more likely to be on both problematic pathways (TS-VE-EM and VE-EM/NEET) and less on any pathway to GT. Thus they are clearly disadvantaged in the Swiss educational system.

Chart 3. Odds ratio by ethnic origin compared to natives

Ref. = Natives	VE-EM	TS-VE-EM	VE-EM/NEET	VE-GT	GE-GT	GE-EM-GT	GE-TS-GT
2G. Italy Spain	1.45•	1.44	0.65	0.36•	1.22	0.37•	0.35
2G. F.-Yugoslavia Albania	0.83	1.80***	2.51***	0.18***	0.41**	0.22***	0.39
2G. Portugal Turkey	0.69•	3.37***	1.57•	0.41•	0.25**	0.27**	0.28
2G. Other	0.81	1.43	1.19	1.15	0.87	0.89	0.65
1G.	0.29***	5.73***	1.66•	0.39	0.38•	0.18•	0.29
2.5G.	0.74**	1.62***	0.86	0.87	1.17	0.97	0.85

Controlled for gender, linguistic region and number of siblings

Sig levels : *** P<0.001; ** P<0.01; • P<0.05

N= 3927

Source: Our elaboration on TREE data

When we control for SES (*see Chart 4*), we can see that there are no further differences between the second-generation from Italy/Spain and natives, except the fact that they more often take the pathway that leads directly to university. So we can confirm that the main differences are explained by SES for this ethnic group. But some differences remain for those from the former-Yugoslavia/Albania, who still more often undertake the professional pathway marked by inactivity (VE-EM/NEET) and less often the continuous pathways (VE-EM and GE-GT).

Nevertheless, we observe no differences for other pathways. The Portuguese/Turkish second-generation more often undertakes the professional delayed pathway (TS-VE-EM) instead of the continuous one (VE-EM). Thus we can see that SES has a huge impact on the type of post-compulsory pathway taken (even if all differences are not entirely explained by it). So, it could be interesting to go further in seeking to understand how SES concretely impacts on educational pathways.

Chart 4. Odds ratio by ethnic origin compared to natives when controlling for SES

Ref. = Natives	VE-EM	TS-VE-EM	VE-EM/NEET	VE-GT	GE-GT	GE-EM-GT	GE-TS-GT
2G. Italy Spain	1.28	1.08	0.57	0.44	2.42**	0.53	0.39
2G. F.-Yugoslavia Albania	0.60***	1.16	2.09***	0.25**	1.03	0.43	0.61
2G. Portugal Turkey	0.65•	2.03***	1.11	0.66	0.71	0.72	0.34
2G. Other	1.01	1.62•	0.34•	1.35	0.79	0.69	0.79
1G.	0.28***	2.69***	1.90•	0.71	0.89	0.44	0.14
2.5G.	0.73**	1.61***	0.85	0.84	1.17	0.99	0.98

Controlled for gender, linguistic region and number of siblings, highest educational attainment of parents, highest occupational status of parents

Sig levels : *** P<0.001; ** P<0.01; • P<0.05

N= 3593

Source: Our elaboration on TREE data.

In the following section, we focus more specifically on how and by which mechanisms SES influences and impacts on the educational trajectories of the children of Albanian-speaking immigrants from the former-Yugoslavia.

After having outlined the SES of the qualitative sample, we will look, first, at the mechanisms that take place within migrant families, by differentiating between the occupational status and educational attainment of the parents and, second, within the educational system.

Which “hidden” mechanisms?

