

Yann Bochsler

Governing the Young Poor in Switzerland

*How the Moral Foundations of Work Ethics Guide
Social Assistance Discourse*

Studies on the Social Question



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in Switzerland**

How the Moral Foundations of Work
Ethics Guide Social Assistance
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Volume 11

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The theoretical and empirical context of social inequality, marginalization and exclusion, known as the “social question”, is a traditional part of sociological thought. This is where classical sociological questions about society come together: which actors shape the social order and what effects do their actions, strategies and dispositives have? How are certain social and welfare state arrangements legitimized and practically enforced? Under what circumstances and how are social phenomena encoded as “social problems” in public, social politics and science? These questions provide the framework of the series “Studies on the Social Question”. The series is open for different currents and approaches of sociological thinking and different academic disciplines. It welcomes theoretical works, empirical studies and analyses of contemporary developments.

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Acronyms

AIZ	Centre for work integration (Canton of Basel-City)
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
CAS	Municipal social assistance centres (Canton of Geneva)
CASI	Contrat d'aide sociale individuel
CS	Compulsory school
EDK/CDIP	Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Public Education
EQIP	Encouragement à la qualification et à l'insertion professionnelle
EVD	Federal Department of Economic Affairs
FNIA	Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration
FORJAD	Vocational Training for Youngsters with Difficulties
FSO	Federal statistical Office
GSI	Gestion du suivi individualisé
GT	Grounded Theory
IBJ	Informational basis of judgment in justice
LIASI	Law on integration and individual social assistance in the canton of Geneva
LIVES	Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research
NEET	Neither in employment nor in education or training
OCE	Office cantonal de l'emploi
OdA	Organizations of the World of Work
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCI	Problem-centred interview
RMCAS	Revenu minimum cantonal d'aide sociale pour les chômeurs en fin de droit
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation
SEMO	Motivational semester
SKOS/CSIAS	Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations
SODK/CDAS	Conference of Social Service Directors
SRED	Service de la recherche en éducation

SRP	Service for professional reintegration (Canton of Geneva)
VET	Vocational education and training
VPET	Vocational and Professional Education and Training
YAS	Young adults without vocational training receiving social assistance

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1 Introduction

This publication analyses the current socio-political alignment of two Swiss cantons (Basel-City and Geneva) in the policy field of social assistance, focusing on young adults without vocational training (YAS). Despite a comparatively well-developed social security scheme on a federal level, Swiss cantons retain exclusive competencies in many social policy fields like family, poverty, education, and social assistance. Historically, there has never been a framework law on social assistance, which means that there are twenty-six cantonal laws regulating access to a minimum subsistence level in case of a proven hardship. The Federal Constitution stipulates in Article 12 that “anyone that is in situation of distress and unable to provide for his or her needs has the right to be assisted and to receive the means necessary to lead a life in accordance with human dignity”.

Since the economic crisis of 2008, the socioeconomic situation of young people in Europe has deteriorated. More and more young people live with their parents, and unemployment, inactivity, and deprivation have increased for young people in nearly all EU countries (Eurofound 2014). For Switzerland, although the increase in numbers cannot be ascertained in the same way, local social services in charge of implementing social assistance for eligible young adults and their families have observed an increase in what they call cases with “multiple problems” (Haller 2012:10; Haller, Jäggi, and Beiser 2013:12). According to this view, young adults without vocational training currently receiving social assistance (YAS) have not met the expectations required to enter the life phase of adulthood. They are in a psychological and social state of multiple dependency (towards their parents and/or the welfare state), trying to catch up with their peer group by reattempting the previously failed transition of school to paid work. The YAS have no employment and limited educational perspectives and financial resources. Furthermore, they often cumulate disadvantages (‘multiple problems’) like breaks with their families, health-related problems (drug and gambling addictions, depression), private debts, inappropriate housing, and low school achievement (Bochsler 2020).

Policy makers and frontline workers have specific expectations towards youngsters who seem to have fallen out of the institutionalized life course (Kohli 1985, 1997, 2007). Guided by the moral and political consensus that no young person should be left without professional prospects, social policies in Switzerland aim at activating the subjects that come under their jurisdiction.

Young people in Switzerland are increasingly taken into account as future human capital in the context of activation policies (Dahmen, Bonvin, and Beuret 2017:146). In this vein, a sustainable labour market integration of the YAS secures the desired return on investment. The various institutions of the welfare state actively regulate the youth phase. The aim is usually the creation of a skilled workforce for the economy and a reduction in the number of young people lacking skills and qualifications because of potential future welfare state expenses (Atzmüller 2011; Dahmen et al. 2017; Lessenich 2013).

A major issue of the implicit youth policies as they are framed currently via activation (Hansen 2019) and social investment strategies (Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012) is the inconsistency between the encouragements aimed at achieving sustainable labour market integration and the reality of failed or precarious integration. Even though a majority meets or surpasses the various thresholds, a significant number of young people do not. Scholars have argued that the integration measures and other policies addressed at this specific category of young individuals who fail to transition smoothly from school to work are designed to 'cool out' the scarring effects of such exclusionary experiences (Goffman 1952; Nada 2019:40). The welfare state implements integration measures with the aim of adapting both the youngsters' expectations to their real integration potential, while also working on their deficiencies in order to prepare them for another attempt at entering the educational system or labour market. In other words, these measures are also intended as palliative interventions and accompaniment for compensating the loss of a certain social status and thus 'cooling out' the adverse effects of not mastering the intended transitions (Wei 2016).

Approach and research interest

The presented research fits into a long sociological and political science tradition of social policy analysis. The theoretical perspective applied is that governmental responses to poverty and social exclusion perform a number of different social purposes (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Rose and Miller 1992). On the one hand, governmental actions towards 'the poor' are practical and tangible. They define for instance the level of material support for households experiencing an objective hardship. On the other hand, they affirm the dominant moral values of a given social order and have a symbolic function. Social policies and welfare benefits contribute to relieve material misery and provide labour opportunities to certain categories of 'the poor'. They structure

and delimitate the access to social benefits and accompaniment. In this vein, they are tangible and provide valuable support for numerous households struggling to make ends meet. At the same time, social policies also contribute to help constructing and problematizing social phenomena like the YAS. They are not value neutral because they decide upon the concrete levels, conditions, and duration of social benefit access. These latter vary greatly according to recipients' specific socioeconomic features. As such, social policies include a great deal of moral judgements, disclosed within public discourses on 'the poor', which translates into surveillance and control of those who claim state support (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020). Within the cantonal regimes of social assistance, YAS, for instance, receive a lower minimum subsistence level compared to older or so-called 'more deserving' social assistance beneficiaries. Such delimitations are continuously constructed to legitimize the policies both internally (within welfare administration) and externally (towards taxpayers, the 'working' population, and politicians, for instance).

Consequently, one cannot reduce social policies to the mere technocratic regulation of poverty and social exclusion (Rosenstein 2018:20). Indeed, one can evaluate the effects of social policies on their beneficiaries and many studies and scholars have done just that. However, social policies can also be considered as reflections of our contemporary conceptions of solidarity and social justice. The critical analysis of social policies has a long tradition and different approaches must be considered. Based on social justice theories like the capability approach (Sen 1980), Swiss scholars have analysed and evaluated social policies from a critical standpoint (Bilfulco et al. 2015; Bonvin 2008; Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016). This substantial social policy research is based on the assumption that the information used, officially and/or informally, to separate 'deserving' from 'less deserving' welfare beneficiaries is constitutive of the "informational basis of judgment in justice" (IBJ, see Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016:39; Sen 1990). In this perspective, identifying the IBJ of social policies reveals a great deal about conceptions of social justice and the way vulnerable people should be supported or not. A lot of qualitative research has been done on the selectivity of social policies within different policy contexts (Nada 2019; Rosenstein 2018; Tabin and Perriard 2016) bringing to light the complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of beneficiary subgroups within welfare regimes such as social assistance, invalidity, and/or unemployment insurance. However, the present research differs from these projects as it focuses on the moral underpinnings of social policies enclosed

within discourses addressed at YAS. Using a specific understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values with a focus on work ethics in combination with age, I retrace discursive patterns and narratives found within cantonal welfare and youth transition institutions as well as associations and social firms implementing integration programmes. Furthermore, I contrast these discursive patterns and narratives to the perceptions of the YAS themselves – allowing a multi-level perspective on the moral ambiguities of social policies.

This book provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-political alignment of two Swiss cantons. It focuses thereby on two aspects. The first is to understand how cantonal social policies grasp, circumscribe, and define ‘the social problem’ of the YAS. The second one is the discursive justification patterns for their strategic take on ‘the social problem’ and how these strategies evolved over time. The reflective gaze of the YAS adds a valuable perspective by acting as a mirror to the designed and implemented policies. The activities of the welfare state are not value free (Hasenfeld and Abbott 1992). Social policies seek to shape the life course of the YAS according to what is considered the right path for them. Consequently, the welfare state itself can have ambiguous effects on the life of the YAS because there are material consequences if they do not adjust their behaviours according to what is expected of them. The research interest is twofold:

This publication seeks: (1) to analyse the current socio-political narratives addressed towards the young adults on social assistance without vocational training (YAS); and (2) to reconstruct how the implementers of these policies and the YAS themselves perceive them.

Case studies were conducted in two cantons, Basel-City and Geneva, during 2017 and 2018 – using a multi-level approach and a set of qualitative data collection techniques (document analysis, expert- and problem-centred interviews). The evaluation of the data follows mostly a deductive research approach by adhering to a specific theoretical conception of social policies and using coding instruments in order to retrace the emerging discursive patterns and narratives within the collected data. Both cantons have undergone structural changes within their administrations in recent years and have introduced new agencies and strategies regarding the YAS. I understand governmental action as a diffuse network of actors with different positions of power. The state, in this perspective, is not and has never been a unified actor (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020:366). Rather within the cantonal jurisdiction and administration of the youngsters, there are various and sometimes conflicting

“political rationalities” (Rose and Miller 1992:178), put into practice to shape the realities of the YAS. This book seeks to disclose the plurality of these political rationalities with a focus on their moral underpinnings.

