

Chapter 9

Successful Integration of Refugees in Vocational Education and Training: Experiences from a New Pre-vocational Programme



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· Pre-apprenticeship

Introduction

The Swiss labour market is highly structured and relies on standardised vocational education and training (VET) qualifications. Generally, a Federal VET diploma (three- or four-year apprenticeship) or a Federal VET certificate (two-year apprenticeship) is a basic requirement for taking up qualified work. Asylum migrants, and in particular refugees and temporarily admitted persons (RE/TA) without a recognised qualification, thus struggle to find employment, and even several years after their arrival, their employment rate is lower than those of Swiss citizens and other migrants (Aerne & Bonoli, 2021; Spadarotto et al., 2014). Including RE/TA, first, in vocational education and training is, therefore, a key strategy to accelerate their employability. However, the implementation of this strategy is challenging. Research consistently shows that adolescents and young adults with migration backgrounds and learners with special education needs struggle to transition to

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upper secondary education and stable jobs (Kammermann et al., 2011; Scharnhorst & Kammermann, 2020). Such difficulties in accessing vocational education and training are more pronounced for RE/TA, as they often do not fulfil the prerequisites for beginning an apprenticeship, such as the necessary language skills or sufficient knowledge of local culture, norms, and values (Barabasch et al., 2021; Schaffner et al., 2022). Moreover, many refugees and temporarily admitted persons come from countries with low-standing VET pathways. Hence, they are unaware of the importance and meaningfulness of VET as a successful way to employment (Billet et al., 2022). All these findings highlight the importance of pre-vocational measures to support RE/TA in finding access to initial VET programmes. The “pre-apprenticeship programme to support integration” PAI, examined in more detail in this chapter, is one of those measures.

Integration Agenda Switzerland

As in many other European countries, significantly more refugees arrived in Switzerland between 2015 and 2017 than in the years before. Hence, the federal government, the cantons, and municipalities decided to increase the measures to support the integration of recognised refugees and temporarily admitted persons. Since 2019, asylum procedures have been accelerated, and integration measures are carried out as part of the *Integration Agenda Switzerland IAS*,¹ which serves as a framework to jointly improve the conditions for integrating RE/TA. The integration measures are intensified and start earlier than before while still considering the specific needs, age, and background of RE/TA. Integration provisions focus on initial personal information, identifying and using RE/TA’s potential, rapid language learning shortly after arrival, targeted accompaniment and support, consistent encouragement and challenge, and the possibility to familiarise with the way of life in Switzerland. Young refugees should be prepared for post-compulsory education; adults should be supported to acquire the skills to enter working life.

The measures of the *IAS* are regularly reviewed for their impact. Binding impact targets include (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft et al., 2018), that

1. three years after entry, all recognised refugees and temporarily admitted persons have a basic knowledge of a national language (at least level A1);
2. at the start of compulsory schooling, 80% of children from the asylum sector can communicate in the language spoken in their place of residence;
3. five years after entry, two-thirds of all RE/TA aged 16 to 25 are in post-compulsory education;
4. seven years after entry, half of all adult RE/TA are sustainably integrated into the primary labour market;

¹ <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/integration-einbuengerung/integrationsfoerderung/kantonale-programme/integrationsagenda.html>

5. seven years after entry, foreign nationals are familiar with the Swiss way of life and have regular social contact with the local population.

Target 3 addresses adolescents' and young adults' integration into vocational education and training. It specifies that 95% of all young RE/TA who have "educational potential" (i.e., those able and capable of engaging in VET and not hindered by health problems, difficult family situations or other personal reasons) should be in upper secondary education.

The Pre-apprenticeship Programme to Support Integration

The "pre-apprenticeship programme to support integration" PAI has been launched in accordance with the IAS, and the therein agreed integration strategy (Bundesrat, 2015; Scharnhorst & Kammermann, 2019). The PAI (German: Integrationsvorlehre INVOL; French: pré-apprentissage d' intégration PAI; Italian: Pre-apprendistato di integrazione PAI) is a one-year pre-vocational training programme, which targets refugees and temporarily admitted persons aged 16 to 35 who are able and willing to achieve a vocational qualification at the upper secondary level. Since 2021, the programme is also open to late migrants from the EU, EFTA, and third countries with a similar educational need as the RE/TA (target group PAI+).

The PAI has two main goals: First, it aims to prepare the participants to take up a regular apprenticeship and acquire a VET certificate or diploma. Second, it should allow employers to find a new workforce, especially in fields lacking qualified workers. The programme thus aims to create a win-win situation: Companies gain motivated employees, and refugees and temporarily admitted persons are offered positive career prospects (Aerne & Bonoli, 2021).

