

Who is included in VET, who not?

Ursula Scharnhorst and Marlise Kammermann

*Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET),
Zollikofen, Switzerland*

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper describes the Swiss Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, its crucial role and challenges with respect to the inclusion of vulnerable groups and investigates the effectiveness of the efforts undertaken to promote inclusion in VET so far.

Design/methodology/approach – Empirical research focusing on various indicators of inclusion (national monitoring data and own studies) is analysed.

Findings – The overall findings show that equity and inclusion of persons with a migration background or special education needs in VET have been successfully promoted but can be improved.

Research limitations/implications – Long-term, in-depth longitudinal data regarding some issues are still scarce.

Practical implications – The paper provides information about young people having difficulties to access and complete VET or who are at-risk of exclusion and points out further courses of action.

Originality/value – A comprehensive and detailed account of the current state of inclusion in Swiss VET and of related systemic problems is given.

Keywords VET, Inclusion, Disadvantaged groups, Switzerland

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Like other countries, Switzerland seeks to promote the inclusion of people having difficulties to access the regular educational structures. Considering the importance of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system at upper secondary level, the inclusion in regular VET programmes is of particular interest. About two-thirds of the adolescents in Switzerland choose VET after compulsory education. Accessing and completing regular VET are important steps to gain a foothold in the primary labour market and to continue education and training at tertiary level. Adolescents and young adults with a migration background or with special education needs often face difficulties in taking these steps. Efforts were made in the past 15 years to promote inclusion of these two vulnerable groups in VET by offering adapted programmes and support measures. Before evaluating their effectiveness, some theoretical considerations are presented as well as an overview of relevant policy goals, legal frameworks and of the general situation of inclusion of the two groups (section 2). Then, the various pathways from compulsory school to upper secondary VET in the Swiss education system are described, as well as the support measures provided in the low-threshold two-year VET programmes leading to a nationally recognised certificate (section 3). The accessibility of regular VET through indirect pathways is examined with data from the national monitoring statistics (section 4). Then follows a detailed presentation of the general effectiveness of the two-year VET programmes and the inclusion of students with migration background or special education needs, based on results from national evaluation studies and monitoring data (section 5). Finally, conclusions are taken and the present state of inclusion in VET is discussed (section 6).

2. Inclusion of vulnerable groups in upper secondary education

Equal opportunities, participation and inclusion are standards to which the United Nations (UN) are committed through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General



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[Assembly of the United Nations, 2015](#)). The Agenda sets the global goal to secure inclusive, equal and high-quality education as well as possibilities for lifelong learning for all people by 2030. This includes equal access to all levels of education for all, in particular for people with disadvantages or special education needs. Inclusive education means to design, to the greatest extent possible, teaching and learning environments for all people to enable them to gain knowledge, skills and to learn with motivation ([Burgstahler, 2015](#)). Applied to VET, the concept of inclusion implies that separative VET tracks should be avoided to allow young people with sociocultural disadvantages or disabilities to be educated and trained in regular VET structures (e.g. [Heisler, 2015](#)). The regular system should therefore be more flexibly adapted to the needs of the learners. But critical voices hold that this could eventually rather foster exclusion than inclusion, if low-level programmes are offered which are not regarded as sufficient to prepare young people for the first labour market (e.g. [Biermann, 2015](#)). The Swiss Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (VPETA) stipulates a balancing of education and training opportunities regarding social and regional aspects, equality of women and men as well as the elimination of discrimination of people with disabilities ([Swiss Confederation, 2002](#), Article 3c). However, inclusive education in Switzerland is challenged by a selective system of compulsory education ([Scharnhorst and Kammermann, 2018](#)) as well as by a selective apprenticeship-market, driven by economic efficiency, i.e. employers' interests ([Di Maio et al., 2019](#)). This dilemma is expressed in the federal guide for two-year VET-programmes which states that specific solutions – also outside the regular VET system – may be needed to meet the requirements of inclusion ([SBFI, 2014](#)).

