



SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION IN SWITZERLAND. RESULTS AS OF 2004 FROM THE TREE PANEL SURVEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TREE is a longitudinal survey which follows up a sample of the national school leavers cohort having reached the end of compulsory schooling in 2000. This brief report gives an overview over the main intermediate results of the TREE survey panels 1-4, carried out in a yearly rhythm between 2001 and 2004, as regards the post-compulsory educational and labour market pathways of youth in Switzerland.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Panel 4 of TREE, carried out in spring 2004, shows that young people in Switzerland pass through the upper secondary level at very different paces. Whereas some were only just beginning their education or training, others had already finished it and were working or studying at the tertiary level. In spring 2004, a good third of the cohort (36%) had obtained an upper secondary level diploma. Approximately a quarter more would have finished at the end of the school year 2003/04, giving a rate of upper secondary certification of about two thirds. During this 4th year, upper secondary level enrolment of the cohort has passed its zenith: after seeing rates above 80% in the 2nd and 3rd years, during this 4th year a little less than half the cohort remains enrolled in upper secondary education. In the 5th year, this rate is expected to drop to about 15%.

In spring 2004 approximately 6% of the cohort was enrolled in tertiary education or training (university, higher vocational training). Nearly a third had left the educational system: 20% had obtained an upper secondary level diploma, 11% had left upper secondary education or training without obtaining a diploma - whether temporarily or definitively remains to be seen. The risk of not being enrolled in post-compulsory education or training is very unequally distributed: It is substantially increased (20-25%) among those who attended lower secondary tracks designed for modest achievers, who come from modest social backgrounds and/or who had shown a low level of reading literacy in 9th grade.

EMPLOYMENT

For the third of the cohort which was not or no longer in education or training in spring 2004, TREE data pertaining to occupation were systematically analysed for the first time. The analyses show that conditions for youth entering the labour market - and those for staying there - are far from being favourable and sometimes precarious. About three out of four youth of this group have an employment. This proportion is significantly higher for upper secondary VET¹ graduates than for youth without a post-compulsory degree. Approximately a third of the group had experienced a period of unemployment during the twelve months preceding the 4th TREE panel of 2004. The risk of unemployment is appreciably higher among the young people who had not obtained an upper secondary diploma. But even for VET graduates, it is higher than 30%. This shows that completing upper secondary education or training is a necessity, but does not guarantee an easy entry into the labour force.

This difficulty is also underlined by a series of characteristics of precariousness, which concerns VET graduates almost as often as the young people without a post-compulsory degree. One of those characteristics is that about half of the employed youth did not have any other job offer when they started working. Another indicator of precariousness is the fact that one in five VET graduates holds a job for which no VET diploma was required. Lastly, the young people entering the labour market receive relatively modest wages (approx. 3'800 francs gross per month).

¹ Vocational Education and Training

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is one of the central themes when it comes to the question of transition of young people towards adult life and employment. Unfortunately, the intensity of the debate among politicians and in the media often does not keep up with the (admittedly scarce) empiric knowledge of the phenomenon currently available in Switzerland.

Since 2001, the TREE (Transitions from School to Employment) project has been able to fill, at least partially, some of the gaps in knowledge. TREE is the first Swiss national longitudinal study surveying the transition of young people towards adulthood, with particular attention paid to their education, training and occupation after the end of their compulsory schooling.

So far the TREE project has published several reports focussing on the transition from compulsory school to vocational training or general education (see bibliography p. 15). With the results presented here, TREE gives a first glimpse of the intricate interface between upper secondary education or training and employment or tertiary level studies. The analyses attempt to answer the following questions:

- How far has the cohort (compulsory school leavers from school year 1999/2000) progressed through upper secondary education and working life?
- How well do VET graduates succeed in entering the labour market?
- When it comes to labour market entry, how do VET graduates compare with those who remain (up until 2004) without an upper secondary level diploma?

