

NEGOTIATE

Overcoming early job-insecurity in Europe

National Stakeholder Committee Report 2017

Location: Basel

Date: 19th of September 2017

Participants:

1. Tobias Hensel VSS – Association of the Swiss student body
2. Rémy Müller / Cantonal Office for Education (Zug)
3. Karin Rüfenacht / Swiss Conference of Cantonal VET Departments (SBBK)
4. Bernhard Weber / State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
5. Martin Gasser / State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
6. Christian Imdorf / NEGOTIATE, University of Basel
7. Lulu P. Shi / NEGOTIATE, University of Basel

Summary for the NEGOTIATE website:

Representatives from Swiss public authorities, and the Association of the Swiss student body met at the third national stakeholder meeting on the 19th of September 2017 at the University of Basel (UNIBAS). Christian Imdorf (Co-leader NEGOTIATE at UNIBAS) and PhD student Lulu P. Shi presented descriptive findings from the recruiter survey, which was carried out in May and June 2016 in the four countries Bulgaria, Greece, Norway and Switzerland. The focus was on the results found in Switzerland.

Hotly debated topics of the meeting were the employers' ambivalent evaluations of applicants' participation in active labour market programmes (ALMP) and – against the background of a recent media coverage in Switzerland – the dramatisation of the negative impact of having worked as a call centre agent for a skilled worker's occupational career. The findings that employers show higher reservations to hire job hoppers compared to unemployed candidates was also met with interest. All in all, the Swiss stakeholders showed interest in further insights and made helpful suggestions.

Descriptive findings

In the first part of the meeting Christian Imdorf and Lulu P. Shi presented the descriptive findings from the factorial survey experiment, which was carried out in May and June 2016 in the four countries Bulgaria, Greece, Norway and Switzerland. The focus was on the results found in Switzerland. Presented descriptive findings include amongst others: The response rates across the five occupational fields mechanics, finance, health, catering and ICT, the geographical distribution of the vacancies, the characteristics of the jobs, features of the recruiters, the communication channels used for the job advertisement, the instruments used for making hiring decisions, as well as the hiring criteria.

Discussion about recruiter's evaluation of ALMP participation

An important subject of the meeting was the employers' evaluations of the applicant's participation in active labour market programmes (ALMP). Across all occupational fields, the majority of the employers indicated that the experience of ALMP participation would have no impact on or decrease the chances of the applicants for being hired. A minority of the employers stated that such participation would increase the chances of the applicants for being hired. Although these findings were not entirely surprising to the participants of the stakeholder meeting, they caused strong reactions and initiated a lively discussion. On the one hand, the participants understood the reasons of the employers, why they would avoid hiring applicants who have participated in ALMP: Such participation can be seen as negative signals and indicate low productivity, low motivation or other negative traits of the applicants. On the other hand, some applicants may gain the necessary competences and skills for finding jobs in such programmes. It was observed that some career advisors would suggest the unemployed to participate in ALMP but later not to reveal such experience in the CV in order to avoid being negatively stigmatised. The participants of the stakeholder meeting would find further insights from research and suggestions addressing this issue helpful.

Discussion about scarring effect of early job insecurity

In the second part of the meeting analytical findings of the factorial survey experiment were discussed. The experiment design was briefly summarised: Real recruiters were shown fictive CVs and were asked to evaluate their chances to be considered for the advertised vacancy. The fictive CVs differ in their education background, (un-)employment history and gender. The main interest of the study is to analyse the effect of experienced unemployment and job experience in de-skilling job, which was operationalised with the job title *call centre agent* in the CV experiment, on recruiter's evaluation. Researchers of the university Basel emphasised that a direct comparison between the effect of unemployment and de-skilling job experience should be avoided, since the fictive CV show maximum 20 months unemployment, whereas job experience as call centre agent last up to five years. Especially against the background of the recent media coverage in Switzerland, which directly compared the effect of unemployment and work experience as call centre agent and overdramatised the latter, the repeated stressing on the limited comparability between the two effects was important.

Karin Rüfenacht from the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Vocational Education and Training Departments suggested to be careful when equating call centre jobs with de-skilling jobs, since in Switzerland there has been the aim to establish the job as call centre agent as a qualified profession by certifying the education and training for this profession. Further, Rémy Müller from the Cantonal Office for Education in Canton Zug added that depending on what kind of jobs, employers may appreciate applicant's experience in a call centre. Previous job experience as call centre agent could be a valuable experience when applying for jobs involving secretary tasks. Tobias Hensel, presenting the Association of the Swiss student body, suggested that such experience could indeed be useful if it matches the education background of the applicant. However, if the applicant is educated in a different occupational field and the work as call centre agent was taken up only to avoid unemployment, such job experience would be regarded as de-skilling and would not be evaluated positively by recruiters. In the factorial survey experiment the fictive candidates, who show work experience as call centre agent are educated in one of the five occupational fields, the job advertisements were sampled. Hence work experience as call centre agent is likely to be perceived as de-skilling by the respondents. This assumption is supported with the experiment results, which shows that call centre experience is strongly penalised with lower recruiter's rating.

Another form of job insecurity the researchers have studied is job hopping. In the survey the employers were first asked whether they would have any reservation to hire candidates who have been unemployed during the last two years. Second, they were asked whether they would have any reservation to hire candidates who have been changing jobs frequently. The findings indicate that the share of employers, who shows reservation to hire job hoppers is larger than the share of employers, who show reservation to hire candidates showing a longer period of unemployment in all four countries. The participant of the stakeholder meeting would be interested in further analysis explaining these findings. Martin Gasser from the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) assumed that scarring effect caused by previous job hopping should be different depending on the candidate's education background and the job requirements. He would suppose that candidates with Vocational Education and Training (VET) degrees applying for middle skill jobs would be penalised the least, since due to the specific skills gained in the VET education, future employers would need to spend less resources for the introductory training. University graduates on the other hand are comparatively less endowed with job specific skills, since universities teach more general skills. Hence, future employers would need to spend considerably longer time for the introductory training. Therefore,

employers recruiting for jobs requiring university degrees would be more cautious to hire workers, who may be inclined to change job after a short period.

From another perspective, Rémy Müller argues, the opposite might also be true: Since in the segment of high skill jobs it is not unusual for highly educated workers to frequently change jobs, job hopping might not be perceived as a negative signal. In contrast, it may even signal ambition and high productivity. In the segment of middle skill jobs however, it is less the norm that workers voluntarily change jobs. Job hopping would therefore rather be associated with involuntary job changes and negative qualities of the applicants. In order to understand how recruiters interpret job hopping, it is necessary to draw on the qualitative survey items, in which respondents stated their reasons for their reservation to hire job hopping applicants.