Since 2018, PAI programmes have been established in several occupational fields in the service sector, the industry and manufacturing sector, and agriculture (Kammermann et al., 2022). All programmes are based on the national framework and benchmarks set by the State Secretariat for Migration (Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, 2020a, b). Benchmarks stress, for example, the inclusion of placement in the primary labour market in the corresponding occupational field of at least 8 weeks and the acquisition and improvement of language, academic (e.g., mathematics, digital skills), practical, and transferable skills (methodological, social, and self-competencies). The learned competencies are related to the chosen occupational field and focus on vocational and cultural know-how. Competence profiles, derived from the profile of the corresponding two-year apprenticeship, are developed for each occupational field and serve as a guideline for employers, teachers, and participants. The PAI also includes guidance and support for the participants and employers, which specialists provide. Admission to the PAI is based on a potential assessment, which verifies the work and school experience of the RE/TA and evaluates whether the RE/TA meets the PAI's learning requirements. At the end of the PAI, participants receive a confirmation of participation, which documents their

learning outcomes referring to the competence profile and provides information on performance and behaviour at the workplace.

Within the national framework, the cantons are responsible for implementing the programme. They decide, for example, in which occupational fields they want to establish PAI programmes, how school-based and work-based learning parts are organised, and how/by whom participants are supported (e.g., a coach or a teacher). Most cantons have established PAI programmes where teaching, training, and learning are structured similarly to the two-year apprenticeship (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). Common to all programmes is the strong involvement of employers, who offer company-based practical training in an occupational field, and education at a vocational school. Some programmes also include learning in inter-company courses.

The Accompanying Research Project

The introduction of the PAI pilot programme is accompanied by a research and evaluation project, which began in 2019. The project assesses and evaluates the implementation and impact of the programme and elaborates recommendations for development. Research questions focus on the participants' training and education quality and career outcomes. Following findings from resource theory (e.g., Hobfoll et al., 2018), training quality and career success in VET (Stalder & Carigiet Reinhard, 2014; Stalder & Schmid, 2016), we postulate that the success of PAI participants depends on the quality of the learning environment in the workplace and school (e.g., learning opportunities, support from trainers, teachers, and coaches), and their individual and social resources (e.g., language skills, self-efficacy, housing, support by significant others). Success is measured by objective (e.g., successful entry into initial vocational education and training) and subjective (e.g., satisfaction) criteria (see Stalder et al., 2021).

The project uses a multi-source, mixed-method design (Fig. 9.1). We interview cantonal programme officers and survey PAI participants, teachers, and in-company trainers. In six case studies, we deepen the quantitative findings to gain more information about the opportunities and challenges of the programme for the actors involved. The cantons provide individual data about each participant, for example, regarding their language skills and practical and transferable competencies. They also indicate whether the participants have completed the PAI and inform about the participants' educational pathway after the PAI. Register data provided by the federal statistical office are used to investigate whether participants who have secured a regular apprenticeship at the end of the PAI also complete the apprenticeship.

		Interview programme officers	Survey participants	Survey trainers and teachers	Educational data on participants	Case studies	Register data on participants' pathways
Cohort 1	2019 Year 18/19	●	●	●	●		
Cohort 2	2020 Year 19/20		●		●		
Cohort 3	2021 Year 20/21		●		●		
Cohort 4	2022 Year 21/22	●	●	●	●	●	
Cohort 5	2023 Year 22/23		●		●		●
Cohort 6	2024 Year 23/24				●		

Fig. 9.1 Research design

Experiences from the First Programme Year

Results from the first cohort show that the PAI has made a promising start: In 2018, 18 cantons provided 77 PAI programmes, covering 12 different vocational fields and about 750 participants (Kammermann et al., 2022; Stalder & Schönbächler, 2019). Four out of five participants completed the programme, and three-quarters of the completers had found an apprenticeship place.

In general, the cantonal authorities, the participants, the in-company trainers, and the teachers were highly satisfied with the PAI. The participants could improve their language abilities and develop good practical skills. They were satisfied with the training in the company and the education in the vocational school. Most of them felt well-supported and accompanied. Employers and teachers were highly engaged in offering participants suitable learning environments. They supported them well in their learning process, and many were also available when participants needed help in their private life.

For the teachers, dealing with the participants' heterogeneous learning requirements and cultural differences was challenging. In-company trainers and teachers emphasised that insufficient language skills among the participants pose a problem. A one-year programme might not be enough to reach the language skills necessary for a regular apprenticeship. Both stressed that close guidance and support of the participants is essential and proposed intensifying existing measures to accompany them. Some teachers and employers deplored that the cooperation between workplaces and schools is insufficient. The programme officers observed different exchange practices between companies and schools. In general, the three actors suggested intensifying the cooperation such that participants can better transfer learning between the workplace and school and are better supported in their learning.

Key Factors Contributing to Successful Transitions

This study builds on the experiences of the first programme years. We investigate the quality of the learning environment in the PAI, individual characteristics of the RE/TA and their social environment in more detail and examine their relation to participants' pathways after the PAI.