The inclusiveness of the Swiss VET system will be addressed separately but generally, education at upper secondary level is remarkably effective. The national monitoring statistics from 2011 to 2016 show that 90% of the students graduated within five years. The rest had either stopped their education (5%) or had not yet graduated (5%). However, the graduation rates differ between the cantons, sexes, migrant status and social origins of the students ([BFS, 2018a](#)).

A national educational policy goal from 2006 (restated in 2011 and 2015) stipulates that 95% of all Swiss residents should have an upper secondary qualification by the age of 25 years because this is important for stable employment in Switzerland's highly developed economy ([EDK, 2006](#)). To reach this ambitious goal, more young people having problems to access the regular education structures at upper secondary level need to be included.

2.1 General state of inclusion of migrants

The latest monitoring data show that the mentioned 95%-goal has not yet been reached, especially in the population of young migrants ([BFS, 2018b](#)). Overall, 91% of the 25-year olds had an upper secondary qualification in 2015. With a graduation rate of 94%, Swiss nationals born in Switzerland almost reached the goal, but migrants born in Switzerland (86%) and born abroad (73%) are still rather far from it ([BFS, 2018b](#)).

According to the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals ([Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation, 2005](#)), the integration of the foreign population should primarily take place within the regular structures of education, work, social security and health. However, the indicators of integration regarding upper secondary education and employment show various disparities for persons with a migration background ([BFS, 2017a](#)). For refugees and temporarily admitted persons, the confederation and the cantons agreed in 2018 on an "Integration Agenda Switzerland" [1] to enhance their integration into education and work by establishing more coherent processes and ensuring sufficient funding. Its effects will have to be evaluated at a later point.

2.2 General state of inclusion of persons with disabilities

In 2014, Switzerland put the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of the UN into force. On the national level, the equality of persons with disabilities is laid down in the Federal Constitution and the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) ([Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation, 2004](#)). A decade after enactment of the DDA, a report on the evolution of equality from 2007 to 2012 ([BFS, 2014](#)) stated that education and training of persons with disabilities had improved but that they were more exposed to the risk of poverty (e.g. deterioration of finances and jobs). The first report to the UN with respect to the CRPD was mostly positive ([Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 2016](#)) but it was contradicted by a shadow report of the associations for persons with disabilities criticising the lack of a comprehensive policy and a concrete implementation plan ([Inclusion Handicap, 2017](#)). A new action plan (2019–2023) [2] for the CRPD was recently suggested by all associations for persons with disabilities.

In compulsory education, the inclusion [3] of children with disabilities was promoted after enactment of the DDA and of the Special Needs Education Agreement ([EDK, 2007](#)) [4]. Learning settings with special curricula were reduced from 5.1% to 3.4% ([SKBF, 2018](#)). In 2017/2018, more than half (53%) of the pupils requiring reinforced learning support due to special education needs were integrated in a standard class, 6% were supported in a special class of a regular school and 41% received support in a separate special school ([BFS, 2019a](#)). Nevertheless, the transition to upper secondary and higher education poses a challenge. Additional efforts are needed to include more young people with disabilities in the regular VET system but respective discussions were limited so far and mainly focused on practical vocational trainings in special institutions ([Sempert and Kammermann, 2011](#); [Aeschbach, 2008](#)). In 2017, three national conferences on the labour market integration of persons with disabilities were held [5]. The participants (e.g. authorities of education, social welfare and health, associations for persons with disabilities, professional associations) made a common declaration and courses of action were determined. Another recent report, based on a literature review and on workshops with VET actors, analysed successes and problems regarding the inclusion of adolescents and young adults with disabilities in VET and in the labour market and suggested measures to increase their participation ([Knöpfel, 2018](#)).

Despite these positive developments, researchers reported persisting disadvantages and inequities regarding the transitions from school to VET and to the labour market for young people with a migration background or special education needs ([Imdorf and Scherr, 2015](#); [Hupka-Brunner et al., 2011](#); [Becker, 2010](#); [Hollenweger et al., 2007](#)).

Before empirical data on inclusion in VET are presented in detail (see [section 4](#) and [5](#)), the Swiss education system and its support measures are outlined to give a better idea how access to regular VET is facilitated for young people facing difficulties.