This booklet tries to provide preliminary answers to these questions. However these are provisional for several reasons. There is a considerable proportion of the PISA/TREE cohort that has yet to make the transition into adulthood and employment. Compared to the whole of the panel, the subsample that has already joined the labour market in 2004 has to be considered as a kind of avant-garde. Future analyses will primarily have to focus on how the professional careers evolve after the first labour market entry.

The TREE project team will continue to work on this issue, hopefully along with an increasing number of other researchers equally keen to exploit the richness of the TREE panel data. Until then, we wish you a captivating and stimulating reading of this first "appetizer".

GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL REMARK

Figures calculated on the base of TREE data are not exact values, but approximations with a certain margin of error. Within those margins, they are representative for the population of young people who finished compulsory school in 2000). The data in this publication as a rule are expressed in integer percentages or are rounded to thousands in the case of absolute population estimates. This publication comments only on results and differences that are statistically significant. More precise information on the errors in estimation and of rounding can be obtained from TREE.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Situation in 2004 (4th year after leaving compulsory school)

Up to 2004, the cohort has progressed at strongly varying paces through the upper secondary level. (see figure 1). Whereas some had only recently started an upper secondary level course, others had already completed their education at this level and entered the labour force or begun tertiary level studies.

In 2004, a good third (36%) of the cohort had completed upper secondary education or training, i.e. 23% vocational training and 13% general education.

FIGURE 1 POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ENROLMENT AND DIPLOMAS IN THE 4TH YEAR AFTER LEAVING (COMPULSORY) SCHOOL

Situation in spring 2004	Upper secondary diploma obtained?			Total	
	Yes		No	%	Population estimate
	VET	General education			
Upper secondary level: VET	4%	*	38%	43%	34'000
Upper secondary level: general education	*	*	11%	12%	10'000
Other education/training, work placement (not tertiary)	2%	3%	2%	8%	6'000
Tertiary level education or training	*	5%		6%	5'000
Not in education or training (anymore)	16%	4%	11%	31%	25'000
Total	%	23%	13%	64%	100%
	Population estimate	18'000	10'000	51'000	80'000

The percentages refer to the total of the cohort (80 000).

*The table cells that show * represent less than 1% of the cohort.*

Due to rounding errors, the row and column totals may differ slightly from the sum of the added single values.

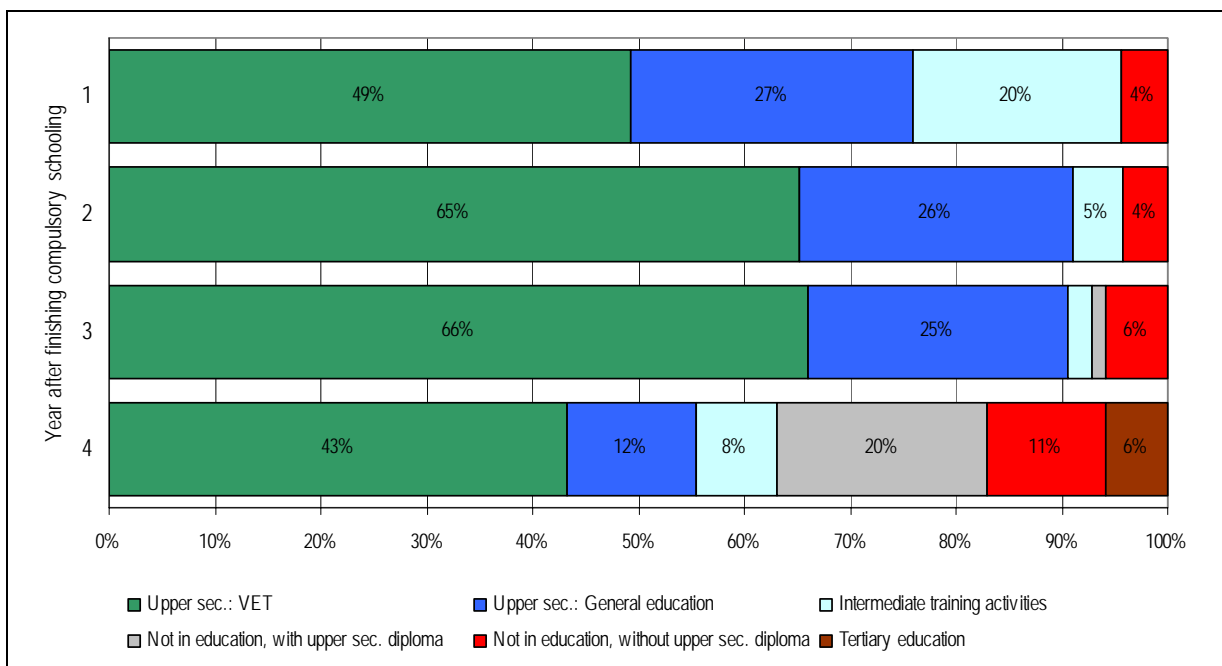
In spring 2004, about half of the cohort was still in upper secondary education and had not yet obtained a diploma (38% in VET, 11% in general education). However, a large number of this group (approximately two out of three) was about to obtain their diploma in the summer following the 2004 TREE panel. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that approximately two thirds of the cohort will have obtained an upper secondary certificate by the end of the school year 2003/04 (in summer 2004). This implies that in the fifth year after compulsory education, approximately 15% of the cohort still would be found in upper secondary education or training without having (yet) obtained a first certificate at that level.