Structure and objectives of the publication

The book is structured in six parts. The first (Chapter 2) focuses on the legal context of social assistance, its relation to age, the statistical evolution of the YAS, and the Swiss dual VET system. I start out by presenting the state of comparative welfare state research with the aim of contextualizing the Swiss welfare state, its specific features, and recent evolutions in general, before detailing the federalist organization of social assistance in Switzerland and the discursive importance of the umbrella institution, the Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations (SKOS/CSIAS). In order to illustrate the current socio-political challenge that the YAS present to the cantons and their social assistance administration, I include a statistical analysis of young adults receiving social assistance in Basel-City and Geneva according to various socioeconomic characteristics. Next, I outline the Swiss dual VET regime and the pathways that should ideally be available for the YAS. As the cantons strive to guide youngsters towards a smooth school-to-work transition, the role of cantonal offices (employment offices and vocational training departments) and actors (associations and social firms) will be discussed as well. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the current ‘education first’ alignment of the cantons, which aims at a long-term accompaniment of youngsters with breaks in their education and multiple problems towards a re-integration into the Swiss VET system and subsequently the regular labour market.

The second part (Chapter 3) presents the theoretical assumptions and angles with which the collected data has been evaluated. I argue that social policies include moral judgements, disclosed within political discourse on ‘the poor’ and subgroups of ‘the poor’. Social policies contribute to maintain a certain type of public order and lastly constitute a way to enforce work, while hierarchizing different classes of individuals. I argue that moral representation of ‘deservingness’ and the broader discourse on poverty matter because they convey conceptions of social justice. To illustrate this, I borrow from various conceptual and empirical works within social policy research. The chapter details first two related notions used to describe ongoing shifts in social policy discourse and practices: ‘activation’ and ‘social investment’. Next, I discuss a specific set of moral values that are continuously negotiated within the design and implementation of social policies. Subsequently, I

will disclose the main analytical perspective with which I will conduct the evaluation of the collected data: the reinforcement of the work ethics of the YAS as guiding principle of governmental activities. This focus is based on the observation that for the Swiss context it is normatively more and more difficult to find socially accepted exemptions from paid work (gainful employment) while being considered a deserving welfare beneficiary. The chapter will close with the formulation of four hypotheses, which will guide the data analysis.

The third part (Chapter 4) details the methodological approach. Demonstrating the importance of 'expert knowledge' in social policy formulation and implementation in liberal, evidence-based democracies, it clarifies the level of analysis. The chosen approach on governmental action suggests a focus on the discursive aspect of human practices and a reconstruction of narratives of the identified experts within a given administrative apparatus. The chapter starts out by linking conceptions of governmental action with the theoretical understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values. Next, I outline the pertinence of a multi-level approach when analysing the nexus between vulnerability and social policy before disclosing concretely which levels I address empirically. Subsequently, I will detail the procedures regarding the case studies, the data sample, and the criteria for the selection of the studied documents and interview partners. A subchapter which addresses the interview and coding techniques will follow. Finally, I close the chapter with a reflexive note on my field experiences and the limitations of the research.

The fourth part (Chapter 5) presents the first part of the empirical analysis. It draws on data I collected from strategic documents like cantonal reports and studies as well as on interviews I conducted with various administrative experts ('implementers' and 'providers of integration'). To provide the context, first, I retrace the historical evolution and recent changes within both cantonal administrations with a special focus on strategic turns within both cantonal administrations. Second, the chapter introduces the commonalities and differences between the investigated cases regarding their strategic take on the YAS. Third, I analyse the encompassing discursive patterns and underlying moral underpinnings, disclosing the emerging, conflicting narratives in social policy discourse on the phenomenon of the YAS. Based on an in-depth empirical analysis of the individual perceptions of key actors with 'expert knowledge', the recurrent discursive patterns and narratives shared in both cantons are made visible.

The fifth part (Chapter 6) turns to the perception of the YAS themselves. It provides the second part of the empirical analysis. It draws on data collected from problem-centred interviews with YAS, who I have encountered in various settings (through social services and integration programmes). The chapter starts out by discussing the heterogeneity as well as the commonalities within the social group of the YAS, before detailing the emerging discursive patterns and narratives found within the data. The chapter discloses how the YAS perceive the current alignment within the cantons and how they deal with ambiguous social policies that individualizes their deemed ‘deviant’ trajectory.

The sixth part (Chapter 7) discusses the hypotheses and the essential results of this research. It seeks to reflect the emerging discursive patterns and narratives on the YAS, the social assistance, and youth unemployment on a broader scale. The first concluding remark reflects the tendency to relativize the access to social rights for certain subgroups of ‘the poor’ and its significance for the welfare state as a whole. The second remark discusses the alleged ‘welfare dependency trap,’ which appears throughout the data and reflects the insights in the light of the cantonal ‘education first’ adjustments. Finally, as social assistance is a major occupational field for various professionals of social work, the results will be discussed with respect to their significance for the discipline.

Contribution

A first benefit of the present research is the combined focus on the discursive patterns of implementers, providers of integration, and the reflexive analytical gaze of the YAS themselves. Some of the encountered implementers (heads or deputy heads of offices and integration programmes) combine policy-making function and street-level experience. As such, the focus of the analysis lies at the intersection of policy formulation and implementation. This research contributes to a better understanding of the intricacies of activation and social investment policies and their ambiguous moral underpinnings regarding young people. More precisely, it provides scientific insight into the framing of young people as ‘problematic’ within the realm of activation and social investment strategies.

Second, by choosing to focus on the moral perspective of the ‘work ethics,’ this book contributes to reflect on a typically Swiss moral feature, which has previously shaped the arrangements of welfare regimes in Switzerland and has arguably even gained in importance in recent years: the nexus between

individual responsibility and welfare. Indeed, the question of receiving state support in situations of unemployment in Switzerland is intricately linked with the question of individual responsibility and the question if a person has done enough to avoid a given hardship and 'deserves' the support granted by his or her community. Furthermore, this research shows the importance of looking at discourses in critical social policy analysis. Scholars have argued how the youth phase has become saturated by problematic ascriptions like 'deviant' or 'precarious' (e.g. Becquet, Loncle, and Van de Velde 2012). These ascriptions are relevant because they impact the lived realities of policymakers, frontline workers, as well as the youngsters and frame the implementation of policies. In the case of YAS, this publication demonstrates for instance to what extent the narratives of the welfare and transition regimes are incorporated and reproduced by YAS.

Third, the present research demonstrates the value of a multi-level approach, which allows reconstructing discourses from various angles and perspectives. Such an analysis at the intersection of policy formulation and implementation reflects not only the moral foundations at a macro level but also its translation into practice, whereas the perspectives of the YAS mirror the moral values of the social policies as a whole. Another advantage of such a procedure is that it allows a comparative approach between the investigated cases as well as within the cases.

Fourth, the conducted case studies include not only an analysis of emerging discursive patterns and narratives but also a historic reconstruction of how the administrative structures of Basel-City and Geneva (actors, institutions, associations, and integration programmes) have evolved in the last twenty years. Most studies take either a historic or a discursive perspective. The present research combines these two aspects.

2 Social assistance in Switzerland and its relation to age

Before addressing the issue of social assistance in Switzerland and its relevance for young adults, it is important to give an overview of the Swiss welfare state as a whole and discuss its specific features. The term ‘welfare state’ describes a set of policies enacted by various institutions, which intervene in economy and society. These policies are intended to cushion certain risks of exclusion and provide legitimate comfort for households and individuals, who are not participating in the labour market for different reasons. The policies include, for instance, unemployment benefits, access to health care, pension schemes, access to education, housing, or a subsistence level in case of long-term unemployment. Which groups of (non-)citizens are entitled to what kind of benefits and to what conditions is part of a constant political and discursive negotiation process, which evolves around the normative questions of ‘rights and responsibilities’ of members of a given society (Dingeldey 2007; Gilbert 2002). The welfare state is directly bound to the nation state and to a large degree to its territoriality. Welfare policies also actively contribute to demarcating the deservingness and symbolic belongingness of citizens and non-citizens. The conditions, duration, and level of support for unemployed individuals with migration backgrounds, for instance, is considerably more rigid in comparison to Swiss nationals.

Comparative welfare state researchers have studied the emergence of welfare states, predominantly for the OECD member countries. Following up the classical work of Esping-Andersen’s *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen 1989), they have categorized Switzerland as a standard European continental model with a liberal face (Armingeon 2001; Armingeon, Bertozzi, and Bonoli 2004; Bertozzi, Bonoli, and Ross 2008). The ‘liberal face’ is characterized by the consensus amongst scholars that ideas of flexible labour markets and non-interventions of the state tend to prevail in political debates concerning social policies (see for instance Dahmen and Bonvin 2017). Switzerland has a comparatively delayed evolution of its federal social security schemes. One of the more prominent reasons for this delay is the fact that the federal state is weak both in competences and in resources. Another reason is institutional: Federalism slows down the process because every new social policy on the federal level needs a constitutional amendment (Armingeon 2001; Armingeon et al. 2004). Furthermore, Dahmen and Bonvin

(2017: 274) state that federalism triggered a “constant search for consensual solutions, striving to integrate all stakeholders in the decision process in order to avoid possible referenda at a later stage”. Combined with the division of labour between the different levels of government regarding the design and implementation of social policies (social insurance being in federal hands and social assistance, family, and housing policies under cantonal and municipal responsibility) this has resulted in a highly complex, fragmented, and multi-actor social policy landscape. Another Swiss particularity is the strong involvement of private and corporate actors like associations and private firms in shaping and implementing social policies.

Despite these delays, social security schemes in Switzerland are now comparatively well developed. Findings demonstrate that in the period from 1980 to 1995, in comparison to other OECD countries, Switzerland increased social security benefits more than any other member state (Armingeon 2001). These benefits are predominantly insurance based and compensatory in nature. However, as was mentioned, the cantons retain their competences in designing and implementing their own social policies in fields like poverty, education, family, and housing. This has resulted in twenty-six cantonal welfare jurisdictions with distinct regimes of means-tested benefits that complement the federal assurance-based social benefits. A prominent example of such a means-tested benefit designed and implemented by the cantons is the health care premium reduction. The Swiss health care insurance was introduced in the 1990s on a federal level and is financed via a per capita premium mechanism. The cantons are in charge of reducing the weight of these premiums for lower- and middle-income households and they are free to define the limits of entitlements as well as the level of reduction for these households. Another example are the cantonal scholarships. They are understood to be contributions for students (upper secondary level as well as tertiary education) living in low-income households. Again, the level of the cantonal contributions and the access conditions (for instance, grace periods or income thresholds) vary a great deal and the scholarships for students completing a vocational training or other upper secondary education are usually lower than those for tertiary education. The granted scholarships are, with some exceptions (canton Vaud for instance), not comprehensive enough to secure a minimal subsistence level, which means that these households are usually also beneficiaries of social assistance (SKOS/CSIAS 2011).