Participants' Learning Environment in the PAI

Providing learners with high-quality education and training is crucial for developing vocational competence, well-being, and positive career development (Lüthi et al., 2021; Stalder & Lüthi, 2020). High-quality learning environments are characterised by meaningful workplace tasks and lessons that stimulate learners' motivation and interest, sufficient guidance by trainers, teachers, and colleagues, and the possibility of becoming an appreciated member of the community of practice (Böhn & Deutscher, 2020; Lüthi et al., 2021). Research with academically weaker apprentices shows that close guidance, support, and instructional approaches adapted to the learners' needs promote learning and a successful transition to higher-level VET programmes (Hofmann et al., 2014; Scharnhorst & Kammermann, 2020). Notably, it is essential to ensure that learning contents align across different learning locations. Building bridges between the workplace and school is crucial for developing vocational competence (Aarkrog, 2005; Aprea & Sappa, 2020) and establishing a vocational identity (Klotz et al., 2014). Refugees might need and profit particularly from supportive teachers and trainers. Workplace and school educators can help them link learning experiences from different contexts – not only between school and work but also in relating the PAI to learning experiences from their birth country (Choy & Wärvik, 2019).

Participants' Individual Characteristics

Effective learning is only possible if learners are motivated to engage in learning activities in the workplace and school and capable of using the various opportunities for learning (Billett, 2001). Research shows that learners with higher individual resources (e.g., higher prior educational attainments and more work experiences, better language skills, higher motivation, confidence and persistency) have better learning outcomes and more favourable careers (Nägele & Stalder, 2019). Evidence from the first PAI cohorts shows, for example, that participants' language levels at the beginning of the PAI were closely related to the proficiency level they reached by the end of the programme (Stalder et al., 2021). To ensure participants' success, the RE/TA granted access to the PAI programme are carefully selected for their

motivation and readiness to engage in a regular VET programme rather than directly looking for paid work. It is also examined whether RE/TA have sufficient language and academic skills and the potential to learn to follow the PAI and cope with its requirements (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). Also, promoting and further developing such individual skills and resources during the PAI is essential to the programme.

Participants' Social Environment

Learning processes are scaffolded by significant others outside of the workplace and school, with whom learners can exchange their experiences and ask for advice and support. The provision of targeted support is important for young people with learning or multiple difficulties (Hofmann et al., 2014; Scharnhorst & Kammermann, 2020) and even more so for migrants who have no family ties in their destination country (Gei & Matthes, 2017; Schaffner et al., 2022). RE/TA need more support in educational matters and multiple forms of support in private life, such as searching for accommodation and childcare or dealing with authorities. Findings from the first PAI cohort highlight that many RE/TA live in difficult housing situations, where they have limited opportunities to withdraw, find a place to relax and do their homework (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). Having to “sort out” life outside of the PAI might thus “draw them away” from education and learning. Moreover, RE/TA sometimes do not know whom to address and ask for support. Especially for those who cannot rely on family members, building a social network is a challenge. The PAI programme thus stipulates that each participant is accompanied by a specialist who is there and helps when needed.

Research Questions

In this study, we posit that the quality of the learning environment in the PAI, individual characteristics of the RE/TA, and their social environment influence participants' career prospects after the PAI.

We first describe the PAI, participants' individual characteristics and their social environment in general, and ask:

- How do participants perceive their learning environment in the workplace and school, and how do they describe themselves and their social environment?

We second investigate core elements that characterise successful careers after the PAI and compare more and less successful participants:

- What key characteristics distinguish participants who could secure a regular apprenticeship from those who did not?

More specifically, we explore whether participants, who found an apprenticeship place, a) experience their workplaces and schools as better linked and conducive to learning and feel more supported by trainers and teachers, b) are more able and willing to engage in learning and have better learning outcomes at the end of the PAI, and c) find themselves in more favourable social environments than participants whose career after the PAI is still uncertain.

Data and Measures

To address the research questions, we report and elaborate on data from the participants' survey of the fourth PAI cohort (2021/2022, $N = 432$) and complement them with findings from the employers' survey ($N = 184$) and the six case studies. The surveys with participants and employers took place in May/June 2022, 2–3 months before the end of the PAI. The participants filled in the questionnaire during one lesson, assisted by their teachers. The teachers had received the questionnaire and supplementary documents beforehand to better support the participants with limited language skills. The case studies included semi-structured interviews with trainers, teachers, and coaches in January/February 2022 and interviews with participants in May/June 2022. The interviews were conducted on-site and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes each. They were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Samples

Participants enrolled in the PAI programme in the German (61.6%), French (32.4%), and Italian-speaking (6.0%) parts of Switzerland. The PAI covered 19 occupational fields, with most participants trained in a programme in the service sector (78.8%; industry and manufacturing: 21.0%; agriculture: 0.2%). Participants came from Eritrea (35.3%), Afghanistan (15.3%), Syria (9.5%), other Asian (16.0%) and African countries (11.8%), and from Europe (9.7%) and South America (2.3%) (target group PAI+). The mean age was 26.4 years ($SD = 6.2$), and 61.5% were male. 30.1% were married, and 30.3% had children.