The SES of our qualitative sample is measured first of all by the highest educational attainment of the parents. Of 50 interviewees, 20 have parents with a compulsory education level or less, 14 have at least one parent with a VE degree and 16 have at least one parent with tertiary education or baccalaureate certification. The educational attainment of our sample tends to be high compared to the representative database (see Annex 1). We can also see that the occupational status of the parents tends to counterbalance it. In fact, due to the lack of recognition of degrees and diplomas obtained in foreign countries, the parents often experience processes of professional downgrading in Switzerland, which means that the occupational status reached is lower than expected. In the qualitative sample, 13 interviewees have parents who experienced professional downgrading (7 of them achieved a tertiary degree in the country of origin yet are unskilled workers in Switzerland) while, on the contrary, only 3 have parents who experienced professional upgrading. In addition, 14 have parents who receive disability benefits (3 earned tertiary degrees in the country of origin) which means that the parents' incomes are lower. The classification of these cases may be difficult on an occupational scale. Thus the SES of Albanian-speaking parents tends to be underestimated or in some way biased when considering only educational attainment and occupational status. In the TREE database, when looking at the highest international socioeconomic index (HISEI), descendants of migrants from the former-Yugoslavia are at the bottom of the social ladder, lower than those with Italian or Spanish parents (Meyer, 2003), but their parents are more highly educated than Italian or Spanish parents (see Annex 1). To better measure the SES of the second-generation, it would be interesting to take into account educational attainment and occupational status not only at the moment of the survey but also before the migration and, as suggested by Sirin (2005), by household income.

Within the migrant family

In many interviews, we observe the well-known effect of low parental occupational status on the education of the children. In fact low occupational status and economic deprivation imply, in general, less money to invest in repeaters, books, computers and school supplies, living in

difficult conditions and in small households. For example, Erina⁷ explains how it was difficult to live in a small apartment. *“During the first years (in Switzerland) some family members lived with us too, my uncle too. We were a lot in this apartment with 2 bedrooms (...). We were a lot of people sleeping in bedrooms. It was not a place where we could have privacy in a quiet room to study.”* But for many Albanian families, low occupational status combines with other elements that can impact negatively on education, as, for example, migrant families having a precarious legal status or no legal status at all, economical transnational obligations, or health problems that prevent them from working (invalidity benefits), etc. The example of Dren’s family⁸ illustrates that difficult life conditions are linked to low occupational status and many other elements. In this case, long judicial proceedings prevent them from obtaining residence permits in Switzerland and a scholarship during secondary education.

Interviewer: *Did you or your parents receive any scholarship or study grant?*

Dren: We couldn’t until last year because my parents, it’s quite complicated. My father worked at the Embassy of “---” and six years ago he was fired while on sick leave. That was illegal and we lost the diplomatic permit. The Swiss state intervened to manage the problem because my father didn’t want to defend his rights against a country (...). So the procedure still continues today. (...) so for a long time we couldn’t receive any scholarships (...). My father had heart surgery, he’s OK but he cannot work. And my mother has back problems because she worked as a chambermaid. She has three discal hernias but they consider that she’s able to work so it’s a permanent conflict, a judicial remedy. (...) So it’s something really tangled, a stroke of bad luck.

Thus, for many families, the low occupational status of the parents combined with other elements engender inadequate educational conditions. Many youngsters face difficult family situations and must shoulder responsibilities, such as taking care of their brothers and sisters, assisting their parents with administrative tasks, or working in school time in order to contribute to the household income, etc., that can divert them from their studies. Nevertheless, for some of them, these responsibilities can also

⁷ Erina is the second daughter of a large family of 7 children. She reached tertiary education (specialized schools) though a discontinuous trajectory (VE-GT). Her mother is a housewife and her father is a construction worker.

⁸ Dren studies law at the University (GE-GT). Both parents are on disability benefits. His father obtained his baccalaureate and had a small shop in Kosovo. His mother finished compulsory school and never worked before arriving in Switzerland.

enable them to develop administrative competence and can enrich their work experience as long as they do not restrict their educational choices or trajectories.

In some cases, youths are encouraged or must work during their education in order to contribute to the family income (to cover expenditure such as rent, insurance or educational costs, to support family projects like buying a house, or to invest in their country of residence or of origin, to help other family members, and to cover the young people's personal expenditure, etc.), as was the case for Yllka⁹, the fifth child of a large family.

Interviewer: *What did you do with your income?*

Yllka: During the baccalaureate it was more for clothes and school supplies, a school bag. After (during university), I received an important scholarship. My father's employer gave him 300 per month so with that I paid for the studio apartment. And the scholarship, I gave it to my parents; it was 20,000 per year. And I worked every weekend and it was enough for me to buy clothes and food. And the day I need any extra I ask my parents.