Evolution 2001-2004

In 2001, the first year after finishing compulsory education, approximately three quarters (76%) of the cohort were enrolled in upper secondary education and training programmes, with a ratio 2:1 between VET and general education. About a quarter of the cohort failed to access upper secondary education or training programmes directly. These students were mainly to be found in intermediate or preparatory training years or work placements (20%). Only a small minority, approx 4%, did not undertake any education or training at all.

During the second and third years following compulsory school, upper secondary enrolment of the cohort reached its maximum (>80%). The majority (two out of three) of those attending "intermediate solutions" during the previous year entered vocational education and training. The percentage of the cohort enrolled in general education remains constantly at approximately one quarter, whereas less than 10% failed to enrol in (certifying) upper secondary education or training altogether.

FIGURE 2 : EDUCATION AND TRAINING SITUATION: EVOLUTION 1-4 YEARS AFTER COMPULSORY SCHOOL



N=100%=80'000

The fourth year marks for many the beginning of the transition from upper secondary education to the labour market or tertiary level studies. Upper secondary enrolment drops sharply, and nearly one third of the cohort is no longer in education (31%). 20% obtained an upper secondary diploma, while 11% remain without a post-compulsory degree.² 6% of the cohort had started tertiary level studies.

At this point of progress of the cohort, upper secondary completion rate is markedly lower among men and in the French resp. Italian ("Latin") speaking regions.³ (maximum value: 47% of women from German-speaking Switzerland; minimum value: 20% among men from Latin Switzerland).

This gender disparity is all the more worth noting considering that women enter VET markedly more often than men indirectly, by way of intermediate training activities. This has to be put in context with the strong gender segregation of the vocational training market in Switzerland, which manifests itself, among other things, in the fact that VET for "male" professions lasts considerably longer than VET for "female" professions.⁴

² One in five among those remaining without a post-compulsory degree never actually entered an upper secondary programme leading to such a degree.