Of the 450 employers contacted, 184 filled in the whole questionnaire. Most had one (72.8%) or two (13.6%) PAI participants. About half were small and medium-sized firms with up to 49 employees (54.3%) located in the German (55.4%), French (42.9%), and Italian (1.6%) parts of Switzerland. Employers have been engaged in the PAI since 2018 (32.9%), 2019 or 2020 (26.9%), or for the first time in 2021 (40.2%). Most companies also had learners in two-year (51.6%) and three-/four-year apprenticeships (74.5%). The majority of in-company trainers had several years of experience, and 59.2% were male.

The case studies included two female and four male participants and their trainers, teachers, and coaches in two German-speaking and two French-speaking

cantons. Participants were 16 to 36 years old and came from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Tibet, Sudan, Ecuador, and Italy. They completed their PAI in the health, automotive, construction, logistics and sales sectors.

Measures

Measures in the participants' and the employers' survey used for this study are presented in Table 9.1.

The participants' survey covered the learning environment in the PAI, participants' individual characteristics, their social environment, and their career prospects. The *learning environment* focused on the workplace and school and the possibility of transferring learning contents from one location to another. To assess the learning environment, we used scales and items validated in the IVET context (Stalder & Lüthi, 2020; Stalder & Schmid, 2016; TREE, 2016). Since most RE/TA had limited language skills, we simplified item wordings. The items assessing motivating work/lessons, guidance and support, and building on previous skills were strictly parallelised for the two learning contexts. All items were measured on a five-point scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Participants' *individual characteristics* included effort and performance in the workplace and school (self-assessed), using a 5-point scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) for effort and a seven-point scale from 1 (very poor) to 7 (very good) for performance. Participants also self-rated their language skills in comprehension, reading, and speaking on a 5-point scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) and indicated how important it is for them to learn a trade (five-point scale from 1, not true at all, to 5, very true). Items to measure *participants' social environment* included their housing situation, the support in private life, and the number of close friends. Finally, to measure career prospects, participants indicated, what they shall do after the PAI, and how they perceive their career and future in general (five-point scale from 1, not true at all, to 5, very true). The PAI research team developed items assessing participants' individual characteristics, social environment, and career prospects.

The employers' survey covered the same concepts and used the same items as the participants' survey. The item wording was changed such as the employers self-assessed, for example, the support they provided to their learner (e.g., "I'm there for him/her when he/she needs me") and judged the participants' learning behaviour (e.g., "In the workplace, he/she gives his/her best"). Employers who trained more than one PAI participant filled in the questionnaire for the learner with whom they worked the most.

Questions in the case studies focused on the participants' individual characteristics (e.g., for participants, "Do you have to do homework for school in the evenings or during the weekends? If yes: Do you have enough time to learn after school or after work? How do you learn?"), their learning environment (e.g., "What work do you do in the workplace? Can you give an example of something you learned in the workplace last week? Do you understand when the teacher explains something?

Table 9.1 Measured used in the two studies

	Participant survey	Employer survey	Sample items (participants' wording)
	Number of items	Number of items	
Participants' learning environment (PAI)			
Workplace			
Motivating work	3	2	In my work, I can learn a lot of new things.
Guidance and support by the in-company trainer	3	3	My boss is there for me when I need him.
Social integration in the team	3	3	My colleagues are there for me when I need them.
Building on previous skills	1	1	I can use what I already know and can do.
School			
Motivating lessons	3	3	At school, I can learn a lot of new things.
Guidance and support by teachers	3	3	My teachers are there for me when I need them.
Building on previous skills	1	1	I can use what I already know and can do.
Transfer of learning			
Workplace to school	2	3	What I learn at work, I can use well at school.
School to workplace	2	3	What I learn at school, I can use well at work.
Participants' individual characteristics			
Workplace-related			
Effort	1	1	At work, I give my best.
Performance	1	1	How good is your performance at work?
School-related			
Effort	1		At school, I give my best.
Performance	1	1	How good is your performance at school?
General			
Language skills	3	3	How well can you understand (read, speak) high German (French, Italian)?
Importance of learning a vocation	1		I think it is important that I learn a vocation.
Participants' social environment			
Housing situation	2		Do you live alone? Together with family members?

(continued)

Table 9.1 (continued)

	Participant survey	Employer survey	Sample items (participants' wording)
	Number of items	Number of items	
Support in private life	3	1	Who does support you when you need help in your private life?
Friends	2		How many friends do you have that are Swiss?
Participants' career prospects			
Educational situation after PAI	5		What do you do after the PAI?
Perception of career prospects	2		I'm able to complete an apprenticeship.
Positive attitude towards future	1		When you think about your future, how satisfied are you?
Staying in/leaving the company after the PAI		3	Does the PAI participant continue with an apprenticeship in your company? (employers' wording)

Can you use at work what you learn at school?"), and their social environment (e.g., "Where do you learn? With whom do you learn? Do you have a room where you can learn without being disturbed? Who does support you when you need help in your private life?"). Also, participants were asked to share their plans and career prospects (e.g., "What do you do after the PAI? If you could freely choose an occupation, which would you like best? What will you do in 10 years?").