But in some rare cases, the financial situation of the family (including state benefits) is so difficult that it directly restricts the educational trajectories of the young. Both the older children in Yllka's family had to work when they arrived in Switzerland whereas they were in a baccalaureate school in Kosovo.

Yllka: The situation in Kosovo was difficult... in fact we lost everything during the war. Our house was destroyed, two brothers of my father stayed there with nothing. And before we arrived in Switzerland my father always helped us, he sent money because it was difficult before and during the war, but even now it still is. And because of that my sisters worked at the factory.

Interviewer: *So they didn't study in Switzerland?*

Yllka: No, they have nothing (no certification). We urgently needed money because we were many. (...) So it's also thanks to them that my father rebuilt our three houses in Kosovo, two for his brothers and one for us.

⁹ Yllka is the fifth child of a large family (7 children). She obtained a Master's degree at the university (GE-GT). She's the only child of this family to reach tertiary education. Given the difficult economic conditions of the family, parents could "invest" in tertiary education only for Yllka. The father was a foreman in the former-Yugoslavia and is a skilled worker in Switzerland. The mother finished compulsory education in Kosovo and is a housewife.

In these interview extracts we observed that the low occupational status of parents often goes hand in hand with other constraints and that this accumulation does not allow optimal educational conditions and sometimes can directly affect educational trajectories. Nevertheless, we noticed the importance of individual and familial strategies to improve study conditions. Scholarships and study grants provided by the state are also paramount. These financial resources help many descendants of Albanian-speaking immigrants to undertake long educational pathways, specifically when they face difficult living conditions.

In addition to the effect of parental occupational status on the educational outcomes of their descendants, we will now investigate the relation between parental educational attainment, educational aspirations (of parents and youths) and youths' educational trajectories. The correlation between these elements has been considered as strong (Sirin, 2005; Bauer & Riphahn, 2006; Meyer, 2011; Santagati, 2011; Ressa & Anzzolini, 2014) and confirmed for the second-generation from the former-Yugoslavia according to our analysis of the TREE data. In the following paragraphs, we will compare the children of parents with low and those with high educational attainment (respectively compulsory education or less vs baccalaureate or tertiary education) in order to identify the different mechanisms that impact on their educational trajectories.

The first element to highlight from our qualitative interviews is that, independent from the educational attainment of parents and their reasons for migration (work or asylum), all life and migration projects are deeply linked to the will to improve the living and/or safety conditions of the family and to the idea of or a strategy for a certain type of upward social mobility¹⁰. Nevertheless, we identified two main types of social mobility strategy related to the education of parents and thus to cultural capital.

The first type of social mobility strategy, mainly present in families with less-educated parents and on VE pathways, is tied to the idea of professional success, to the importance of students earning their own money through hard work and quickly gaining their independence from

¹⁰ The relation between the migration project and the willingness to be socially mobile has been pointed out for Italian and Spaniards in Switzerland (Bolzman, Fibbi, & Vial, 2003) and as a general trend in France (Vallet, 1996).

parental and state financial support, as illustrated in the following interview extracts from Ismet¹¹ and Luan¹²:

Ismet: I must make it right in the sense that I have to succeed (...). I have all I need to succeed today. Nobody tells me that I have to but when I see that my parents suffered, I have to. If I don't, the sacrifice of my parents will have been wasted. We mustn't disappoint people. My parents for instance expect a lot from us, that we succeed.

Interviewer: *And what do you mean by succeed?*

Ismet: To obtain a (post-compulsory) certificate, to have a good job, a good financial situation, a good family.

Interviewer: *And where does it come from, this willingness to do business?*

Luan: I don't know... It's maybe my father who tries to instill that in me every day. It's obviously thanks to him... but... it's also a leitmotiv. I love to create problems for myself, to challenge myself. To achieve challenges, it's another story.