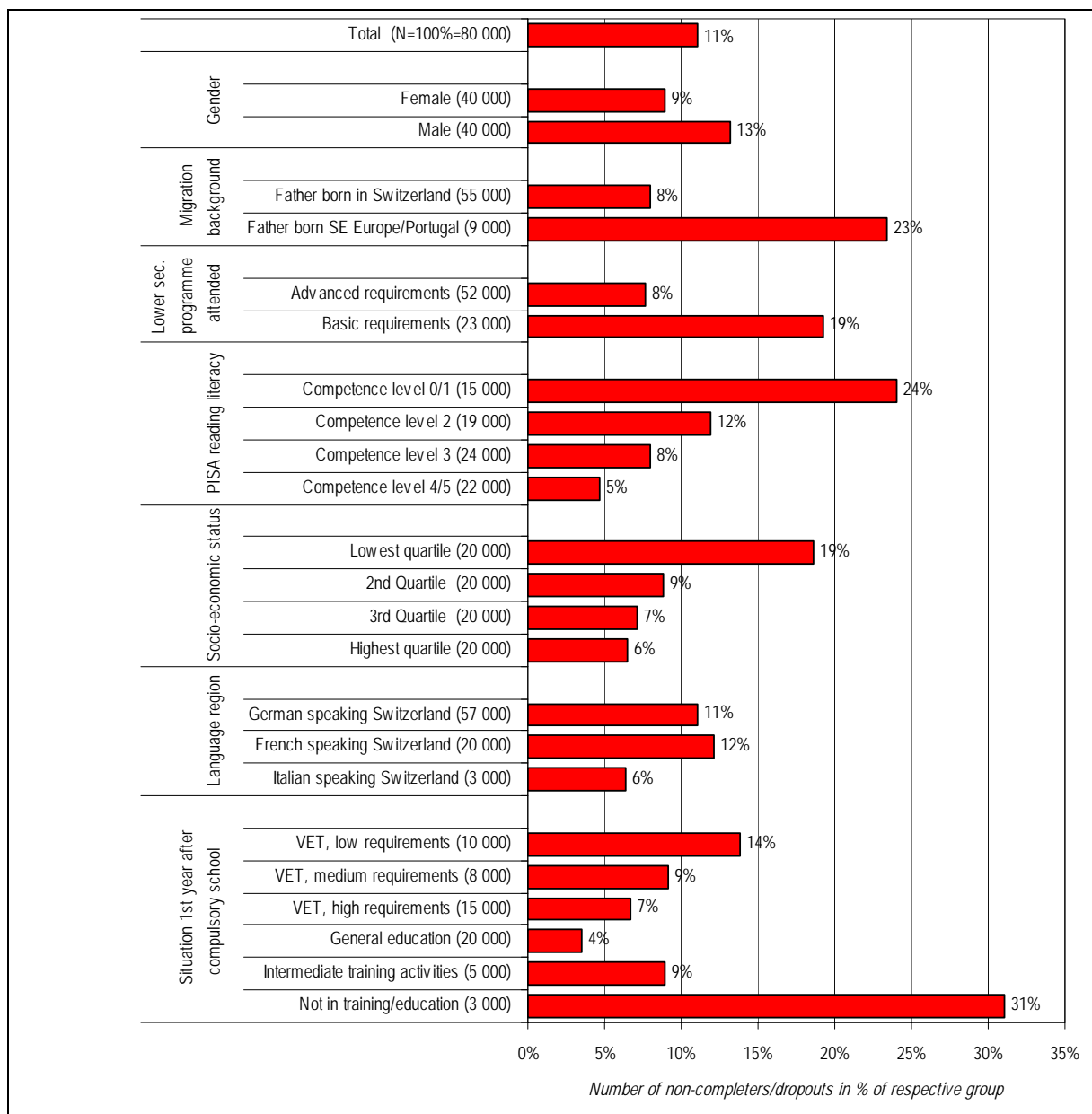
³ Due to small subsample size, data for Italian speaking Switzerland are often statistically unreliable. Whenever this is the case, the data for the French and Italian speaking parts are joined together under the label "Latin".

⁴ Vocational training always shows a clear statistical relationship between the duration of the training and gender. Women are clearly over-represented in two-year programmes, such as sales assistant or office clerk (which are no longer available under the new vocational training law). Men on the other hand are over-represented in four-year programmes such as electrician, car mechanic or carpenter. The result is that the average training duration of men is nearly a half year longer than that of women (about 3,5 years vs. 3 years)

Not in education

In the 4th year after leaving compulsory school, 11% of the PISA/TREE cohort are neither in education (any more) nor have they obtained an upper secondary level diploma. This percentage is equivalent to approximately 9'000 young people per age cohort in Switzerland. Although these results are provisional and must be read with caution (theoretically, these young adults can still acquire a diploma later on), it is likely that a large majority of this group will never obtain an upper secondary level diploma. This "non-completion/dropout" rate corresponds rather well with the population estimates of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office⁵.