Results

The findings are reported in four sections. The first section describes the career prospects of the participants. The second focuses on the learning environment in the PAI, the third on participants' individual characteristics and the fourth on their social environment. We present results and contrast participants who had managed to secure a regular apprenticeship at the time of the survey (i.e., the "successful ones") with participants whose pathway after the PAI was still uncertain (i.e., those who did not know what they would do).

Career Prospects

Participants reported whether they would start with a regular apprenticeship after the PAI and, if yes, indicated whether they had already secured an apprenticeship place (apprenticeship contract signed or promised). Results are presented in Fig. 9.2.

Nearly two-thirds (62.7%) of participants said they had already found an apprenticeship, either in a two-year programme aimed at more practically gifted learners (45.8%) or in a three or four-year programme that is academically more demanding (16.9%). Another 14.6% of the participants indicated they plan to start with an apprenticeship but have not yet found an employer. The remaining 22.8% did not anticipate engaging in an apprenticeship. Some planned to take up an additional short-term education (3.5%, e.g., bridge year, language courses, short-term practical training), while others planned to start working (4.9%). For 14.4%, the future career was uncertain; they said they did not know what to do after the PAI.

From the participants’ survey, we do not know whether those who indicated they had secured an apprenticeship will remain in the company where they did the PAI. We asked, however, the employers whether their PAI-participant would start a regular apprenticeship in their company after the PAI. Of the 184 employers surveyed, 122 (66.3%) confirmed that the PAI participant would take up an apprenticeship in their company; 48 (26.1%) said that the participant would leave the company, and 14 (7.6%) did not know yet. According to employers, reasons for a discontinued engagement were manifold, such as, for example, insufficient language skills, no interest in learning the occupation, continuing health problems, or difficulties arranging childcare.

Participants were asked whether they thought they could successfully complete an apprenticeship and find a good job later. Most of them had a positive view of their

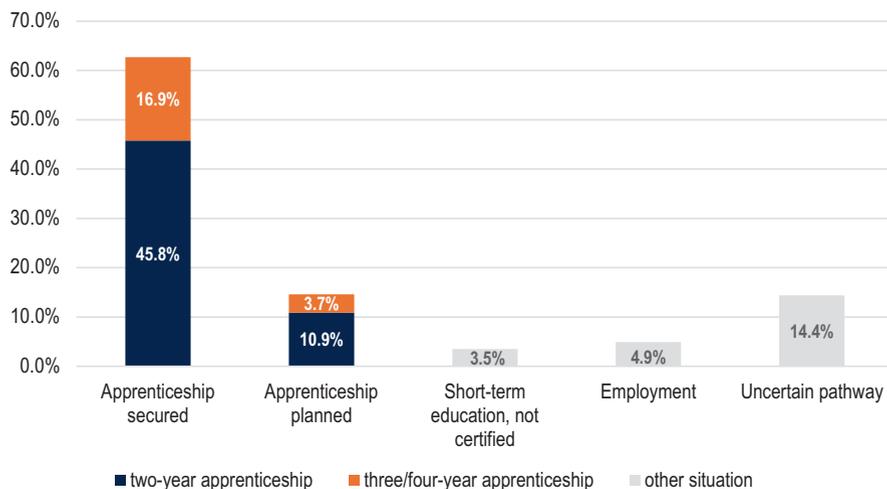


Fig. 9.2 Educational pathways after the PAI

future. They were convinced they could manage the apprenticeship (M = 4.3, SD = 0.95) and find a good job (M = 4.5, SD = 0.81). Participants with uncertain pathways after the PAI were the least confident and significantly less optimistic about their future than those who had secured an apprenticeship place.

Many participants who had secured or planned an apprenticeship had plans for the time once they had finished it. They spoke about continuous training and projected a working career allowing them to lead a self-determined and independent life.

As one of the coaches stated:

C: Although his finances are very tight, he wanted to become financially independent. He does not want to live on social welfare... [D, Coach]

Or with the words of a participant:

P: That doesn't mean money comes from the municipality anyway and always stay with social and my [...] I say self-employed is I finish my apprenticeship and do my own work and earn money, and that I mean self-employed. [C, participant]

The Learning Environment and Educational Pathways

Participants were asked to evaluate their workplace and school learning environment and the possibility of transferring what they learned from school to the workplace and vice-versa. Table 9.2 shows the results for all participants and contrasts the perspectives of participants who had secured an apprenticeship place with those whose pathway after the PAI was still uncertain.