Parents and children often have low educational aspirations which are related to the cultural capital of the parents, and to the lack of available resources or social capital to support the children's education (sometimes the result of adapting aspirations according to school performance or of the limitations caused by tracking). Children tend to invest only slightly in education and the parents have limited scholastic and/or linguistic competence to concretely support their children's education.

Interviewer: *During your education, who do you ask for help when homework was difficult?*

Flamur¹³: (he laughs) Not my parents, they are bad. Well they finished professional school but the problem is that in French they understand nothing. I'll tell you what I do. When I arrive in the morning at school, I copy everything from the exercise book of a friend and that's it. I can tell you that I almost never did my homework.

¹¹ Ismet obtained a professional certificate as a glazier (VE-EM). His father finished vocational education in Kosovo. His mother finished compulsory education. Both are employed in low-skilled jobs.

¹² Luan is the elder brother in a family with two children. After finishing compulsory school on an extended track, he spent two years at a baccalaureate school and changed to a professional commercial baccalaureate. He actually earns a lot of money in a commercial property business (VE-EM).

¹³ Flamur is now a skilled operator in the watch industry after an apprenticeship (VE-EM). Both parents obtained a professional certificate, his father works as a deliveryman and his mother receives disability benefit.

Reaching any type of post-compulsory education is already considered as a success in these families. *“When I achieved my VE, I told myself ‘OK, I have succeeded in my life’. I have at least a VE. If not, you’re nothing. You can’t find a job. All I wanted was to obtain a VE, no matter which one.” (Flamur)*. Thus social recognition and social mobility are gained through work, earnings and symbolic material possessions, such as having an expensive car and nice clothes and travelling.

The second type of social mobility strategy (mainly present on “GE-GT”, “GE-EM-GT” and “GE-TS-GT” pathways and less on professional pathways) is characterized by the idea of success through education. In this case, most of the time, parents and children share high educational aspirations and consider education as the most relevant investment to enable intergenerational upward mobility and social success. The desire for social mobility through education is more often present in families with educated parents though also sometimes in families with low parental educational attainment¹⁴. For most parents and youths, the main target is university (sometimes the more valorized university branches such as medicine, law or business) or, when this is not possible, then the highest educational level attainable according to the youngsters’ school performance and to the track attended at the end of lower-secondary school.

Dren: They saw that I was going to continue to university so my parents liked that and they supported me. (...) Now my sister is in medicine, I study law and my parents had many health and administrative problems so we are meeting their expectations. (...) Their expectations were for us to go to-university so now we have reached this level, they support us (...).

Interviewer: *And what if you had chosen an apprenticeship*

Dren: I don’t think they would have liked it. It’s related to school performance. They always told me that I have to reach 100% of my potential. ‘You don’t have to continue with an apprenticeship because it’s “degrading” to work’. We must reach the maximum level.

Nevertheless, the high educational aspirations of parents are often counterbalanced by the parental lack of French-language skills, of knowledge of the Swiss educational system and of the social capital considered necessary to mobilize the social networks of parents as a source of information and of potential support in their children’s education

¹⁴ Thus we agree with the results of Santagati (2011) and the fact that investment in education and upward mobility are present in low cultural capital and low SES families.

(Coleman, 1988). But many youngsters look to others (older siblings, friends, teachers or neighbours) for support, knowledge and information on the different educational possibilities and thus develop strategies to compensate for the lack of concrete support from their parents.

In some rare cases parents impose their high educational aspirations for the youngsters with a more “deterministic logic” (Santagati, 2011), sometimes because they consider that there are no other options for them to reach university through baccalaureate schools (GE-GT) or at least to reach the highest possible educational level. These cases often lead to young people becoming disinterested in education and to more discontinuous trajectories, as was the case for Mirina¹⁵.

Mirina: In fact, after (compulsory school), I applied to the specialized school because I wanted to work in something linked to biology or to the pharmaceutical industry. And my sister did the commercial school (the more valorized scholarly apprenticeship) and my father thought it was the best thing to do. And given that we live in Switzerland and we have that ‘migrant thing’, that they want their children to achieve the best education possible, he wanted me to go to business school instead of the specialized school (...). And as I was a minor and I needed the consent of a parent to register for school, my father told me ‘No you won’t go’ and I couldn’t say anything, I did the business school.