FIGURE 3: UPPER SECONDARY NON-COMPLETION/DROPOUT, 4TH YEAR AFTER COMPULSORY SCHOOL



In parentheses: estimated size of population within the displayed category.

⁵ Estimates of upper secondary completion rates (see www.statistics.ch)

As figure 3 shows, this overall rate varies strongly with socio-demographic and performance/achievement characteristics. Young men are significantly more likely (13%) not to complete/to drop out of education or training than young women (9%).⁶

As far as migration background is concerned, nearly a quarter (23%) of young adults whose families come from south-east Europe turn out to be dropouts/non-completers, a percentage three times as high as among the "natives" (8%). The relative risk of not completing upper secondary education and training is also substantially increased (up to 19%) for youth having attended lower secondary tracks with reduced requirements, twice as high as for those in the academically more privileged lower secondary tracks.

Moreover, the TREE analyses show that non-completion/dropout risk distinctly rises with decreasing socio-economic status and with decreasing reading literacy. This result is particularly marked for the lowest category of each of these characteristics (lower quartile of SES: 19%; lowest category of reading literacy [levels 0/1]: 24%).

For the linguistic regions, the lowest rate of young people without education (6%) is found in Italian speaking Switzerland, which is less than half that of the other areas of the country (11/12%).

Finally, the circumstances under which the young people did or did not enter upper secondary education three years earlier also has an impact on the risk of upper secondary non-completion or dropout: This risk is particularly high amongst those who were already out of education or training in the first year after compulsory school (31%), and – somewhat less markedly - amongst those with a direct entry in VET with low requirements (14%).

⁶ Here, the results of TREE clearly contradict the SFSO data: according to SFSO, the ratio of women not in education is higher than that of men.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment and education are two activities which are by no means mutually exclusive. A third of the PISA/TREE cohort having an employment in spring 2004 was also enrolled in education or training, while almost a fifth (18%) of those who were in education or training also worked. Here, we are primarily interested in employment patterns of those who are not enrolled in full time education or training anymore, be it definitely or provisionally only, be it with or without having obtained an upper secondary diploma. Thereafter, we will consider only the young people who, in spring 2004, were not in education. Within this group, we are primarily interested in

- Youth who have obtained an upper secondary VET diploma up until spring 2004. This group includes mainly young people who, after leaving compulsory school, entered directly into a three years VET programme and completed it within the regular duration.
- young people who left upper secondary education or training prematurely and without a post-compulsory diploma - or who never gained access to it.

Figure 1 (see p. 5) showed that in the fourth year after compulsory school, a good third of the cohort - some 25'000 people - have left (full time) education or training. Some 16'000 of them (about two thirds) obtained an upper secondary VET diploma, the remaining 9'000 left their education - provisionally or finally - without having obtained a post-compulsory certificate.

Three quarters approximately of the young people having left the educational system are employed. Employment rate is significantly higher among VET graduates (83%) than among those without any upper secondary diploma (76%). In Latin Switzerland, the lack of an upper secondary diploma is a greater handicap to finding employment than elsewhere. In German-speaking Switzerland, this patterns applies to women only, while the contrary is the case for men in this part of the country. However, this anomaly is artificial and due to categorisation problems in regard to employment status during the military service.