There are further cantonal means-tested benefits like alimony benefits, affordable housing benefits, contributions towards childcare costs, etc. They function in a similar way. In some cases, like health care insurance for instance, there is a framework law on the federal level guiding the direction of a certain policy, and in other cases, like alimony benefits, housing, and poverty issues, there is no framework law and instead associations like the Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations (SKOS/CSIAS) have a coordinating and harmonizing function. In yet other cases like scholarships, the cantons become active themselves and initiate a treaty in order to harmonize at least partially the differences in contribution levels and access conditions. They usually use the lowest common denominator as a benchmark for defining the scholarship standards. As of 2020, twenty-one cantons have adhered to the concordat on scholarships (EDK/CDIP 2020).

Cantonal social assistance is another example of a classical means-tested social benefit. It is designed for households without access to sufficient economic resources. There has never been a federal framework law on social assistance in Switzerland. Article 115 of the Federal Constitution states that “people in need are supported by their residential canton. The Federation shall regulate the exceptions and the competences”. Consequently, the cantons have exclusive competence in both designing and implementing this policy field, which means that there are twenty-six cantonal laws on social assistance legislating the fundamental right to a subsistence level. The Federal Constitution only stipulates in Article 12 that “anyone who is in a situation of distress and unable to provide for his or her needs has the right to be assisted and to receive the means necessary to lead a life in accordance with human dignity”.

The present chapter discusses the evolution of the cantonal regimes of social assistance, the role of the federal association SKOS/CSIAS, and its converging effects on cantonal laws of social assistance with the publishing of its guidelines on social assistance. As the subject of the present research is young adults without vocational training on social assistance (YAS), the focus will be laid on the social assistance and its relation to age groups with a special attention for reforms targeting 18- to 25-year-old individuals. Next, I outline the results of an evaluation of the statistics on social assistance comparing the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva in order to have detailed information of the statistical evolution within these two cases and the socioeconomic features of the YAS. Finally, the cantonal social assistance regimes are embed-

ded in a broader youth transition regime and collaborate with other cantonal departments (employment offices and vocational training departments). For this reason, the Swiss VET (vocational education and training) system will be introduced. Furthermore, the recent strategic shift in youth transition policies in Switzerland, which can be called ‘education first’ and its importance for the social assistance and the YAS will be discussed.

2.1 The objectives of social assistance

The cantons and particularly the municipalities have historically played an important role in supporting households experiencing hardship. A member of a cantonal and/or municipal community has a fundamental right to be supported in case of proven need. Since 1975, both Swiss nationals and foreigners get support from their residential canton if they experience hardship. Before that, it was the responsibility of the canton or municipality of origin (Armingeon 2001). Apart from the moral ideal of solidarity towards households in need, the right to a minimum existence level is also guided by the notion of ‘dignity’. This means that every community member should have the right to be supported in a way that allows him or her to lead a dignified life. From a legal perspective, it was only in 1995 that the federal court stated in a landmark ruling that ensuring a “human dignified basic existence” constitutes an integral part of a democratic community and even a “condition for exercising other fundamental rights” (BGE 121 I 367). In the course of the complete revision of the Swiss constitution introduced in the year 1999, the Federal Council formalized this principle by translating it into a fundamental right to support in case of need.¹ However, these legal notions of support have a conditional character. Who gets what level of benefit and which circumstances and hardships qualify for a certain type of social support are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The Council of States added a subsection, for instance, emphasizing the subsidiary character of this right to support in need (Hänzi 2011:79).

One can argue that the Swiss conception of social assistance has always been conditional. Whether or not the hardship is self-inflicted is irrelevant, yet support is conditioned on the upstream means available to that person or household for completely avoiding or alleviating the hardship. This conditionality is called subsidiarity and is a guiding principle of Swiss social

1 Botschaft des Bundesrates zur Reform der Bundesverfassung 96 091 vom 20. November 1996 in BBl 1997 I 149.

security as a whole as it formalizes and demarcates the competences of the different state actors and welfare institutions. In order to be eligible for social assistance, households must prove that their hardship is real and concrete and they must also prove that there are no other upstream means available for them – even their own possibility to help themselves. Every local social service in Switzerland in charge of implementing social assistance has such an entitlement procedure – which sometimes is also called ‘verification of subsidiarity’.

From a legal perspective, the scope of services arising from Article 12 of the Federal Constitution are still only minimal (Coullery 2019). Social assistance should have the function of bridging a given hardship until the individual or household regains economic autonomy. The granted services should always be adapted to the concrete situation and in no case be too advantageous in comparison to other households without access to social assistance (like working poor households, for instance). However, the aim is to help households in need so that they do not have to beg for food and shelter (Hänzi 2011:81). In other words, there is also a moral purpose of order and security, which aims at avoiding the public visibility of poverty. These minimal services incorporate elementary needs like food, clothing, housing, and basic health care. Furthermore, it includes services that allow a minimal ‘social participation’ in order to prevent social exclusion like access to forms of communication (telephone, internet) or support in case of judicial procedures. It is important to note, however, that the actual content of Article 12 of the Federal Constitution has never been specified in detail. The question of the concrete level of services remains relative to the concrete and individual hardships. The concept of “human dignity”, according to Article 12 of the Federal Constitution, does not contain an estimation of what it minimally entails. Rather, it only becomes relevant in a negative sense, when it is breached (Neumann 1995). Consequently, the concrete level and form of social assistance is constantly negotiated and renegotiated within social services and must always be interpreted in relation to the current social standard.

The fact that social assistance is conceptualized as an interim support implies a second objective for its implementation, the reintegration of its beneficiaries. Social assistance has a duty to its beneficiaries to secure them a livelihood and help them regain an autonomous life without economic, social, or professional support. Even though implementation is in the competence of the federal subunits – the cantons and the municipalities – and thus

the realities of the social services can differ, we find converging objectives articulated in the cantonal laws on social assistance. Regarding the goal of reintegrating their beneficiaries, Hänzi (2011:113) pinpoints three groups of common objectives that can be found in some form in all of the twenty-six cantonal laws:

- (1) Encouraging economic and personal autonomy
- (2) Professional and social integration
- (3) Preventing social distress

These three objectives demonstrate that ‘helping’ beneficiaries of social assistance entails more than just providing material support. In accordance with Kutzner (2009), helping these individuals in need translates into complementary support. The first objective embodies this aspect as the aim is ‘encouragement’, which means there is a need for professional support, complementary to the capacities of the individuals with the aim of enhancing their autonomy.

The second objective, even though at a first glance seemingly congruent with the first one, has a different discursive and moral background. It was introduced in the norms of the SKOS/CSIAS and in most of the cantonal laws by the end of the 1990 or in the beginning of the 21st century and goes back to the integration discourse we also find within migration policies (Bochsler, Koch, and Kehrli 2020; Piñeiro 2020). Indeed, the articulation of an ‘integration’ mandate for social assistance implies that individuals seeking help are in a state or trajectory of ‘disintegration’ and thus ‘outside’ of a community. The objective of ‘social and professional integration’ embodies a more constraining approach, conceptually borrowed from similar approaches within migration policies: the migrant individual arriving in Switzerland needing to prove worthiness for integration and adherence to the community. In a similar way, with the mandate of ‘professional and social integration’, beneficiaries of social assistance need to prove their moral eligibility for support by signing an ‘integration contract’, which details the future ‘integration steps’. Hänzi (2011:112) argues that “professional integration” and “encouraging the economic autonomy” should be congruent in most cases with the first objective – with the important nuance that “encouragement” implies taking into account the individual resources of the beneficiaries. Regarding the second part of the ‘integration’ mandate (social integration), Hänzi (2011:112) interprets it as behavioural prevention because social assistance wants to make sure that the individuals will not end up socially excluded.

Taking into account the actual social assistance practice of the integration mandate, others have argued that ‘social integration’ is inextricably linked to the mandate of ‘professional integration’ and is only then regarded as a legitimate objective when it serves as a first step towards labour market integration (Strohmeier and Knöpfel 2005). The third and last objective (‘preventing social distress’) can be interpreted in the sense that social services, apart from the concrete help and support they are providing in the present, should make sure that no such hardship reoccurs in the future. Usually this incorporates the transmission of ‘competences’ (financial literacy, for instance) in order to deal with certain challenges like the prevention of future debts.

Consequently, the purpose of social assistance boils down to two assignments: guaranteeing a subsistence level and reintegration. These assignments are morally and tangibly intertwined. As we have seen, this concrete support must entail a minimal enhancement of social participation. This is linked to the stipulation in Article 12 of the Federal Constitution that support should allow a beneficiary to live a “dignified” life. Conversely, the failure to alleviate one’s hardship morally justifies reducing or even aborting the support, since the beneficiaries – in these cases – have not done everything in their power to avert the hardship. This example demonstrates that in the case of social assistance the concrete policies manoeuvre within one crucial field of tension: solidarity versus individual responsibility. The following subchapter will illustrate and discuss this field of tension by outlining and deepening the guiding principles of the social assistance stipulated in the norms of the SKOS/CSIAS.

2.2 The SKOS/CSIAS and its guidelines

Even though social assistance is implemented on a cantonal and municipal level, the SKOS/CSIAS plays an important role in coordinating and harmonizing the practice within the constituent units. This umbrella association sets the normative framework and guides the strategic direction of social assistance practices locally. Thus, in the absence of a federal law on social assistance, the guidelines of the Swiss Conference of Welfare Organizations (SKOS/CSIAS) have the function, amongst other things, of harmonizing the social assistance practice of the cantonal and municipal social services in Switzerland and providing an exchange platform for all the state and non-state actors involved in designing and implementing welfare policies. The SKOS/CSIAS was founded in 1903 as a non-governmental association by Christian priests. The foundation’s background is twofold. First, due

to the sudden population growth in the early 1900s, the subsequent increasing mobility, and rise of new forms of urban poverty, cantons and municipalities could not keep up with the support of individual hardships. Second, by 1912 more than 1,800 institutions were involved in “voluntary aid to the poor” (Hänzi 2011:13–15). Consequently, there was an obvious need for coordination due to the lack of transparency and growing density of actors involved. It would be beyond the scope of the present research to set out the historic evolution of the SKOS/CSIAS.