3. Ways to access regular VET and alternatives

[Figure 1](#) shows possible direct (continuous arrows) and indirect (dotted arrows) transitions and pathways from compulsory school to educational offers at upper secondary level in Switzerland. Subsequent transitions to the labour market or to tertiary education are also indicated.

In Switzerland, VET mainly occurs in the dual form combining in-company training and vocational school. Entirely school-based VET only makes up a small part ([Wettstein et al., 2017](#)). The general education tracks at upper secondary level (right side of [Figure 1](#)) are not shown in detail as they are not the focus of this article. The centre of [Figure 1](#) shows the dual initial VET programmes with a duration of two, three or four years (see [3.3](#)). The two-year VET programmes (framed in dark grey) are supposed to provide a low-threshold access to

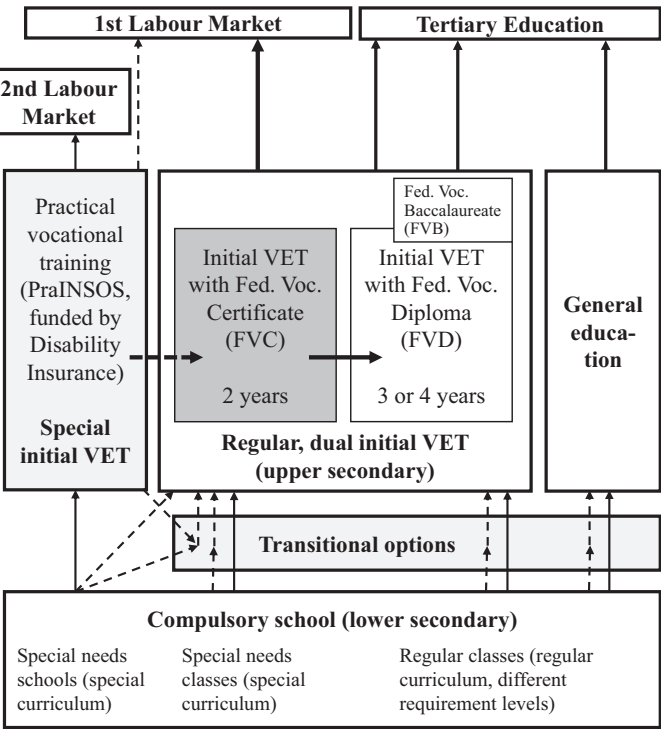


Figure 1.
From compulsory
education to VET in
Switzerland –
transitions and
pathways (own
representation)

regular VET and are crucial for students with low achievement due to sociocultural disadvantages or disabilities. For most of them, accessing and completing a regular two-year VET programme will be the only way to obtain a nationally recognised upper secondary certification. Students who cannot access certifying upper secondary VET or general education programmes directly after compulsory school may first take a transitional programme (light grey bar above compulsory school). Students from special schools for whom a transitional programme is still too demanding may start a practical vocational training of two years (left side of Figure 1, framed in light grey). These trainings are funded by the Disability Insurance, do not lead to nationally recognised certificates and are therefore not part of the regular VET system.

Following Figure 1 from the bottom, the indirect pathways for accessing the regular VET system will be presented (3.1 and 3.2) before shortly describing the dual VET programmes of different length (3.3) and the available support measures in the low-threshold two-year VET programmes (3.4).

3.1 Transitional pre-VET programmes

Direct access to dual VET after compulsory school is not possible if the adolescents are not contracted by a host company. Especially students with disabilities coming from special schools but also migrants arriving in Switzerland near the end or after compulsory education often have difficulties to finalise an apprenticeship contract.

Transitional options usually last for a year and many of them are pre-VET programmes which combine school and work-based training. Specific pre-VET programmes for migrants between 16 and 25 years focus on teaching a local language (i.e. German, French, Italian) and

the academic skills required for initial VET as well as on transmitting norms and values of the Swiss culture of learning and working. The students also gain practical work experience and are supported to find a host company to start a VET programme. New, additional pre-VET programmes were started in 2018 to prepare refugees and temporarily admitted persons for dual VET (Scharnhorst and Kammermann, 2019).