FIGURE 4 : EMPLOYMENT RATE BY GRADUATION STATUS, GENDER AND REGION, 4TH POST-COMPULSORY YEAR

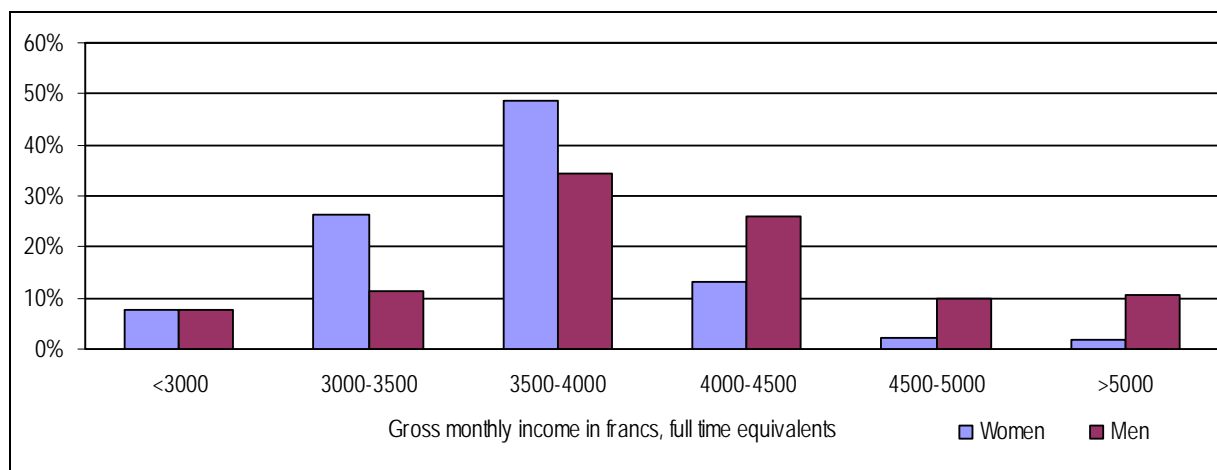
	Upper sec. VET diploma	No upper secondary diploma	N=100% (rounded to thousands)
German speaking Switzerland			
Women	94%	82%	8'000
Men	72%	82%	8'000
Latin (French or Italian speaking) Switzerland			
Women	87%	63%	2'000
Men	71%	62%	2'000
Total	83%	76%	21'000
N=100% (rounded to thousands)	12'000	9'000	21'000

* Numerator: number of cohort members who were employed and not in education (any more) in spring 2004
Denominator: number of cohort members who were not in education (any more) in spring 2004.

Income

Figure 5 gives the income distribution by gender, while figure 6 supplements this information by looking at the average income according to selected characteristics. Incomes are extrapolated to full-time employment, in order to avoid distortions due to part-time employment.

FIGURE 5: INCOME BY GENDER, 2004 (4TH YEAR AFTER COMPULSORY SCHOOL)



These data concern only the gainfully employed cohort members who were not in education (any more) in 2004. Valid data are available on the income of some 9'000 women and 7'000 men (extrapolated to the cohort population).

The data show clearly that the new entrants on the labour market mainly receive relatively modest incomes. The average gross income is below 4'000 francs per month, opening a gap of more than 1 500 francs to the mean income as regards the whole labour force⁷. Having obtained a VET diploma or not does not (yet) appear to play a role at this point of transition. However, this is expected to change rapidly with increasing seniority of VET graduates in the labour market.

FIGURE 6: INCOME BY GENDER, GRADUATION STATUS AND REGION

	Gross monthly income (mean, full-time equivalent, rounded to 100.-)			Diff. in salary men-women in % of the Ø	Estimation of the reference population
	Women	Men	Total		
Total	3'700	4'100	3'800	10%	16'000
Upper sec. graduation status					
VET diploma obtained	3'700	4'100	3'800	11%	9'000
No upper secondary diploma	3'600	4'100	3'900	13%	6'000
Linguistic region					
German speaking Switzerland	3'800	4'100	3'900	8%	13'000
French or Italian speaking Switzerland	3'100	3'900	3'500	23%	3'000

Gender differences seem to matter right from the start. On average, women earn approximately 400 francs less than men, a relative difference of 10%. Gender differences in wages are markedly more accentuated in Latin Switzerland than in German-speaking Switzerland (23% vs. 8%). The difference in average wages between the two linguistic areas is mainly due to the fact that women of western and southernmost Switzerland earn much less than their counterparts in German-speaking Switzerland (3'100 vs. 3'800 francs). The income differences between regions are less marked for men.