Since its creation, the SKOS/CSIAS has consistently lobbied for a federal framework law on social assistance – however the association has remained unsuccessful. In its position statement (SKOS/CSIAS 2012), the SKOS/CSIAS favours the introduction of such a framework law because it could regulate “the objectives, the principles, the eligibility criteria, the definition of the subsistence level, as well as the rights and duties of social assistance beneficiaries”. According to their perspective, this would contribute to alleviating harmful cantonal disparities regarding disposable incomes of households in similar economic situations or regulations like the obligation to reimburse lawfully received social assistance benefits. Backed by the Conference of Social Service Directors (SODK/CDAS)², the Federal Council has repeatedly expressed scepticism as to the introduction of a framework law, arguing that it would be politically very difficult to achieve due to the opposition of the cantons. The Federal Council acknowledges the lack of harmonization and liabilities but favours the strengthening and legitimization of the SKOS/CSIAS norms as defining set of rules rather than seeking a federal solution (Bundesrat 2015). A more recent political attempt still needs to be decided upon. A motion of the Green Party was submitted in summer 2020 for the introduction of a broad framework law on livelihood.³ This proposal takes the initial idea of a framework law on social assistance further and seeks to regulate on a federal level, amongst other things, issues like legal protection for beneficiaries, professional requirements for social services professionals, and the financial participation of the Federation and the cantons. The Federal

2 This council unites the members of the government of the 26 cantons who head the social affairs departments. It promotes cooperation between the cantons and thus contributes to the harmonization of social policy.

3 The motion was submitted by the Green member of the Swiss parliament Katharina Prelicz-Huber and is entitled “framework law on livelihood” (motion 20.3823, see also: <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefft?AffairId=20203823> [access date: 17 October 2023]).

Council reiterated its negative stance towards this proposal and the motion will be discussed within both chambers of parliament in the next two years.

In the following subsection, the logic of the ‘social subsistence level’ as well as three of the arguably most important principles of Swiss social assistance will be outlined (subsidiarity, individualization, and fulfilment of demand), before focusing on the recent reforms and tendencies most pertinent for young adults without vocational training in the next subchapter.

2.2.1 The ‘social subsistence level’

If a social assistance claimant has proven his or her eligibility to the local social services in charge of implementing assistance, this individual and household has a claim to a so-called ‘social subsistence benefit’ (SKOS/CSIAS 2016). Even though there are slight differences in the cantonal and municipal implementation regarding this benefit, nearly every one of the twenty-six cantons refers to the definition according the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines either in their laws or in their regulations (SKOS/CSIAS 2018). There is no uniform definition of a subsistence level in Switzerland. Apart from the one defined in the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines, the definitions stipulated in the law regarding debts and pursuits and in the law on supplementary benefits regarding pensioners and invalidity are also relevant in their respective domains. However, the definition of the SKOS/CSIAS is arguably the most important one (Schuwey and Knöpfel 2014). First, it is not just bound to one domain like the other two definitions, so it is relevant for every eligible citizen in need. Second, the federal court refers to it in legal questions according to Article 12 of the Federal Constitution, and the Federal Office for Statistics (FSO) use the definition as well for the assessment of poverty statistics.

Social assistance is a means-tested benefit, and, unlike the logic of the social insurance benefits, has the monthly revenue of the household requesting support as a starting point for defining eligibility. In other words, social services compare the revenues of a household with the ‘approved’ expenses that are part of the subsistence level. These ‘requirement-related’ aspects are the basic needs, which cover all day-to-day expenses like food, clothing, mobility, and communication. For a one-person household this currently amounts to 997 Swiss francs per month. The other two acknowledged expenses cover housing and basic health care costs.⁴ In order to take into

4 The SKOS guidelines do not recommend specific amounts for these expenditure items because they vary from case to case. For example, rental costs for single-person households

account the vast heterogeneity of social assistance cases and to make sure the professionals of the local social services can act according to the individual needs of the beneficiaries, there are also additional ‘situational benefits’ that can be granted. Typically, these benefits cover expenses like dentist bills, which are not covered by primary health care, or employment-related expenses like out-of-home meals. For these expenses, the beneficiaries must hand in a request if the situation occurs.

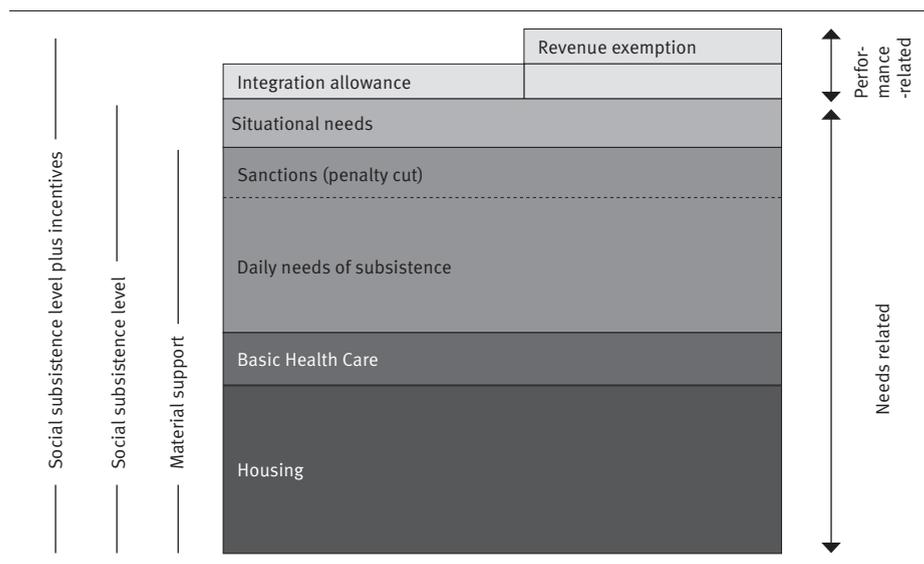
Furthermore, since the 2005 reform of the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines, two instruments have been introduced, the ‘income deduction’ and the ‘integration allowance’ (completing a socio-professional integration measure). Both financially reward beneficiaries already in employment (though still with insufficient revenue, the so-called ‘working poor’). The first refers to a practice in which part of the revenue deriving from employment is not taken into account for the calculation of the social assistance benefit. The SKOS/CSIAS guidelines recommend a range of 400 to 700 Swiss francs depending on the employment rate and/or the wage level (SKOS/CSIAS 2023:E.1.2). Consequently, beneficiaries with gainful employment are financially better off, compared to those without gainful employment. The ‘integration allowance’ is a financial bonus granted to those beneficiaries who participate in an integration measure. The SKOS/CSIAS guidelines recommend a range from 100 to 300 francs (SKOS/CSIAS 2023:C.2). In other words, the SKOS/CSIAS initiated the linkage of the two core mandates securing livelihood and reintegration: If a beneficiary does not strive for reintegration, his or her benefits will be cut. These instruments institutionalized the ‘activation’ principles by introducing financial incentives for individual integration efforts or for being in employment. Some scholars speak in this respect of the beginning of a ‘bonus-malus’ system, which rewards ‘good’ behaviour (either beneficiaries in employment or completing an integration programme) and penalizes ‘bad’ behaviour (beneficiaries not engaging in enhancing their chances for leaving social assistance) (Schuwey and Knöpfel 2014). In this respect, the instrument of ‘sanctions’ is also relevant. Social services have the possibility to sanction (since 2018, up to 30 percent of the usual benefit level) beneficiaries for not cooperating, refusing to participate in an integration programme, or not making the required job searches (SKOS/CSIAS 2023:A.8).

Consequently, the material benefits that are covered by the SKOS/CSIAS definition are constructed following two different logical premises.

in Switzerland vary greatly depending on where you live.

The first one entails awarding different benefits according to the needs of a given economically precarious household situation. This logic focuses solely on need and is not linked to other assessments like the concrete behaviour or potentials of social assistance claimants. The other ‘incentive’ benefits have gradually been introduced starting in 2005 and in more recent reforms as well. They have reinforced what we can call a meritocratic and performance-based logic. The aim of these reforms and instruments (like the integration allowance, for instance) is to symbolically and tangibly separate employable beneficiaries or those already in employment from the those deemed uncooperative and/or unemployable. Consequently, not everyone has the same access to the social subsistence level according to the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines. It depends on individual factors, like motivation and cooperation, which are assessed by local social services professionals and on more objective criteria (like being in employment or participating in an integration programme). Figure 1 illustrates the current logic of the social subsistence level according to the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines.

Figure 1: The social subsistence level according to the SKOS/CSIAS, 2021



Source: SKOS/CSIAS (2021), own illustration.

As mentioned above, this does not mean that the social subsistence level is applied consistently in every Swiss canton. However, it has a harmo-

nizing and converging effect on the cantonal laws and applications within the local social services. Furthermore, the SKOS/CSIAS monitors the various applications within the cantons and in the following I point out some of the major nuances.

All the cantons refer at some judicial or operational level to the SKOS/CSIAS-guidelines. In eighteen cantons, the guidelines are implemented either entirely or for the most part within the legislation on social assistance (framework laws and directives). The other eight cantons refer to them at a lower level, for instance within the manual of social services – they are partially binding or used as orientation (SKOS/CSIAS 2018). Regarding the amount granted for the basic needs of the beneficiaries, 22 out of 26 cantons apply the recommendation of the guidelines. However, three cantons (amongst them the canton of Geneva) refused to adapt the amount to the adopted inflation compensation in 2013. Consequently, these three cantons have a slightly lower grant amount for the basic needs. Interestingly, back in 2005, the Vaud canton decided not to adhere completely to the new bonus-malus system and added the integration allowance of 100 Swiss francs to the basic needs. To this day, the canton of Vaud has thus the highest level of social subsistence level – if we focus solely on the amount (1,100 francs per month) granted for the basic needs of the supported households (SKOS/CSIAS 2018). There are other important local nuances that affect the material support of social assistance beneficiaries, like dealing with households with a monthly rent which is higher than the approved limits of the social assistance.⁵ I will discuss the variations concerning the young adults further below – as well as the specificities of the two cantons I investigate more thoroughly.

In the following, I address the three most important principles of social assistance in Switzerland – subsidiarity, individualization, and fulfilment of demand (Hänzi 2011:114). As the focus of the publication is the strategic and discursive alignment of social assistance towards the target group of young adults, it is important to understand and reflect on these foundations.

5 There are two trends within the practice of social assistance concerning this phenomenon (Bochsler et al. 2015). Some social services accept a certain deviation of the rent limits because they know that these particular households will not find other suitable accommodation. Other cantons and social services (predominantly in the German speaking part of Switzerland) are more severe and constrain the households to either find new accommodation or to bear the costs themselves.