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3.2 Practical vocational training for students with special education needs

Students from special schools (bottom left of Figure 1) who lack the academic performance required in two-year VET or in pre-VET programmes may start a practical vocational training of two years (called PrAINSOS). PrAINSOS are not part of the regular VET system as the trainees are fully or partly trained in special institutions and in the protected labour market. PrAINSOS are offered in 50 occupations to about 1,200 students per year. They are standardised by ensuring a training framework oriented towards the respective two-year VET programmes. Training is focused on basic occupational activities, individual assistance is offered and the competences displayed in the practical final examination are attested by the provider. A new but still little used possibility to promote the inclusion of PrAINSOS trainees in regular VET or in the primary labour market (indicated by dotted arrows in Figure 1) is the issuance of an Individual Competence Record (ICR) [6] approved by the respective professional organisation. An ICR describes the knowledge and skills attained by a PrAINSOS trainee in relation to the competence goals of the respective two-year VET programme.

3.3 Regular dual VET programmes with different requirements

Students whose achievement level after compulsory school does not yet correspond to the requirements of a three- or four-year VET programme may enrol in a less demanding two-year programme which is also apprenticeship-based (i.e. practical training in a host company on four days per week, one day at vocational school). Graduates of two-year programmes hold a Federal VET Certificate (FVC) which should enable them to find an occupation in the primary labour market or to continue their education in a three- or four-year programme as permeability is ensured. Graduates of three- or four-year programmes hold a Federal VET Diploma (FVD) and may subsequently access Professional Education at tertiary level [7]. If they take a programme with extended general education requirements and qualify with a Federal Vocational Baccalaureate (FVB), they may enrol in tertiary programmes at Universities of Applied Sciences.

About 215,500 students were in dual VET programmes in 2018/2019. They made up almost two-thirds of all students in certifying upper secondary education. Only 28% were in general education and 12% in transitional programmes. The vast majority of students in dual VET programmes (93.5%) attended three- or four-year programmes; two-year programmes made up 6.5% (BFS, 2020).

3.4 Support measures in two-year VET programmes

Students with learning disabilities or sociocultural disadvantages who start a regular two-year VET programme (directly or after pre-VET) may still need support to complete it. Various support measures are provided which are either prescribed in the VPETA (Swiss Confederation, 2002) and its subordinate regulations or recommended as good practice. These include

- (1) Teaching methods adapted to weaker students;
- (2) Remedial courses at vocational school;

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- (3) Individual tutoring in case of a risk to fail the programme (Stern *et al.*, 2018; SBFI, 2014);
 - (4) Prolongation of the programme by one year;
 - (5) Compensation of disadvantages due to disabilities (e.g. adapted examinations) if the set standards are met (Schellenberg, 2018; SDBB, 2015);
 - (6) Case management to ensure coordinated long-term support for students at high-risk of dropout, from grade 9 or 10 (out of 11) of compulsory school through VET up to labour market entry (Egger and Partner, 2015);
 - (7) Individual competence records describing the acquired competences in case of repeated failure of the final examination, approved by the respective professional organisation which may help to find employment without final qualification (SGV *et al.*, 2018; SBFI, 2014).
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Some of the measures ((2), (4), (5) and (6)) also apply for students in three- or four-year programmes.

4. Accessibility of regular VET through indirect pathways

In this section, results from the national monitoring of upper secondary education, especially with regard to VET, are presented to give an account of the participation of students with migration background or special education needs. Generally, the types of upper secondary programmes attended and the students' progression in them are influenced by selection processes in lower secondary education (BFS, 2018a): the chances for being in a more demanding programme and for a regular progression are better for women than for men, for Swiss than for foreign students and for students having well-educated (tertiary qualification) than for students with low-educated parents (no upper secondary qualification).