7 According to the labour force indicators published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO, Neuchâtel 2005) the median of the gross standardized (full time equivalent) income amounted to approximately 5'400 francs. The corresponding value is 3'700 francs for the TREE sub-sample analysed here.

Further employment characteristics

The range of activities carried out by the employed TREE subsample is extremely large. A thorough analysis of the occupational data will not be possible before 2006. However, the first exploratory analyses give some indications in regard to relevant employment characteristics of young labour market entrants.

The majority of the part of the TREE cohort being employed in spring 2004 is employed full-time (85%); 15% work part-time, young women already distinctly more frequently (21%) than young men (9%). Approximately three quarters of the young employed have a contract of unspecified duration, the remaining quarter have a contract which limits the period of employment.

Approximately 60% of the young labour force entrants had been searching a while before being employed, on average for three months. A good half of those being employed admitted that when they accepted their current employment, they did not have any alternatives, i.e. any another job offers at hand. Approximately one out of four indicate that their current employment did not ask for any particular requirements, which is an indicator for unqualified labour. The proportion of unqualified labour is significantly higher (one in three) for youth without an upper secondary diploma. However, a considerable minority of VET graduates also filled an unqualified workplace (one in five approximately).

Among the holders of VET diplomas, approximately 40% occupied an employment in the company where they previously did their training. For obvious reasons, this is more frequently the case in large companies than in small ones.

Unemployment

Youth unemployment - a theme currently much discussed - is a very frequent reality according to the TREE data. A third approximately of the TREE cohort has been laid off at some time or other during the 12 months preceding the fourth TREE survey panel. Figure 7 highlights that the risk of unemployment tends to be higher for young people without an upper secondary level diploma (35%) than for VET (31%). However, the figures clearly suggest that when it comes to first entry into the labour market, VET graduation is by no means a guarantee against unemployment.

FIGURE 7: UNEMPLOYMENT RISK DURING PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS (SITUATION SPRING 2004)

		Unemployment risk during past 12 months		Estimated population size (N=100%)	
		Upper secondary VET diploma	No upper secondary level diploma	Upper secondary VET diploma	No upper secondary level diploma
Total		31%	35%	10'000	6'000
Sex	Women	33%	40%	5'000	3'000
	Men	28%	32%	4'000	3'000
Linguistic region	German speaking Switzerland	30%	39%	8'000	4'000
	French or Italian speaking Switzerland	36%	26%	2'000	1'000

N=100%=youth of relevant category not being in education (any more) in 2004;

Definition of unemployment: youth agreeing with the statement "I have been unemployed" for a period of 12 months preceding TREE wave 4.

It is somewhat contradictory to note that in French-speaking Switzerland, the unemployment risk for VET graduates is higher than that of young people without an upper secondary diploma. However this result is based on a relatively small number of cases. It could also be related to regional differences in perception as regards the status of unemployment. The data of future TREE panels (5th and subsequent panels) will doubtlessly allow for more thorough analyses of this phenomenon.

NEET – NEITHER IN EDUCATION NOR IN EMPLOYMENT

In the 4th year after compulsory school, 8-9% of the TREE sample are neither in education nor in employment. That represents 6'000 to 7'000 people in the age cohort, a rather heterogeneous group. Two thirds of them have obtained an upper secondary diploma (VET or general education), and two thirds are men. When interpreting results pertaining to the "NEETs", the same methodological problems as those described on p. 9 arise: results are "blurred" by the fact that approximately 40% of this group are men doing their (compulsory) military service.

About one in four NEETs is registered as unemployed when surveyed by TREE in 2004. This proportion is appreciably higher among those who do not have an upper secondary diploma (approximately 40%). Between 50 and 60% of this group was in search of work.