After having explored different types of “hidden” mechanisms related to SES that take place within families, we now look at mechanisms within the educational system.

Within the educational system

In many studies on the effect of SES on education, mainly those based on Boudon’s (1973) approach to inequalities, the effect of the interrelationship between SES and the educational system is often ignored. In countries like Switzerland, where the educational system is considered to be highly unequal and to reproduce social inequalities (OECD, 2009), it is of paramount importance to take into account this effect.

¹⁵ Mirina is unemployed. After finishing lower-secondary on the highest requirement track she undertook a business school certificate (VE), changed three years later to a dual business apprenticeship and then also stopped this. She had not obtained any post-compulsory certification 13 years after the end of compulsory school. Both parents reached higher education in Kosovo and are unskilled workers in Switzerland.

In fact, in Switzerland, the selection of students into tracks is highly correlated to the SES of families, given that school performance is correlated with SES and the cultural capital of families (Falter, Ferro Luzzi, & Sbergami, 2010). In addition Kronig (2007) and Sacchi, Hupka-Brunner, Stalder, and Gangl (2011) showed that gender, SES and ethnic origin are variables that influence selection onto different tracks even when controlling for school performance. Thus selection onto different tracks can be considered as an institutionalization of school performance and SES difference measured at the age of 12 years old. And tracks followed can be considered as an institutionalization of unequal post-compulsory educational opportunities (Murdoch, Guégnard, Koomen, Imdorf, & Hupka-Brunner, 2014).

Generally, tracking is viewed by interviewees as something normal, as a “natural” restriction of post-compulsory educational opportunities based on school performance. Arbenor¹⁶ does not consider it as exclusion or as differential treatment, even if he was oriented onto the lowest track and dropped out of school one year later. *“Arbenor: I have always been treated like anybody else. At school I never saw a teacher who treats Albanians or foreigners differently. We have always been the same. (...). That’s nice here, they don’t differentiate between us.”* In some other cases, mostly when parents and youths have high educational aspirations, selection onto lower tracks can be considered as failure and can lead to the reevaluation of their educational aspirations or sometimes to students taking bridge years.

Eliana¹⁷: I was oriented onto VSO (lowest track). But it was not my level, they thought I was bad but it was because I was dyslexic. They told me ‘You are VSO, you will not go higher’. The year after I had the maximum average in every school branch and I had to repeat a school year to go to VSG (extended track).

Interviewer: But your parents wanted you to go to baccalaureate school...

Fitore¹⁸: Umm they were a little bit disappointed when they saw that I was on VSG

¹⁶ Arbenor didn’t finished compulsory school but he found an apprenticeship as a tinsmith. Then he easily found a job (VE-EM). His parents have a low educational attainment and only the father works as an unskilled worker.

¹⁷ Eliana obtained a professional baccalaureate in photography, spent one year at university in Kosovo but wants to continue in Switzerland (VE-GT). Her parents have a low educational attainment and only the father works, as a mechanic.

¹⁸ Fitore spent one year in a transitional situation, then completed a commercial apprenticeship and a professional baccalaureate (TS-VE-EM). She wants to become a teacher so she is considering a tertiary degree. Both parents obtained the baccalaureate. As a

(extended track) (...). My father told me 'I hope you will reach the bridge year course' but he saw that I was not really motivated. So they told me that I have to stay at the same level and find a good apprenticeship.

During the three years between initial selection and the end of compulsory education, we noticed that tracks and respective actors within each track have an effect on the educational aspirations of youths and on their post-compulsory educational trajectories. On the baccalaureate track, students are highly encouraged by their teachers, counselors, parents and peers¹⁹ to continue to baccalaureate even if all doors are still open. When asking about post-compulsory educational opportunities, the majority of interviewees considered baccalaureate school as the most relevant path, with business and specialized schools as a second choice; dual apprenticeships were not considered.

Interviewer: Did you consider the possibility of doing anything other than business school, an apprenticeship or baccalaureate school?