4.1 Transitional programmes or direct enrolment

Longitudinal monitoring data on the transition from lower to upper secondary education show that about 75% of all students directly enrolled in certifying VET or general education programmes after compulsory school (BFS, 2018b; 2016). The rest enrolled with a delay of one year (16%) or two years (4%). Direct enrolment rates vary considerably according to the requirement level of the students' compulsory education, their migration status and the educational level of their parents. Compared to the overall results, enrolment in two-year VET programmes is more often deferred (49% direct enrolments, 36% after one year and 15% after two years) because many students take a transitional pre-VET programme. In fact, transitional options are chosen four times more often by students coming from the lowest levels of compulsory education than by those from classes with extended requirements.

Foreign students are overrepresented in transitional programmes, making up almost half of the student body (BFS, 2017a). This also holds for two-year VET programmes in which they accounted for one-third of all students. In comparison, their share in three- or four-year programmes was only 16%, respectively 11% (BFS, 2015). Analyses suggest that this is partly due to their social origin (i.e. parents with a low level of education). Several factors like language skills, age at arrival in Switzerland and education of the parents influence the choices at upper secondary level and might impede direct access to certifying programmes (BFS, 2017a). But even between equally performing Swiss students and students with migration background, members of the second group more frequently decide on visiting a school-based transitional programme after compulsory education, apparently due to their preference for general education options (SKBF, 2018).

Transitional programmes, which usually last for a year, are successful in facilitating the access to certifying upper secondary education. Of the entire cohort leaving compulsory school in 2012, 14% chose a transitional option (pre-VET or general education) and 12% subsequently started a certifying programme (BFS, 2016). In fact, the vast majority of the students (96%) coming from compulsory schools with basic-level requirements after grade 11 were able to start certifying upper secondary education a year later – only 4% did not make it. But twice as many students from the lowest levels of compulsory school who started a transitional programme in 2012 had not yet entered a certifying programme two years later. Transitional programmes are therefore somewhat less successful to enable access to certifying upper secondary education for students from the lowest levels of compulsory education. The highest proportion of students (42%) who did not make the transition between 2012 and 2014 came from classes with special curricula [8] (BFS, 2016).

4.2 Practical vocational training (special VET)

It is difficult to reliably assess the importance of PrAINSOS trainings (see 3.2) in promoting the subsequent transition to two-year VET programmes or to the primary labour market. A still restricted data base of INSOS over four years (2012–2015) suggests that one out of ten PrAINSOS graduates entered a two-year VET programme directly afterwards and just over one-third joined the primary labour market. Transitions to the protected labour market have decreased, possibly due to increased measures of supported education and supported employment (i.e. job coaches supporting students and workers in the primary labour market) (Scharnhorst and Kammermann, 2017).

5. Effectiveness of two-year VET and inclusion

The overall graduation rate reported for two-year VET (84%) was not much lower than the one for three- and four-year VET (89%) (BFS, 2018a). However, it varied considerably between vocational fields. Furthermore, about 10% of the graduates of two-year VET originally started a three- or four-year programme but were reoriented (BFS, 2018a). In contrast, 4% of the students in two-year VET were promoted after the first year and continued in a three- or four-year programme (BFS, 2015).

Two-year VET programmes were introduced with an inclusive intention by the [Swiss Confederation](#) (2003; 2002) and various support measures (see 3.4) are provided to help students with difficulties to complete them successfully. As two-year programmes are a stepping stone to certifying upper secondary VET, two main questions arise:

- (1) How did two-year VET programmes evolve since their introduction?
- (2) How successful are they, in general, and for young people with migration background or with special education needs in particular?

These questions are addressed in the next sections.

5.1 Evolution of two-year programmes

The evolution of two-year VET programmes with standardised competence profiles, defined by professional organisations to ensure their labour market relevance, is generally considered as a success (e.g. [Bundesrat](#), 2019; [Kammermann](#), 2017). Their number as well as the enrolments steadily grew since their introduction in 2005 so that presently 57 programmes in 21 (out of 34) vocational fields are offered. In 2018, about 6.5% of all apprentices were enrolled in two-year VET (BFS, 2020) and graduates of two-year programmes made up 9.3% of all initial VET qualifications (BFS, 2019b). It is assumed that a substantial part of this growth reflects the inclusion of motivated persons with a potential to

be developed (SKBF, 2018). It must be noted that the implementation of two-year programmes varies considerably between the cantons but the reasons for this have hardly been studied so far (Kammermann, 2017).