2.2.2 Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity derives directly from Article 12 of the Federal Constitution, stating that anyone experiencing hardship and claiming support needs to do everything in their power to reduce or alleviate the given hardship. Furthermore, it is also anchored in Article 6 of the Federal Constitution, expressed through the principle of individual responsibility to oneself and to the community. According to Hänzi (2011:114), the principle of subsidiarity has a higher purpose and is relevant not only for the legal domain of social assistance. It is also relevant for all formulated and implemented social policies, since it helps demarcate the various state levels and actors and their respective jurisdictions and competences. However, it is particularly important for social assistance because it translates into practice directly and not just symbolically, since social assistance claimants need to prove their eligibility for support. In contrary, for example, individual claims to social insurance benefits do not undergo such a verification procedure. The income or assets of an individual person do not matter, for instance, when determining access to unemployment benefits. The importance of the principle of subsidiarity becomes apparent if we take a look at the twenty-six laws on social assistance. Every one of these cantonal framework laws refers to the individual responsibility of each and every claimant to use every possible upstream resource to alleviate a given hardship. Following the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines, this principle can be narrowed down to three key aspects (SKOS/CSIAS 2021:A.3.):

- › Possibilities of self-help: An individual seeking help shall do everything in his or her power to prevent the need for support by social services. Most of the time, this refers to personal income and assets or to employment possibilities.
- › Obligations of third party: The obligation of the local social services to support an individual and his or her household is subsidiary to benefits from an upstream source like social insurance, maintenance contribution, scholarships, or other contractual claims.
- › Voluntary support from third party: In principle, social assistance benefits are also subsidiary to any voluntary support, though there is no legal obligation in this matter.

The principle of subsidiarity is tangibly important not only for the implementation of social assistance; it radiates outwards and shapes the

design of other social policies as well. In a moral sense, it is closely related to the notions of equality and citizenship. A 'modern' citizenship should orientate itself to the principle of civic equality. This means, on the one hand, that everyone is entitled to the support of the community when experiencing a hardship. However, the individual responsibility to become a productive member of society is equally important. This logic separates the old 19th century logic of 'poor relief' from the 20th century welfare logic based on mutual rights and duties of every member of society (Kutzner 2009). Other guiding principles derive indirectly from the principle of subsidiarity, like the moral imperative to not offer an advantage to a beneficiary of social assistance compared to an individual in a similar life situation but without access to social benefits. With respect to the YAS, the principle of subsidiarity also determines the need to verify whether there is a possibility of reconciling the youngsters with their parents before opening a case at social services. According to Swiss law, the parents are legally obligated to support their children financially until they are twenty-five years old.

2.2.3 Individuality

Another crucial principle, which is mentioned in the SKOS/CSIAS norms, and without which one cannot grasp the implementation of social assistance, is called 'individuality'. Social assistance aims at helping individuals to alleviate their hardships. The notion of 'helping' implies that the support is not permanent but rather that there is a finality, a moment, where this help will no longer be needed. This in turn, implies that beneficiaries have a right to support adapted to their individual life situation (Kutzner 2009:27). Individual support means, on the one hand, that the individual needs of a person and his or her household require a professional and individual assessment. On the other hand, the principle of individuality is linked to the aforementioned objectives of social assistance: The assessment and the individual measures deployed need to objectively encourage the economic and personal autonomy of the individuals. They need to advance the possibility of professional and social integration and they need to be adapted such that they can prevent the occurrence of future social distresses (Hänzi 2011:115).

Furthermore, the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines stipulate that there is a need for a systematic clarification regarding individual needs. This illustrates the importance of the so-called 'intake' phase, which starts at the first encounter between claimants and professionals of the local social services. In the first

weeks of 'support', the professionals have a mandate to verify simultaneously the eligibility and the individual needs of the claimants. Consequently, the support of social assistance oscillates constantly between help and policing, between granting individually adapted support and making sure that this support is not too advantageous (so as not to impede on the legal imperative of the equality of rights). This tension is very dominant at the beginning of the assistance and remains to a certain degree until the case is closed. The principle of professionalism is closely linked to the principle of individually adapted support. It stipulates that there must be a professional and comprehensive clarification of the individual needs. This includes a consultation with a social worker, during which an individual help plan is defined. This help plan is ideally jointly defined – taking into consideration the perspective of the beneficiary.

Within social services and its implementation of social assistance this principle is embodied through the mandate of 'personal assistance'. The SKOS/CSIAS norms define personal assistance as a "personalized guidance and accompaniment that takes the individual life situation into account" (SKOS/CSIAS 2021:B.3.). Consequently, social assistance operates on two levels. The first one is the household, which is relevant for calculating the material needs of a social assistance application. The second one is on an individual level, as the personal guidance and reintegration process refers only some members of a given household. This distinction (household versus individual perspective) has been criticized in the past for being incoherent as the support should always englobe the whole household (Schuwey and Knöpfel 2014).

2.2.4 Fulfilment of demand

This third principle comprises two different aspects, which are relevant for social assistance claimants. 'Fulfilment of demand' means firstly, that there must be a current and concrete hardship. Social assistance benefits are not granted for past financial or social distresses, which means, for instance, that individual debts are not taken into consideration for the calculation of the subsistence level. The point of reference for the intervention is always the current and future situation. Secondly, during the procedure of eligibility verification, the cause(s) of the hardship are not relevant. The criteria for support are the concrete and immediate situation as well as anticipated future perspectives. In other words, the starting question during the intake of poten-

tial social assistance beneficiaries is the following: what are the individual possibilities of a beneficiary to partially or completely alleviate the current distress? (Hänzi 2011:118; SKOS/CSIAS 2021:A.3.).

This logic is also called ‘finality’, because the intervention of social assistance is not causal (like in the case of social insurance benefits), rather, the purpose of the intervention is to allocate a suitable benefit according to the demand, independently of the incident that caused the distress. Furthermore, only expenses directly linked to the household making the claim are taken into consideration. Certain vital expenses, like alimony obligations for instance, do not matter for social services because they target another household. It is important to note at this point that this principle is being diluted somewhat by current cantonal social policies as will be demonstrated later in the analytical chapters regarding the discourses on the YAS. This analysis suggests a trend back to more segmentation practices (with different access conditions to material support) according to past failures like failing to complete an apprenticeship or to present a suitable professional project for instance (see also Bochsler 2020).

There are some exceptions to the rule of finality of the support. I will mention one, which can be particularly important for beneficiaries of social assistance. In case of livelihood-threatening incidents, certain social services decide to include debts into the calculation of the benefits. However, this inclusion is exceptional and there needs to be a good reason for this. Furthermore, the beneficiaries of social assistance are obliged to gradually reimburse the amount taken into consideration by social services. Without having access to quantitative data regarding this matter, one can assume that the most notable example for this situation are tenants with rent arrears. Such debts directly threaten the livelihood of households because in Switzerland, after only one month of rent arrears, eviction is possible (Bochsler et al. 2015). During intake procedure, if social services conclude that the housing situation is particularly important for the social participation of a household (for instance, in the case of families), then the arrears are included in the calculation in order to preserve the housing situation.

To sum up, the concrete support of a given household claiming social assistance needs to be adapted to the needs. However, it can never be too advantageous. Furthermore, social services need to make sure that there is no other upstream possibility of assistance. Otherwise, this could be perceived by the rest of the community as fraudulent and threaten the fragile equilibrium

of solidarity and individual responsibility. The three described principles set the normative foundation for the implementation of social assistance within the cantons. Of course, there is a heterogeneity regarding the local implementation practice of policies in the field of social assistance. However, a discursive framework evolves around these implementation practices and they all deal with the alignment of these three principles, which are all enshrined in the cantonal laws on social assistance in some form. Every social services division needs to verify the eligibility of its claimants. They all need to create individualized help plans and need to answer to the individual demands of the households without being too advantageous compared to employed individuals. This requires a constant moral debate around the social phenomena of the 'poor' and other subcategories like YAS. This is because one needs to circumscribe and separate these target groups from the employed and 'productive' part of the community in order to assess, for instance, whether the current alignment policies are too generous or not.

The discourse around questions like how limited or generous the support should be, or which beneficiary should receive what kind of support and under what circumstances, reflects the behavioural expectations regarding the category of the poor or subcategories like the YAS and reveals a great deal about the perceived balance between individual responsibility and societal solidarity.

The next chapter discusses the SKOS/CSIAS reforms with a special focus on the young adults. The aim is to discuss the recent discursive shift for this target group on a national level. Using data from the Federal Statistical Office, I will furthermore show the statistical evolution of this social group in recent years.

2.3 The SKOS/CSAS and young adults

The previous chapter demonstrated that social assistance focuses on two main aspects that are tangibly and symbolically intertwined: securing the livelihood of eligible claimants and encouraging their reintegration into the labour market in order to close the cases.

Concerning the target group of young adults, these two objectives are particularly interconnected. One can argue that they are, within the current alignment, even more interconnected in comparison to other age groups receiving social assistance. Under the so-called 'active' welfare state or 'social investment state' (see Chapter 4), young people are increasingly taken into

account as human capital (Dahmen et al. 2017). Within the realm of welfare policies, young people claiming social benefits without vocational training tend to be considered as deficient, passive, and/or inactive. Moreover, they are considered to be the future of society in a social and economic perspective, since they will need to participate in the labour market in order to finance the costly welfare state via wage costs. Following this line of argument, the fact that they have not yet contributed to the working society delegitimizes their reception of social benefits. If we take a closer look at recent reforms within the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines, the prevalence of this argument is quite clear.

In the following subsection, I discuss how the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines address young adults both in terms of securing their livelihood and the mandate of re-integration. Then, I describe the socio-economic features of young adults on social assistance and the current challenge this target group poses for social assistance. Furthermore, as the analytical part draws on empirical material collected in the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva, the legal context of social assistance as well as the statistical evolution of this target group in both cantons is also outlined and discussed.

2.3.1 Reducing the subsistence level for YAS

Until recently, the calculation logic of the material support within social assistance did not distinguish the ages of the members of social assistance households. Indeed, the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines suggest amounts per person, and for every additional person per household these amounts are increased according to an acknowledged equivalence scale (SKOS/CSIAS 2021:C.3.). However, this changed during the last major reform of the guidelines in 2016, which was introduced in two waves – in 2017 and 2018. The first wave contained financial measures regarding subsistence level, which on the one hand answered external political pressure to reduce the growing costs and on the other hand replied to internal criticism that the benefits were generally too generous (SKOS/CSIAS 2015).