Table 9.2 Participants' learning environment

	All participants	Apprenticeship secured	Uncertain pathway	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	p
Workplace				
Motivating work	4.3 (0.70)	4.3 (0.69)	3.9 (0.77)	<.001
Guidance and support by the in-company trainer	4.2 (0.83)	4.3 (0.78)	4.0 (0.84)	.067
Social integration in the team	4.2 (.82)	4.3 (0.79)	4.0 (0.89)	.039
Building on previous skills	4.2 (.95)	4.0 (0.98)	3.9 (0.95)	.249
School				
Motivating lessons	4.3 (0.70)	4.3 (0.69)	3.9 (0.77)	<.001
Guidance and support by teachers	4.5 (0.69)	4.5 (0.70)	4.4 (0.70)	.658
Building on previous skills	4.1 (0.89)	4.0 (0.9)	4.1 (0.91)	.728
Transfer of learning				
Workplace to school	3.5 (1.13)	3.5 (1.08)	3.2 (1.24)	.024
School to workplace	3.8 (1.05)	3.9 (0.99)	3.6 (1.18)	.044

Note: Answer scales: 1–5. Analyses of variance based on five groups, as indicated in Fig. 9.2, with planned contrasts (simple)

Overall, participants positively evaluated their workplace and school learning situation. They perceived their work as very motivating and interesting and said they could learn a lot. Most of them felt well supported by their trainers and even more so by teachers: Trainers, teachers, and colleagues at work had time for them when they needed help, were there to answer questions, and gave positive feedback. As one of the participants in the interview outlined:

I: If you don't understand something, who are you asking?

P: To my colleagues [...], I ask my colleagues and R. [the trainer], also to everybody.

I: And do people take the time to answer you?

P: Yes, they answer me because they always believe in me and my abilities. Yes, if I ask for something, they answer me right away. [B, participant]

The participants were a bit more critical of the learning transfer, and results suggest that the transfer from school to work is better established than the transfer from workplace to school. Results from the employers' survey confirm that the cooperation between workplaces and schools remains an issue. While 57.7% of the trainers in the company were satisfied with the cooperation with the VET teachers, 20.2% were only partly satisfied, and 22.0% were not satisfied. Some criticised that they were rarely and insufficiently informed about participants' learning progress (15.0%) and potential problems (28.8%) at school. Most of them, however, acknowledged the usefulness of school learning for the workplace and vice versa. In sum, linking workplaces and schools and relating learning contents across learning locations is valuable but challenging, not only for participants but also for employers and teachers, such as one teacher stated:

T: We are human beings, and with human beings, it depends on [how great the willingness for exchange/cooperation is]. Who is here, what is the willingness? So that you can build up and maintain the exchange. For example, also through company visits. I experience that as something very valuable. When I get an insight into a company, it gives me a lot of direct references that I can incorporate into my teaching. Even just mentioning things gives me a picture in my head later on. Where is this learner four days a week? And that is also part of it. [C, teacher]

Contrast analyses revealed that participants who had secured an apprenticeship found their work and lessons more interesting and motivating than participants with uncertain pathways. They were better integrated into the work team and felt better supported by colleagues. It is also noteworthy that the more successful participants evaluated the learning transfer between school and work more positively.

Individual Characteristics and Educational Pathways

Participants were asked how much effort they put into their work and school tasks. They self-assessed their performance and language skills and specified how important it is for them to learn a trade (a vocation, German: "*Beruf*"). Results are presented in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3 Participants' individual characteristics

	All participants	Apprenticeship secured	Uncertain pathway	
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	p
Workplace-related				
Effort	4.6 (0.60)	4.7 (0.55)	4.4 (0.71)	<.001
Performance	6.1 (0.91)	6.3 (0.81)	5.8 (1.07)	<.001
School-related				
Effort	4.4 (0.74)	4.4 (0.75)	4.2 (0.80)	.035
Performance	5.8 (1.08)	5.9 (1.00)	5.6 (1.15)	.076
General				
Language skills	4.2 (0.59)	4.3 (0.58)	4.2 (0.56)	.351
Importance of learning a trade	4.8 (0.57)	4.9 (0.38)	4.5 (0.88)	<.001

Note: Answer scales performance and importance of vocation: 1–5; effort 1–7. Analyses of variance based on five groups with planned contrasts (simple)

Participants self-evaluated their learning effort and performance positively. Most said they “do their best” at work and school, and most reported performing well in the workplace and school. The majority of participants also acknowledged that learning a trade and obtaining a VET certificate is essential in Switzerland. As one of the participants summarised:

P: I also have to graduate and then because in Switzerland, for sure, they have helped us so much, and eh, I also have to thank Switzerland. Thank for example they gave us school, they gave us many chances in life [...] Important rules and so in Switzerland [...] and pay taxes and so that's why I have to do education because without education here it's very difficult to live even if I might have lost job [...], without education, I couldn't find a job quickly because I have no degree. But if I have degree, I could find job quickly [...]. Maybe if I lost a job, for example, with education, you can find a job quickly. [D, participant]

Participants who had secured an apprenticeship differed significantly in their self-evaluation from those with uncertain pathways. Those with an apprenticeship were more engaged in the workplace and school and outperformed participants without secure pathways. Interestingly, in their self-assessment, the two groups did not differ regarding their language skills – both said their language level was good to excellent. However, those about to start an apprenticeship found it more important to learn a trade than those with an uncertain career. Additional analyses were run to explore whether contrast groups differed in age, educational experience (years in education), and the number of years they had been in Switzerland. The two groups did not differ in those characteristics.