Regarding the first research question (see 5) it can be concluded that the overall evolution of two-year VET programmes since their introduction is clearly positive.

5.2 Indicators of effectiveness

When the first two-year VET programmes were introduced in 2005, the Federal Statistical Office could not yet provide longitudinal monitoring data on the individual educational pathways and achievements. Since 2010, identifiers allowing to track individual transitions from school to VET and to further education are used. But before and after 2010, representative national, cross-sectional and longitudinal, evaluations of two-year VET were undertaken which analysed various indicators of success, e.g.

- (1) Graduation rate (Schmid *et al.*, 2016);
- (2) Rate of contract termination and re-entry in VET (Schmid *et al.*, 2016);
- (3) Satisfaction of students, teachers and trainers (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Stern *et al.*, 2010);
- (4) Time until labour market entry and employment rate (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016; Stern *et al.*, 2010);
- (5) Stability or precarity of employment (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017);
- (6) Transition to three- or four-year VET (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016).

A closer look at these evaluations and at national monitoring data of two-year programmes will give more insight into their general effectiveness and their potential to include students with a background of migration or special education.

5.2.1 Graduation, contract termination and re-entry. Of all students starting two-year VET in 2012, about 76% graduated without delay in 2014, whereas 24% of the apprenticeship contracts were terminated prematurely (Schmid *et al.*, 2016). The contract termination rate in three- and four-year VET is similar (BFS, 2017b). Since premature contract termination does not signify definite dropout of VET, the re-entry rates are of interest: they were lower for two-year VET than for three- or four-year VET (65% vs. 82% vs. 88%) four years after contract termination (BFS, 2018a). After terminating a two-year apprenticeship contract, foreign students born abroad re-enter VET significantly less often (43%) than Swiss students (52%). The employment perspective without re-entry is lower for former students of two-year VET (48%) than for those of three- or four-year VET (54%) (BFS, 2018a).

5.2.2 Satisfaction with the programmes and with individual careers. The satisfaction of students, teachers and trainers with two-year programmes is high (Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Stern *et al.*, 2010). Students with a special education background show an even higher satisfaction than those in two- and three-year VET programmes coming from regular schools. The students are also committed to their occupation and to their host company (Stalder and Kammermann, 2017). Moreover, they report a fairly high satisfaction with their career up to five years after graduation (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017).

5.2.3 Labour market entry and employment rate. An immediate labour market entry is proven to be more difficult for graduates of two-year VET than for those of three- or four-year VET (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016; Stern *et al.*, 2010). Generally, the labour market entry and employment rates after two-year VET differ

considerably between occupations (Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016; Stern *et al.*, 2010). However, especially graduates of two-year VET with a special education background struggle to find a job: 18 months after graduation, they are more often unemployed and not in further education (NEET) compared to graduates originally coming from regular schools (see Table 1). But in a mid- to long-term perspective, the employment situation draws level: two and a half years after graduation, approximately 75% of all graduates of two-year VET are employed (Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016). Five years after graduation, the employment rate has increased (83%–85%), with a majority of full-time permanent employment contracts (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017). The short-, mid- and long-term labour market entry rates do not differ for two-year VET graduates with migration background.

Similarly, the national monitoring (BFS, 2018c) showed that graduates of two-year VET going directly to the labour market had a clearly lower full-time employment rate 18 months after graduation than the graduates of three- or four-year VET (78% vs. 89% resp. 95%). Three and a half years after graduation, the NEET status was just over 10% for two-year VET graduates and just under 10% for three- and four-year VET graduates (SKBF, 2018).

5.2.4 Stability versus precarity of employment. Graduates of two-year VET programmes with a special education background are at risk of precarious occupational careers. They face longer and more frequent periods of unemployment than students coming from regular schools (Stalder and Kammermann, 2017). Five years after graduation, one-fourth to one-third of the careers of two-year VET graduates are precarious (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017).