Two groups were targeted by these cuts: households with more than five family members and young adults (18 to 25 years old). The argument supporting cuts to the first group pointed out that the benefits for these households would be too advantageous compared to similar households without access to social assistance. Concerning the young adults, the argumentation was threefold. First, a conducted consultation report of the members of the SKOS/CSIAS concluded that in most of the cantons the material support for

young adults without vocational training, without children, living alone, and without employment was already lower than other age groups. Consequently, the SKOS/CSIAS was 'only adapting' the framework to the situation at the local level (SKOS/CSIAS 2015:6). Second, and here we can identify the interconnectedness with the broader integration mandate of the social assistance, the fact that these young adults have not completed vocational training and are not gainfully employed is reason enough to justify a reduction of the support. Symbolically, it sends a message to these young adults: material support is conditional on individual responsibility to find and complete an apprenticeship or, if this is not realistic, gainful employment. Finally, there is a third aspect also mentioned in the consultation report: the responsibility of parents to support their children financially until they are twenty-five years old if they have not yet completed a vocational training. Indeed, Article 227 of the Swiss Civil Code (ZGB/CC) specifies that there is parental obligation to financially support children until they come of age (18 years). It also specifies that the parents must pay for education or vocational training if such an endeavour is initiated by the young person and if the circumstances allow it. Concretely, this means that a parent or a legal guardian can legally force a young person immediately out of their household after he or she comes of age if they feel like there is no immediate educational or vocational project in sight.

Thus, the reduction of the subsistence level for young adults living alone can be interpreted as a strategic repositioning of the SKOS/CSIAS regarding this age group by saying firstly, that local social services are not supposed to be in charge of them – it should be either the parents or other upstream social benefits like unemployment insurance or vocational training departments. Secondly, it demonstrates the willingness of the SKOS/CSIAS to follow the strategic evolution of their members and acknowledge a more constraining handling of young people without education or the economic means to support themselves. Following the argumentation of the SKOS/CSIAS, it means that young people compared to other older age groups should have a reduced subsistence level to reinforce their individual responsibility to re-enter the 'normal' life course trajectory of completing an apprenticeship or entering gainful employment.

Furthermore, since 2016, the SKOS/CSIAS recommends enhancing the sanctioning possibilities within social assistance. Since this last reform, the SKOS/CSIAS sanctioning margin is between five and thirty percent. Before the reform, the recommended margin was between five and fifteen percent.

Again, this constraining tool has been enhanced based on an internal request of a majority of the members, demanding more possibilities for dealing with ‘uncooperative’ beneficiaries. This is also relevant when analysing the policies addressed at the YAS category because there are indications that sanctioning is a specifically and more frequently practice when used towards young people on social assistance than to older age groups (see for instance Böhringer and Karl 2015 for the German context). Other studies show for the US context how sanctioning as an instrument is used more frequently with respect to vulnerable recipients facing more employment or educational barriers (Hasenfeld and Powell 2004). The YAS category combines both aspects, as they are young and within their peer group present deprivations in multiple life dimensions.

There have been publicly critical reactions from the field of social work regarding these reforms by emphasizing the exclusively punitive strategy of SKOS/CSIAS towards young adults on social assistance (e.g., Tabin 2016). The criticism begins with the afore-mentioned normative tensions between solidarity principles like the protection of human dignity or the reinforcement of individual responsibility, denouncing asymmetric judgments for certain types of households based on preconceived ideas. In case of young adults on social assistance without vocational training (YAS) it is the idea that too much material support would deter their motivation to seek apprenticeships and/or gainful employment. This idea stems from the paternalistic image that only a firm guiding hand can enforce the desired outcome. One could argue that in the case of young adults, the principle of subsidiarity is interpreted in another way as compared to older counterparts. Regardless of the actual possibilities for the young adults to find an apprenticeship or to enter the labour market in general, the SKOS/CSIAS anticipates uncooperative and unmotivated behaviour, in other words, a failure to activate the individual resources to alter the concrete hardship (subsidiarity) and produces thus consciously a financially more precarious situation for this target group.

2.3.2 YAS with multiple problems

The previous chapters discussed the logical bases of social assistance, the function of the umbrella association of the SKOS/CSIAS, and most importantly the recent reforms and their relevance for young adults. Driven by external pressure to reduce growing costs within the cantonal regimes of social assistance, as well as by the normative idea that there should be no young adults on social assistance benefits, the focus of social assistance has been

to participate in a strategic alignment I call 'education first' (see Subchapter 2.5.3). A successful transition of young people from school to vocational training and into the labour market secures not only their social integration but also the long-term financing of the costly Swiss social security system (Kraus 2010). Therefore, young adults without vocational training have become a very important target for regulations, programmes, and other types of governmental interventions in the last fifteen years. They are subjected to pressure from various institutions like social services or the vocational training departments. According to the 'normal' plan designed for them, these people should be at the beginning of their working phase or at least in a vocational training programme leading them towards the labour market. However, while Switzerland is often praised for its permeable and performative vocational education and training (VET) system, there are some young adults left with limited prospects who remain on social assistance. These YAS often present life trajectories with multidimensional hardships and cumulated disadvantages (like low school achievements, health issues, irregular residency status, breaks within their families, etc.). Various authors over the last twenty years have studied the specific vulnerability of the category of the young adults on social assistance for the Swiss context.

Drilling (2004:163–164), for instance, showed that young adults on social assistance do not form a homogeneous group. Instead, their social and financial distress are the consequence of a multiple deprivation process which differs from case to case. The heterogeneity of young adults applying for social assistance is directly linked to the variety of reasons for needing support. For a relatively big portion of the young adults, social assistance has a traditional function of bridging for temporary hardship (Beyeler et al. 2017). This group of young adults accounts for half of all young adults on social assistance (Schaffner and Drilling 2013). Often these young adults have no economic means to support themselves and, because they have not yet accumulated savings and have no access to unemployment benefits due to grace periods, they are forced to apply for social assistance after a few weeks of unemployment. For another smaller group of young adults, social assistance has a subsidiary character as they have a gainful employment or are in an apprenticeship. However, their monthly revenues are too low to cover all their expenses. If we continue to follow the data provided by Drilling and Schaffner (2013:309), for up to 17 percent of the young adults, social assistance has a more long-term function, as they have no vocational training, no (or very low) monthly income

from employment, and also no educational perspectives. This category is often described as having 'multiple problems' because they cumulate difficulties in various life domains as mentioned above. Drilling and Schaffner (2013:309) explicitly cite young adults with health issues like drug addictions and young single parents as examples for this category. In those cases, social assistance has a long-term function because there is no immediate way to acquire a regular source of income other than social assistance.

Schaffner (2007) previously demonstrated interesting results with regard to young adults on social assistance in general. She analysed, with a life course perspective, how young adults on social assistance in Basel cope with their respective discontinuous educational and work life trajectories. The focus of her research was the analysis of how social assistance supports this category of beneficiaries and its effects on the agency of the young adults. One of her findings shows that there has been an institutionalizing process of the transitions from school to work that has 'normalized' specific trajectories and in doing so neglected the specific needs and stresses of young adults with discontinuous trajectories. For those young adults with complex life situations (meaning low financial and social resources as well as critical life events in their childhood), the potential for agency during these transitions was massively restricted, thus creating high biographical risks, which the young adults had to cope with alone. This specifically affects the YAS category. For these individuals the study indicates that the standardized measures during transitions from school to vocational training and into the labour market have a limited effect at best in terms of overcoming vulnerabilities and improving chances of successful labour market integration. In certain cases, the findings of Schaffner (2007) indicate that the mismatch between the design of transition measures and the specific needs of young adults leads to a reinforcement of an already ongoing exclusion process. These findings demonstrate the ambiguity of social policies: They can be a support for individuals in order to alleviate a given hardship but in certain cases (the more vulnerable ones), they can also add another layer of stress to an already fragile life situation and trajectory.

If we look at national statistics of the Federal Office for Statistics (FSO), we can further confirm the heterogeneity of life trajectories of young adults on social assistance. Dubach et al. (2009) showed that household situations of young adults on social assistance differ greatly. More than a quarter lived at that time with their parents. Another quarter lived alone. The latter ones

are the target group of the latest revision of the SKOS guidelines. Ten percent of young adults on social assistance live in couples. Five percent of young adults lived in their one-family household. The rest lived in collective households.

A relatively new published study (Salzgeber et al. 2016) from the Swiss statistics office in collaboration with the University of Applied Science in Bern regarding the duration of benefit receipt shows interesting results as well. The analysis for the age group between eighteen and twenty-five years demonstrates that nearly one third of all the young adults received social assistance more than once between 2006 and 2011. Knowing that social services only definitively close a case if the recipient has not received benefits for more than six months, this is a strong indication that some young adults are not able to make the final leap out of social assistance on the first try. The authors of the study explain this result by arguing that these young adults have discontinuous educational and vocational life courses – meaning uncompleted apprenticeships. At the same time the percentage of young adults who are on social assistance for a very long time (more than 60 months) is relatively small (7.9 percent).

Qualitative studies have furthermore contributed to this research field by analysing the complexities of the cases. They have pointed towards an increase in what they call cases with ‘multiple problems’ (Haller 2012:12; Haller et al. 2013:10). A multitude of factors could explain the increase of complex cases within social assistance amongst the young adults. One factor often cited is the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy with a fast-growing service sector (see, for instance, Frick and Lampart 2007). This structural change impacts the accessibility of the labour market in general as the strictness of job requirements for employees within the service sector have increased in the past decades. People with low qualifications are therefore put under pressure and are more at risk of not finding employment or of losing their jobs.

Another structural reason which explains the growth in the number of YAS with health issues, can be found in the recent reforms within upstream federal benefit systems like disability insurance (DI). Indeed, since the latest reforms to disability insurance, a recently published study shows that between 2006 and 2017, the number of individuals who applied for disability benefits and ended up on social assistance four years later increased from 11.6 percent to 14.5 percent. This is because DI introduced new integration

measures with the explicit political goal of reducing the number of individuals with long-term DI benefits. Since these reforms within the DI predominantly targets young people between eighteen and thirty years, one can safely affirm that recent Swiss social policies concerning youth unemployment have consciously contributed to the emergence of health issues within social assistance, as they are less acknowledged now within the DI regime (Guggisberg and Bischof 2020).