The employers shared a positive appraisal of participants' efforts and learning outcomes. Most of them highlighted that their PAI participant was hard-working and engaged, and more than 80% rated participants' performance in the workplace as good or very good. In the interview, an employer added:

E: And yes, in a way, I think they have more desire to succeed than local people. [B, employer]

Employers evaluated, however, participants' language skills more critically ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.87$) than participants themselves ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.59$). Many of those who did not offer their PAI participant an apprenticeship place stressed that the participant just lacked the needed language and other academic skills to start a two-year apprenticeship.

Individuals' Social Environment and Educational Pathways

Participants described their housing situation, indicated from whom they receive support when they need help in their private life, and reported how many close friends they had. Results are presented in Table 9.4.

General results suggest that participants were in diverse living and housing situations. More than half of them lived with family members, one quarter lived alone, and others shared a flat with colleagues or were in another housing situation. Three-quarters had a room for themselves to relax and study without being disturbed.

A total of 44.2% of the participants reported they could rely on a coach or mentor when they needed help with private matters. More important were close friends, who supported 60.2% of the participants. Most participants had several close friends, both Swiss and non-Swiss. Additional analyses showed that most had at least one person to turn to in case of arising problems. Again, the participants were in diverse situations. One-third had a broad supportive network, including a coach or mentor, family members and friends. In contrast, one out of six participants (17.2%) indicated they had neither a coach nor a family member nor a friend who could provide support. Comparing participants with secured and uncertain pathways revealed no differences between the two groups.

Participants also had other forms and resources of support than those outlined above. Some employers emphasised, for example, that they not only guided their PAI-participant in the learning process but also provided advice and support when participants had troubles in their private life. They also tried to be flexible with working arrangements, as one participant stated:

P: Yes, because R. [the trainer] – we talked, I have two children, and on Tuesday I' m already finished at 5 p.m. because I have to pick up the children and then, a few days I have to – I can't work until the end because he told me that' s fine, I can stay alone, or the others can stay. He has helped me so much. [F, participant]

Also, teachers supported the participants when some schools opened their doors for learners who did not have a quiet place at home to learn. These participants profited from the possibility of staying in school until late:

P: Normally I do the homework at the school. When we finish school. There is a study room. I do my homework there. At the home in the room, I don't have a possibility. I asked my assistant [support person/coach]. He told me that there is a study room. If you ask someone to open it, they open it. [A, participant]

Table 9.4 Participants' social environment

	All participants	Apprenticeship secured	Uncertain pathway	p
	Percent	Percent	Percent	
Housing situation				
Lives				
... alone	25.0%	25.8%	25.8%	.787
... with family	57.4%	55.0%	62.9%	
... with colleagues	6.7%	6.6%	6.5%	
... with other persons	10.9%	12.5%	4.8%	
Has a room for herself/himself (yes)	73.1%	77.5%	61.3%	.083
Support if help is needed in private life (yes), by				
... coach, mentor	44.2%	46.1%	38.3%	.660
... family member	44.9%	41.6%	50.0%	.254
... close friend	60.2%	61.8%	50.0%	.150
Close friends				
Swiss				
... none	19.4%	18.8%	21.0%	.216
... 1–3	43.4%	48.3%	37.1%	
... more than 3	37.3%	32.8%	41.9%	
Non-Swiss				
... none	13.7%	14.0%	21.0%	.336
... 1–3	27.3%	26.6%	24.2%	
... more than 3	59.0%	59.4%	54.8%	

Note: Chi-square tests based on five groups, as indicated in Fig. 9.2

Discussion

Making refugees “fit” for vocational education and facilitating their transition to a regular apprenticeship is one of the main goals of the pre-apprenticeship for integration. In this study, we argued that the quality of the learning environment in the PAI, individual characteristics of the RE/TA, and their social environment influence participants' educational pathways after the PAI.