5.2.5 Transition to three- or four-year VET. Although two-year VET graduates may subsequently take up a three- or four-year VET programme, there are large differences between vocational fields (Kammermann *et al.*, 2017; Stalder and Kammermann, 2017; Fitzli *et al.*, 2016). Two-thirds of the graduates from two-year VET in 2012 did not seek a further qualification, whereas one-third continued education and training (BFS, 2018c). Mostly, they enrolled in a three-year VET programme directly after graduation (24%) and obtained the diploma within the next three and a half years; 8% were still in training after this period. Two-year VET graduates with migration background less often continued their education and training after two-year VET (19%–21%) than Swiss nationals (27%).

	2-year p. special education	2-year p. regular school	3-year p. regular school basic level	3-year p. regular school higher level
<i>Educational and work situation 1.5 years after graduation</i>				
Employment	45.0%	61.4%	76.4%	75.0%
Certifying programme ¹	15.0%	27.0%	14.2%	15.3%
NEET	40.0%	11.6%	9.4%	9.7%
N	20	189	106	72
$\chi^2(6) = 25.4;$ $p < 0.001$				
<i>Educational and work situation 2.5 years after graduation</i>				
Employment	70.0%	76.9%	80.0%	76.5%
Certifying programme ¹	15.0%	6.8%	10.5%	10.3%
NEET	15.0%	16.3%	9.5%	13.2%
N	20	147	95	68
$\chi^2(6) = 4.2;$ $p = 0.650$				

Note(s): ¹ VET Diploma programme or further (additional) qualification on upper secondary level, mostly abbreviated duration

Table 1.
Short- to mid-term
transition into labour
market (Stalder and
Kammermann, 2017,
p. 212) (own
translation)

Regarding the second research question (see 5), it can be concluded that two-year VET programmes are generally successful. Nevertheless, the empirical findings show inequities regarding the inclusion of students with migration background or special education needs.

6. Conclusions and discussion

In Switzerland, two-year VET programmes and related support measures are intended to facilitate the access to certifying upper secondary education for academically low achieving youth. Their function as a gateway makes these programmes important for the inclusion of students with migration background or special education needs. However, many of these students struggle to find direct access to two-year VET programmes. Their transition is encouraged with specific pre-VET programmes for migrants and PrAINSOS trainings for students from special schools.

Young migrants are overrepresented in transitional offers which they may often need but which also delay their entry into certifying VET. A very high risk of delayed entry in VET also exists for young people with a special education background. They are also overrepresented in transitional programmes and often stay in them for more than a year. Alternatively, the competences acquired in PrAINSOS programmes may lead to a job in the primary or in the protected labour market or to an entry in a two-year VET programme. Nevertheless, students with a special education background are at high risk of exclusion from certifying upper secondary VET.

Additionally, young migrants are also overrepresented in two-year VET compared to three- or four-year VET. This can be interpreted as a positive result if inclusion is defined by obtaining a recognised upper secondary qualification regardless of its level. However, it can also be regarded as a systematic segregation into a lower level qualification track.

Premature contract terminations concern one-fourth of the students in two-year VET – a similar rate as in three- or four-year VET. However, only about half of the two-year VET students subsequently re-enter VET. In particular, foreign students born abroad less frequently resume a VET programme, perhaps due to a lack of a personal and familial network. If young migrants successfully graduate from two-year VET, the difficulties they may have faced to access and complete it are not reproduced: their chances to get a job do not differ from Swiss graduates. This means that an inclusive effect of two-year VET for persons with migration background can be confirmed.

The majority of the graduates from two-year VET are satisfied with their education and training and consider it as useful for their current vocational activity. Teachers and trainers are also positive about the evolution of the programmes. The great majority of the students taking the final examinations pass them successfully. A third of the graduates profit from the permeability to enrol in a three- or four-year VET programme and graduate within reasonable time, although students with migration or special education background do so less frequently.

Two-year VET is also effective because most graduates eventually find an occupation in the first labour market. Observed disparities regarding labour market entry and NEET status after graduation for persons with a special education background level out in a mid- and long-term perspective. However, graduates of two-year VET with a special education background are at risk of delayed labour market entry and of non-linear, precarious careers with phases of unemployment and job changes – effects that might become stronger in case of an economic depression.