Mirina: We were misinformed so we were not aware of every possibility, for instance apprenticeships. They talk about the fact that we should go to baccalaureate school. It was all about baccalaureate school, nothing about business school or specialized school. I feel that they want us to continue on a more academic pathway more than on a professional one.

On the extended track, the majority of young people consider business school, specialized school or socially valued apprenticeships. On this track less socially valued apprenticeships or bridge-year courses to baccalaureate school are rarely considered as a possible path. Finally, the low requirement track leads only to apprenticeships and more specifically to less socially valued ones.

Flamur: When I was in VSO (lowest track), and I said to the school guidance counselor that I wanted to go to a professional school, he said 'Oh no, you won't succeed!' and things like 'Do masonry' or crap like that. (...) But I knew that I wanted to do something technical because I was good at maths. So I sent the letter to the school and I was accepted. And I did it without any problem.

plus, the father completed training in the electrical branch and the mother trained as a hairdresser. Both are unskilled workers in Switzerland.

¹⁹ Youths are often influenced by the choices of close friends who are on the same track level.

The inducement to choose an “easier” type of post-compulsory education (observed in the last excerpt from Flamur’s interview) also occurred in many cases when youths encountered difficulties or repeated a school year during post-compulsory education.²⁰

Conclusion

To summarize, different tracks in lower-secondary education can be represented as different tunnels where young people must follow the road that leads them through to the other side (to an expected or “natural” post-compulsory continuation) and where emergency exits (that lead to another lower or higher track and then to other post-compulsory education) should be taken only on rare occasions. Once oriented onto the baccalaureate or the extended track, the congruent influence of different actors (and of structural constraints for the extended track) pushes youngsters to continue to the highest post-compulsory education possible through a given track. If a youngster takes the lowest track, he or she is supported and constrained by the competitive apprenticeship market to continue into low-requirement vocational education or training. Thus, on every track, everybody who differs from the expected and scheduled pathways tends to be reoriented towards this latter track.

Another interesting fact is that the SES of the descendants of immigrants from the former-Yugoslavia, measured by the educational attainment and occupational status of the parents, tends to be slightly underestimated because of the process of professional downgrading.

In addition, the low SES of parents in this ethnic group is often nested within other constraints, such as precarious legal statuses, difficult living conditions and health problems, low social capital, a lack of knowledge (both youth and parents) of the educational system and, in some cases, latent discrimination. This accumulation of disadvantages explains why the children are so often oriented onto the lowest track (see Annex 1) and why a great proportion of them take short and sometimes problematic educational pathways (VE-EM; TS-VE-EM; VE-EM/NEET). Fortunately the accumulation of disadvantages and the effect of hidden mechanisms

²⁰ Nonetheless, we cannot measure any differential treatment compared with natives, given our methodological design.

related to a low SES are sometimes compensated for by high educational aspirations or by a certain willingness to invest in economic and professional success.

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Annex 1. Educational attainment, occupational status (HISEI) of parents and track followed by descendants by origin

	Highest educational attainment of parents				HISEI (standardized)	Track followed by descendants			
	Compulsory education or less	Vocational education	General education	Higher education		Baccalaureate track	Extended track	Basic track	No tracking
Natives	21%	30%	7%	42%	0.12	32%	44%	23%	1%
2G. Italy Spain	60%	17%	4%	19%	-0.22	37%	23%	38%	2%
2G. F.-Yugoslavia Albania	50%	16%	7%	28%	-0.93	11%	23%	61%	5%
2G. Portugal Turkey	77%	17%	2%	4%	-0.47	19%	24%	46%	11%
2G. Other	21%	8%	4%	67%	0.19	23%	41%	32%	5%
1G.	48%	12%	1%	39%	-0.91	7%	16%	74%	4%
2.5G.	26%	19%	9%	46%	0.23	30%	40%	28%	2%
Total	19%	25%	7%	39%	0.00	28%	39%	30%	2%

Source: Our elaboration on TREE data

Annex 2. Figure 1. Post-compulsory educational pathways in Switzerland, frequency of annual activities