General results suggest the PAI programme has met its primary goal, with almost two-thirds of the participants having secured an apprenticeship 2 months before the end of the PAI and the other 14% planning to start with IVET. The IAS (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft et al., 2018) stipulates that two-thirds of all RE/TA aged 16 to 25 should be in post-compulsory education 5 years after they enter Switzerland and specifies that 95% of all young RE/TA with educational potential should be in upper secondary education. According to the 95%-target, the rate of PAI participants who transition to an apprenticeship might not yet be satisfied. However, the results of this study must be interpreted with caution. It is unclear, for example, how many of the participants with an uncertain pathway have the

educational potential to begin an apprenticeship or why those who chose employment over education made that decision. Also, participants may find their way into an apprenticeship between the time of the survey and the remaining months before the school year starts. Results from the first cohort suggest that some participants can secure an apprenticeship at short notice (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020).

PAI participants were very positive about their learning environment in the workplace and school and the support they received from trainers and teachers. Also, they reported being highly engaged in learning and performing well. The outstanding evaluation might be puzzling – is it too good to be true? A possible explanation could be that RE/TA might not be used to sharing their critique or might not want to show their feelings openly to others. However, findings from the employers' survey and case studies primarily support the validity of participants' positive evaluations. Employers and teachers agree about participants' high motivation and good performance – especially concerning practical competencies. Many employers also emphasise the latter, offering participants to remain in the company and continue with an apprenticeship. Note also that the PAI learners who participated in the study are a highly selective group. They were admitted to the programme based on a potential assessment (Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, 2020a, b). They stayed in the programme until the end, while others dropped out early (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). The PAI participants in our survey thus proved to have high educational potential. They had been resilient and adaptive and managed to cope with the requirements of the workplace and school.

Concerning language skills, the perspectives of participants and employers diverge. While participants self-evaluated their proficiency level as good to excellent, employers were more critical. This finding is not new and has already been reported for the first cohort (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). It is plausible that participants have a different reference frame when self-assessing their language skills than employers. Participants might see the progress they have made. They possibly compare themselves with peers or family members not enrolled in an educational programme. In contrast, employers know better what language skills are required to start with an apprenticeship. They might thus compare participants with learners in regular apprenticeships.

The PAI benchmarks state that learning contents in the workplace and school should build on each other and be mutually relevant (Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM, 2020a, b). Results reveal that the trainers and teachers perceive the other learning locations as an important part of the PAI programme. However, time is limited, resources are rare, and cooperation is demanding. These findings align with previous studies that consistently describe the cooperation between schools and workplaces as a significant challenge of dual apprenticeships (Aarkrog, 2005; Aprea & Sappa, 2020).

Based on previous research and the PAI benchmarks, we posited that RE/TA and, thus, PAI participants need specialists' support (Gei & Matthes, 2017; Schaffner et al., 2022). It might be irritating to see that more than half of them reported that they do not have a coach supporting them when they need help in their private life. From the programme officers' interviews in 2018, we know that the cantons organised participants' coaching, guiding and support differently (Stalder & Schönbächler, 2020). While some

participants are closely accompanied by coaches and other specialists outside of school, other cantons chose approaches where teachers play the role of a coach. Whether different coaching models contribute differently to participants' transition success remains open.

We assumed that participants with secured and uncertain pathways differ in their learning environment, individual characteristics, and the social environment outside the PAI. Our results confirm these assumptions for the learning environment in the workplace and school and the individual characteristics but not regarding participants' social situations outside the PAI. Participants with an apprenticeship found their work and school more interesting and were better integrated into the work team than participants with uncertain pathways. Moreover, in line with findings from apprenticeship research (Messmann & Mulder, 2015), the successful participants also saw a more significant potential to transfer their learning between school and the workplace. They might have better understood the concept of 'dual VET' than participants with uncertain pathways, and the cooperation between teachers and trainers might have been better established. The two groups differed clearly in effort and performance. Those with a follow-up solution tried harder and performed better, corroborating previous research emphasising the importance of learners' engagement (Billett, 2001; Stalder & Schmid, 2016). Interestingly, most participants with a secured apprenticeship considered learning a trade and having a vocational degree essential. This might be a sign of positive integration and confirms the importance of PAI's explicit focus on familiarising participants with the norms and values of Swiss culture.

Conclusion

Four years after its introduction, the pre-apprenticeship programme to support integration has proven valuable in supporting refugees and temporarily admitted persons' successful pathways into vocational education and training. The PAI is highly appreciated not only by the participants but also by the employers who decided to engage in the programme. The goal of creating a "win-win" has been achieved for most involved actors. Employers benefit from the programme by securing skilled workforce and participants through integration into VET and employment. Success factors illustrate the high commitment of different actors to developing, conceiving, and implementing the PAI. The joint responsibility in the sense of a "public-private partnership" is a core characteristic of the Swiss VET system. The occupation-specific development of practical, academic and transferable skills, the transfer of learning between work and school, and the targeted support for learners are part of the dual system and are, therefore, well introduced to vocational education and training actors. The PAI builds on this tradition and expands it to include more partners from outside VET. It remains to be seen whether the PAI programme will be successful in the longer term and remain a significant educational offer for refugees and temporarily admitted persons. For now, the Swiss Federal government and the cantons have initiated the continuation and consolidation of the PAI.

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