To sum up, there are a variety of different paths and reasons leading to the reception of social assistance by young adults. Approximately half of the young adults on social assistance only need the support for a short period of time – though there are indications that the first exit out of assistance might not be sustainable for every young person and they might need support later on (see also Beyeler et al. 2017). However, from a socio-political perspective, the ambitious challenge for the cantons and the municipalities are those young adults with low school achievements and without VET, the YAS. Their multiple problems as well as their experiences with the educational systems, e.g., interruption of apprenticeships, are detrimental to a smooth transition from school to work. Drilling (2004) identified three normative developmental tasks that adolescents and young adults are expected to master in order to be considered successful in Switzerland: economic sufficiency, the development of an independent personality, and independence from their families of origin. He argues that because of their multiple problems, young adults receiving social assistance are relatively poorly equipped to master the most important and defining developmental thresholds, that is, entering vocational training and entering the labour market. Furthermore, one has to point out a general evolution in social policy reforms in the last twenty years, which is characterized by reducing social benefits in order to limit expenses and using sanctioning instruments to induce cooperation and integration efforts. This especially concerns recent reforms conducted within the unemployment insurance and disability insurance systems. These reforms were accompanied by integration narratives pushing for more economic efficiency in dealing with unemployed individuals – meaning conditions that are more demanding in order to enhance the pressure to integrate on the policy addressees. This illustrates the specific scientific interest towards the category of YAS for social policy research as for the Swiss context.

2.4 Young adults on social assistance

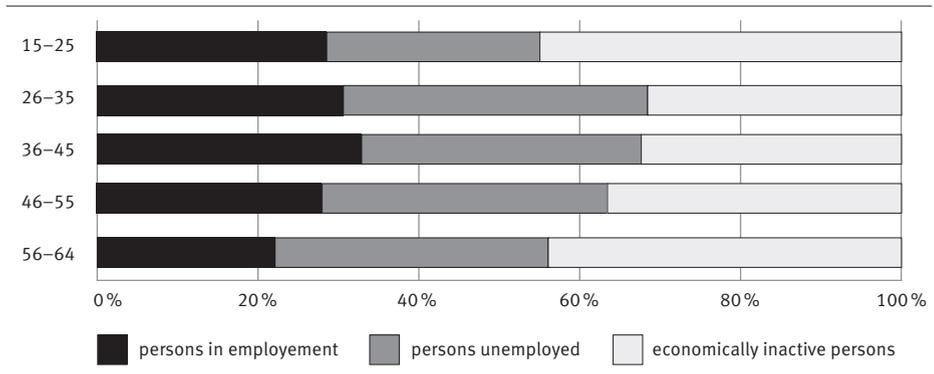
The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) annually produces national statistics regarding social assistance beneficiaries. It is a comprehensive survey and publishes data on the evolution of the socioeconomic characteristics of the beneficiaries, benefit duration, regional differences, and costs per case amongst other things. In general, young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years are (when compared to the average) more likely to rely on social assistance. The ratio of social assistance recipients for this age group for the year 2018 was 3.6 percent (average: 3.2 percent).⁶⁶ The social assistance ratio indicates the number of individuals currently receiving social assistance benefits compared to the rest of the population. This means that 3.6 percent of all young adults perceived social assistance benefits at least once during the survey year 2018, or respectively 3.2 percent of all residents in Switzerland (exempting refugees and provisionally admitted foreigners). The FSO publishes data for specific social categories (like YAS, various household configurations, etc.) as well as for the whole society (average social assistance ratio).

The FSO publishes further interesting in-depth data regarding young adults on social assistance. Nearly 70 percent have no vocational training, which is comparatively high with respect to the general Swiss population (27 percent have no vocational training). Thirty percent of the young adults on social assistance are employed and 45 percent of this group is currently in an apprenticeship. 25 percent are unemployed and another 40 percent are considered as 'economically inactive persons', which means they are either participating in an integration programme or considered unemployable because of health issues for instance (see the following Figure 2).

A comparison shows that all cantons are more or less equally challenged by youth unemployment. The range lies between 9.6 percent and 16.1 percent. The following Figure 2 illustrates the employment situation of young adults on social assistance and notably, the relatively large part of this group categorized as 'economically inactive' and thus not considered as immediately suitable for an apprenticeship or labour market integration.

6 With the exception of Figure 2, all statistical data presented in this chapter has been specifically commissioned for the present research. The frame of reference for the data are the years 2011 to 2018. During the completion of the manuscript, the FSO published new data for the reference year 2019. However, no separate reevaluation for the year 2019 has been conducted as the recent data of the FSO does not suggest radical changes.

Figure 2: Employment status of social assistance beneficiaries by age groups, 2019



Source: FSO (2020).

In the following subsection, I will deepen the analysis of the FSO data concerning young adults on social assistance for the cantons of Geneva and Basel-City. This analysis will give more information on the specificities of the category of young adults receiving social assistance for those two cantons. Before I present this analysis though, the legal context of the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva will be discussed, as there are some commonalities and differences that need to be pointed out between the two legal contexts.

2.4.1 The legal context in Basel-City and Geneva

As the legal context varies from canton to canton, it is important to compare briefly the two legal contexts of the cantons I will investigate later on with a special focus on young adults. Furthermore, using the SKOS/CSIAS monitoring on the implementation of their guidelines (SKOS/CSIAS 2018), I can contrast the legal context with their recommendations. At this point, it is important to note that the respective structure of welfare institutions (employment office, social assistance, and vocational training department) within both cantons is detailed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the institutional evolution from a historic perspective.

Concerning the objectives stipulated within the respective cantonal laws on social assistance,⁷ one can say that they are rather encompassing. They not only guarantee material support for individuals and households

⁷ For Basel-City: Sozialhilfegesetz vom 29. Juni 2000 (SHG); and for Geneva: Loi sur l'insertion et l'aide sociale individuelle (LIASI).

experiencing hardships but also express their wish to enhance social cohesion and participation in general. The canton of Geneva stipulates for instance the will to “fight against social exclusion” (LIASI Art. 2), while the canton of Basel-City affirms that its reach englobes “personal, material and general social assistance” (Sozialhilfegesetz §2). The cantonal law does not further specify what the term ‘general’ entails. Interestingly, they both use the typical ‘social and professional’ integration formula, which was introduced by the SKOS/CSIAS during one of their guideline reforms in 1998. Accordingly, both cantonal laws stress the importance of subsidiarity, individuality, and fulfilment of demand as guiding principles and the ultimate goal of accompanying their beneficiaries to a sustainable, economic autonomy via labour market participation. Interestingly, the canton of Geneva twice mentions the importance of preserving human dignity during benefit support, whereas the canton of Basel-City does not mention it at all. The latter canton does however mention the protection of human dignity as a foundation and precondition to a constitutional state in its implementation concept of social assistance (WSU 2014). Conversely, the canton of Basel-City mentions the SKOS/CSIAS twice as a source of orientation, once in relation to subsistence level (§7) and once in relation to the obligation of support by relatives (§15), whereas the canton of Geneva does not mention the SKOS/CSIAS explicitly in its legal framework. However, if we take a closer look at the alignment of social assistance in Geneva, it becomes clear that implementation converges also towards the normative framework of the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines.

Despite the different wording of the legal frameworks, the general dispositions and legal orientations are very similar in both cantons. However, one needs to point out the most important nuance between the two cases – also because it is the most pertinent one for the YAS. Articles 14 to 20 of the LIASI, the legal framework of the canton of Geneva, regulate the objectives and scope of application of the “individual integration contract” (Contrat d’aide sociale individuel, CASI). These articles specify that after the first three months of entering social assistance, a contract will determine the future ‘commitment’ of the beneficiaries in order to achieve an improvement in their life situation. Such an obligation is inexistent within the social assistance regime of Basel-City. Naturally, as the concrete benefits and accompaniment within social assistance are still negotiated individually between frontline workers and beneficiaries in Basel-City, the context remains similar. However, the legal framework of the canton of Geneva suggests a more formalized and stan-

standardized way of negotiating the ‘help plan’ with the beneficiaries of social assistance. The latter have to sign the contract, three months after demanding support at the latest. The contract determines the future developmental goals of all members of household over eighteen years old.

Concerning the YAS, the canton of Geneva has a more rigid regime, in legal terms, than the canton of Basel-City. The LIASI specifies in Article 11 that in certain cases, material support can be provisional and exceptional. This is considered emergency aid and is deployed in cases where the legitimacy of the support is not yet proven – at least not for a longer period of time. According to my field work (see Chapter 4) and Article 11 of the LIASI, the YAS fall under that category and thus have six months to present a ‘reasonable’ professional project in order to get the ‘standard’ material support. Until they have proven their legitimacy to the frontline workers in charge of their cases, material support is considerably lower than initial subsistence level (500 Swiss francs per month for an individual). The canton of Basel-City does not stipulate a specific manner to treat the YAS or other categories of young adults experiencing hardships on a legislative level. However, the economic and social department of the canton issues guidelines for the specific handling of the YAS within social assistance, which follow the recommendations of the SKOS/CSIAS.

The current cantonal social policies link material support of the YAS to their ‘active’ behaviour. This conception of support led to a willingness to divide and categorize the young adults according to their employability. To that effect, both cantons created institutions like the Centre for Work Integration in Basel-City (Arbeitsintegrationszentrum, AIZ) or the Service for Professional Reintegration in Geneva (Service de reinsertion professionnelle, SRP) that have a mandate to evaluate the employability of the beneficiaries. The target group of young adults is more affected by this compared to other age groups, as the professional integration of the youth is the number one priority. Beyond the segmentation, frontline workers can also cut welfare benefits to up to 30 percent of the minimal subsistence level if they see a legitimate reason to do so. They can stop financial support entirely in certain cases, even though the hardship remains the same. The latter can occur if the social services can legally prove that an individual could have alleviated his or her hardship through paid work, for instance. Again, there are some legal nuances concerning this matter. In Basel-City, the obligations of every beneficiary to cooperate and to undertake every necessary step in order to reintegrate the

labour market is stipulated in general terms, whereas the LIASI is much more explicit. Article 42B of the LIASI stipulates for instance, that every new beneficiary has to participate in an “employability evaluation” (Stage d'évaluation à l'emploi), which lasts four weeks. This evaluation, orchestrated by the newly created institution SRP, is the precondition for participation in any further integration programmes.

Hence, it can be concluded that the legal frameworks of the cantons are similar as to content. They also follow the recommendations of the SKOS/CSIAS in a general manner. However, we can clearly see nuances in the respective legal frameworks pointing to a more rigid and constraining framework for the canton of Geneva as compared to the canton of Basel-City, both in a material as in a symbolic way. In the canton of Geneva, YAS have to deal with reduced material support while proving their legitimacy for long-term assistance by creating a reasonable professional project. Chapter 6 provides a more in-depth comparison of the strategic and discursive evolution in those two cantons with respect to the target group of young adults and YAS.