Despite many positive results, the inclusion of students with migration background or special education needs in the regular VET system cannot be fully approved based on the presented empirical findings.

The effectiveness of the specific support measures should therefore be analysed in more detail to adapt and intensify them if needed, or to develop new forms of support, especially for

young people with special education needs. However, it is unclear to what extent intensified or new forms of support are feasible in regular VET. The prevailing educational policy seems rather restrictive in this respect. An example is the reply of the Federal Council (Bundesrat, 2018) to a political motion referring to the CRDP and asking to adapt the laws so that also young people with severe disabilities are entitled to initial VET: it stated that there are already adequate possibilities for education and social participation and therefore, a general claim for initial VET for all persons with severe disabilities funded by the Disability Insurance would not be defensible on socio-political and economic grounds. It was also stressed that VET needs to match a person's potential and that vocational trainings in protected settings would take the reduced flexibility of persons with severe handicaps into account.

Inclusion is limited by the clear labour-market orientation of the two-year VET programmes which has been emphasised since their introduction. Consequently, students who still lack the prerequisites to start a two-year VET programme have to be prepared for VET in transitional pre-VET offers (Barnettler, 2008). The dilemma between labour market orientation and inclusion is also expressed in the federal guide for two-year VET programmes which underlines that support measures are offered to enable as many young people as possible to get a nationally recognised certificate but that for other needs – in particular in the domain of inclusion – specific solutions have to be found, also outside regular VET (SBFI, 2014).

But there are other voices, of researchers as well as of institutional actors and networks, calling for increased efforts to include more persons with special education needs (e.g. Knöpfel, 2018; Pool Maag, 2016) or with migration background (e.g. Imdorf, 2017; Imdorf and Scherr, 2015) in regular VET. To enhance the direct support, inclusive job design, supported education and supported employment are suggested, measures which are welcomed by VET actors (i.e. professional organisations, employers). But they also see limits to realising inclusive workplaces if the relation between support measures and productivity is too disproportional. For example, the idea to integrate the PrAINSOS trainings into the regular system was controversially debated, and VET representatives of most branches pointed out that the strong regulatory requirements would rather restrict than expand the main benefit of these trainings, namely the possibility to individualise them (Knöpfel, 2018).

These exemplary statements and debates show that a fully inclusive VET system and labour market represents an ideal. The extent to which inclusion is realised depends not only on pedagogical issues like adequate curricula, support measures and qualified staff but also on the prevailing societal norms and values, on the compulsory educational system and, last but not least, on the extent of the economical imprint on the VET system.

Notes

1. <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/de/home/themen/integration/integrationsagenda.html> (accessed 21 April 2020).
2. <https://www.aktionsplan-un-brk.ch/> (accessed 21 April 2020).
3. In German speaking countries the term “inclusion” of the CRPD was incorrectly translated as “integration” which is now the official term in Switzerland. “Integration” is also more common when referring to the inclusion of migrants.
4. It distinguishes basic from reinforced measures for special education needs which can both be provided in inclusive or in separative settings. Until 2014, pupils in separative special schools needing reinforced measures and those in special classes of regular schools were recorded with the same identifier “special curriculum” (see Figure 1). A redesign of the federal statistics, effective since 2017, now takes into account that attending a special class does not necessarily mean that reinforced measures are provided.
5. <https://www.bsv.admin.ch/bsv/de/home/sozialversicherungen/iv/grundlagen-gesetze/arbeitsmarkt-integration/nationale-konferenz.html> (accessed 21 April 2020).

6. ICRs approved by professional organisations were introduced for four PrAINSOS occupations in 2018, with guidelines which allow to develop ICRs in further occupations.
7. Tertiary level Professional Education diplomas in German-speaking countries are very differently classified in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Their classification in Switzerland is shown in the Swiss Education Report (SKBF, 2018, p. 170).
8. They made up 4.3% of the cohort in 2012. As no clear information about the intensity of the special education measures in this very heterogeneous group was available then, no conclusions about subgroups can be drawn (also see endnote 4).

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Corresponding author

Marlise Kammermann can be contacted at: marlise.kammermann@ehb.swiss

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