Trivially, the (continuing) search for an upper secondary education or training opportunity is more intense among those without an upper secondary diploma. However, only a minority of youth within this critical group has not yet given up the ambition of completing an upper secondary graduation: one out of every three women and one out of every four men. The rest of this group seems to have abandoned the idea of (re-)entering post-compulsory education.

One in every six NEETs claims to be mainly occupied with their household. Not surprisingly, this ratio is up to almost a half (46%) among female NEETs without an upper secondary diploma. 5% claim to look after children as their main activity. Among the female NEETs without post-compulsory diploma, this proportion triples to reach 15%.

A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE TREE PROJECT

In Switzerland, TREE is the first national longitudinal research undertaken to study the transition of young people from school to adult life. The central topic of the study relates to the educational and occupational pathways after compulsory school. The initial TREE sample consists of approximately 6'000 young people who in 2000 took part in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), and who finished compulsory education the same year. The sample is representative at the national level, at the regional level as well as for some selected cantons.

During the first phase of the project (three annual survey panels until 2003), the research focussed on the pathways at the interface between compulsory school and upper secondary education. The main concern of this first phase was to describe and analyse the reasons, circumstances and effects of irregular, discontinuous pathways at this stage, with particular attention paid to early dropout.

In a second phase of TREE (four more survey panels between 2004 and 2007), the research is mainly concerned with the transition from upper secondary education and training to working life or tertiary education pathways.

TREE is organised as a consortium of the cantonal departments of education of Bern, Geneva and Ticino, and is substantially co-financed by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET).

Survey and sample design

Five TREE panel surveys have been carried out so far. The survey method used is a combination of standardized questionnaires in written and telephone form. To date, data from the first four panels (2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004) are available for analysis.

FIGURE 8: TREE SURVEY DESIGN (OVERVIEW)

Calendar year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Ø age of cohort	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	<p>End of compulsory school: 2000 Transitions lower sec. - upper sec.: 2000-2003 Transitions upper sec. -> employment /tertiary education: 2004-2007</p>							
<i>PISA/TREE-Survey design</i>	PISA 2000	TREE panel surveys completed				<i>TREE panel surveys planned</i>		
<i>Valid sample</i>		6343	5944	5605	5344	5048		
<i>No. of responses</i>		5532	5210	4880	4680	4502		
<i>Response rate panel specific</i>		87%	88%	87%	88%	89%		
<i>Response rate overall</i>			82%	76%	74%	71%		

The results reported in this publication rely essentially on the data of the fourth wave of TREE, in spring 2004. At that moment, almost four years had passed since the cohort had completed compulsory school. The PISA/TREE sample represents approximately 80'000 young people who, in Switzerland, finished their compulsory schooling in the summer of 2000. TREE data are weighted in order to compensate for distortions due to sample attrition, an effect common to any longitudinal research.

SHORT GLOSSARY

Intermediate training activities: special training years at the interface between lower and upper secondary levels. They are partly used to “brush up” particular skills deficiencies. Another important function is that of a “waiting room” for those who cannot enrol directly in upper secondary education or training due to insufficient number of study and training places.

NEET: Neither in education nor in employment

OPET: Swiss Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

“Requirements”: Starting at lower secondary level, the Swiss educational system is heavily tracked. Selection and segregation starts out after 6th or 7th grade, when students are divided up in tracks with varying “requirements”, with usually little permeability between the tracks. The federal level distinguished between “basic” and “extended” requirements, but some cantons divide their students into up to four different tracks.

SFSO: Swiss Federal Statistical Office

TREE: Transitions from Education to Employment

VET: Vocational Education and Training

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With the exception of Dubs (2006), the listed publications can be downloaded from the TREE project website (www.tree-ch.ch).

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Proposal for citation:

Meyer, Thomas: School-to-work transition in Switzerland. Results as of 2004 from the TREE panel survey. Bern, TREE 2005.

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