2.4.2 *Social assistance statistics in Basel-City and Geneva*

The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) publishes evaluations each year regarding the evolution of social assistance beneficiaries. I commissioned an in-depth FSO evaluation of the data on young adults for the two cantons, Basel-City and Geneva. It is important to have a detailed understanding of the extent and the recent developments of the phenomenon in order to advance our knowledge regarding the socio-political challenge at hand. In the following subsection, I analyse and compare the situation of young adults receiving social assistance in these two cantons. I focus on the general evolution of the take-up, on socio-economic factors like employment, VET, housing, and on the duration of the assistance as well as on the reasons for terminating support – as the latter is an indicator for the complexities of cases. The description of the data is structured as followed: I systematically present the data for Basel-City and Geneva for each variable and conclude with a comparison.

The situation with respect to young adults on social assistance has been rather stable in the past decade in the canton of Basel-City. From 2011 to 2018, the social assistance ratio for the age group of eighteen to twenty-five has not increased but it has stabilized on a comparatively high level. The average social assistance ratio in Switzerland varied between 3 and 3.4 percent in the last decade. An exception is the year of 2016, where the canton had a slight

increase in young beneficiaries to 8.5 percent. However, the ratio for 2018 is 7.7 percent – which is only one percentage point less than in the year 2011. This means concretely that in the year 2018, 7.7 percent of all the young adults aged between eighteen and twenty-five in the canton Basel-City received benefits from social assistance at least once during this calendar year. Table 1 shows this finding.

Table 1: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, in percent, 2011–2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	7.8	8.1	8.4	8.2	7.9	8.5	8.0	7.7
18	5.5	7.6	5.6	8.2	6.5	6.9	7.3	7.2
19	8.2	7.9	9.5	7.8	9.2	7.2	8.9	7.8
20	9.0	9.7	9.8	10.3	8.1	9.7	8.0	8.6
21	8.4	8.0	10.1	8.1	10.6	8.9	9.2	8.2
22	9.6	9.6	8.3	8.6	7.7	10.4	8.4	8.4
23	6.6	8.7	9.4	8.5	7.3	8.2	8.7	7.6
24	6.9	7.0	7.9	8.3	7.3	8.3	7.7	7.3
25	8.2	6.9	7.1	8.2	7.6	8.1	6.8	6.7

Source: FSO (2020).

The social assistance rate of young adults is always calculated as a percentage of all 18–25-year-olds in a given area (here: Canton Basel-City).

Moreover, the ratios are detailed according to age subgroups, because of the hypothesis that social assistance might vary within the age group of eighteen to twenty-five – assuming that there could be a variance because the life situation regarding education and employment might be different. However, as Table 1 demonstrates, there is not much of a variance, with the exception of the age groups between twenty and twenty-two. They showed a slightly higher social assistance ratio in the years 2014 to 2016 (as high as 10.6 percent). One cannot therefore affirm that the life situations of these young people is the same. However, we can surely say that within these subgroups, there is not automatically a lower social assistance ratio for older young adults compared to younger ones.

For the canton of Geneva, we can observe an overall increase of young adults on social assistance. 5.1 percent of young adults aged eighteen to twenty-five in the canton of Geneva were social assistance beneficiaries in 2011. In 2018 however, 7.3 percent of that age segment is registered at social services. The following Table 2 also shows that there is not much of a difference within

the age span of 18-year-olds to 25-year-olds. The percentages remain more or less at the same level.

Table 2: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, in percent, 2011–2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	5.1	6.4	6.7	6.6	6.6	7.2	7.3	7.3
18	4.4	6.3	5.6	6.5	5.5	6.2	6.8	6.5
19	5.5	6.6	7.2	6.4	7.0	7.3	7.3	8.2
20	5.9	7.1	6.8	7.4	7.1	8.2	7.5	7.6
21	5.5	7.2	6.9	6.5	7.3	7.6	8.7	7.2
22	5.3	6.3	7.6	6.3	6.7	7.5	7.5	8.0
23	5.3	6.2	6.1	7.6	6.2	6.3	7.7	7.3
24	4.5	6.4	6.4	6.0	7.1	6.4	6.2	7.4
25	4.8	5.6	6.7	6.3	6.2	8.0	6.9	6.2

Source: FSO 2020.

The social assistance rate of young adults is always calculated as a percentage of all 18–25-year-olds in a given area (here: Canton Basel-Stadt).

Both the cantons of Basel and Geneva have to face an above average social assistance ratio for the selected age segment. The difference is that for the canton of Basel-City, this high level has not changed in the past eight years. The number of young adults without financial resources and other limited perspectives remains comparable. However, in Geneva, the increase in percentage from 5.1 to 7.3 indicates that the canton had to manage a quantitative increase of young adults applying for social assistance at their local social services. This corresponds with recent strategical evolutions within this canton. As Chapter 5 will show, the canton of Geneva has created new units within the social assistance system to deal with this increase in young adults without financial means and educational perspectives. They pushed for a ‘single-window’ approach with the creation of Point Jeunes as a specialized service for all young adults within their territory – hoping, amongst other things, to reduce the increasing social assistance ratio.

Although the ratio in Basel-City has been stable for the past decade, it is still relevant to consider the number of young adults on social assistance. The following Table 3 shows the absolute numbers of young adults having benefitted from social assistance. Furthermore, it demonstrates the number of young adults with Swiss nationality and the number of young adults with another residency status (‘Foreign Nationals’). The distinction is relevant

because according to Article 63, paragraph c, of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA), if a “foreign national or a person they must care for is dependent permanently and to a large extent on social assistance” the residence permit can be revoked.

Table 3: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, nationality, 2011–2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
18–25 Total	1260	1307	1357	1309	1249	1321	1239	1156
Swiss	807	835	858	834	782	794	780	695
Foreign	452	472	492	471	462	527	459	461

Source: FSO (2020).

Table 3 shows that, along with the overall social assistance ratio, the absolute number of 18- to 25-year-olds on social assistance decreased slightly as well. As Table 2 illustrates, the ratio is still relatively high (7.7 percent). In total, 1,156 young adults were on social assistance 2018 in the canton of Basel-City. Compared to 2011, this is a decrease of approximately hundred young adults. 695 of those young adults have a Swiss passport, whereas 461 of them are foreign nationals. We can affirm that these foreign young adults are residing in Switzerland for several years, as the FSO statistics on social assistance takes into account only those foreign nationals who are on Swiss territory for at least five to seven years – depending on their residency permit. Temporarily admitted refugees for instance, who benefit from social assistance, are only taken into account in this statistic after seven years, because this represents the time limit when this target group is no longer in the Federal competence area. After seven years, the regulation of the support of temporarily admitted refugees residing in Switzerland becomes a cantonal matter.⁸

Table 4 describes the same issue but for the canton of Geneva. Congruent with the increase of the social assistance ratio, there is also a growth of the absolute number of young adults on social assistance to be observed. There were 3,477 18- to 25-year-olds receiving social assistance in 2018 within the borders of this canton – 2,144 Swiss nationals and 1,333 foreign nationals. Interestingly, between 2011 and 2018, there is a more accentuated growth in the category of Swiss young adults compared to foreign young adults. Indeed,

8 See article 87 of the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (FNIA) and also the explanations of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) on their official website regarding this matter: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/soziale-sicherheit/sozialhilfe/sozialhilfe-beziehende/fluechtlingsbereich.html> (access date: October 2023).

there are nearly 900 more Swiss young adults on social assistance in 2018 compared to 2011 and only approximately 300 more foreign nationals for the canton of Geneva.

Table 4: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, nationality, 2011–2018

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
18–25 Total	2275	2891	3017	3060	3111	3389	3470	3477
Swiss	1208	1635	1743	1800	1842	2015	2101	2144
Foreign	1067	1256	1270	1257	1268	1371	1368	1333

Source: FSO (2020).

This is an interesting nuance compared to the situation in the canton of Basel-City, though there is no obvious explanation for this trend in Geneva. Another notable difference is the number of young adults itself. Both cantons have comparable ratios when it comes to young adults on social assistance. However, as the canton of Geneva is bigger in terms of population size, the group of young adults in financial hardship is larger in absolute terms.

Concerning the group of foreign nationals and their migration background, these young adults have a variety of countries of origin. However, it is noteworthy to compare the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva in this respect, because a closer look reveals that there are some important nuances.

In Basel-City, 162 of the 462 foreign nationals aged between eighteen and twenty-five on social assistance migrated from non-EU states within Europe – meaning Balkan countries or Turkey, for instance. This is by far the biggest subgroup within the category of foreign nationals in Basel-City. Following the category of non-EU countries are the three subcategories of neighbouring countries, EU-member states and young adults that migrated from the continent of Africa – all evenly matched between 60 and 88.

In contrast, for the canton of Geneva, the largest subgroup within the foreign citizens is young people originally from an EU member state, with 382 young adults. However, it is more evenly distributed in Geneva (compared to Basel-City), as origins from other European countries (226) and the continents of Africa (280) and Latin America (202) are also well represented. One can thus conclude that for the canton of Geneva, the group of foreign nationals constitutes a more heterogenous group in comparison to those foreign nationals aged eighteen to twenty-five on social assistance for the canton of Basel-City.

As the main focus of this book is to analyse the strategic alignment of the current social policies addressed to YAS – those young adults on social assistance without any vocational or educational training (VET) – the following tables present the evolution of the YAS category for both cantons between 2011 and 2018. Table 5 shows the number of young adults who have managed to finish compulsory school at best. The data is divided along age subgroups from eighteen to twenty-five. The acronym CS means ‘compulsory school’⁹ and describes the category of the YAS, as they have no vocational training at the moment of the survey. In total, in 2018 for example, of the 1,156 young adults on social assistance in the canton of Basel-City, 839 have no vocational training or higher education and belong to the category of the YAS. In other words, the YAS constitute 72 percent of all the young adults on social assistance in Basel-City. This proportion remained on a relatively high level between 2011 and 2018, and illustrates the reason for the socio-political focus of investing in the education of these young adults. Within the general population, the proportion of individuals without higher education than compulsory school is 17 percent. Investing in education is thus considered an effective way of fighting against poverty as it reduces the risk to have to apply for social assistance later on.

Table 5: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, compulsory school (CS), 2011–2018

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	1260	1307	1357	1309	1249	1321	1239	1156
	CS	898	946	971	955	875	925	885	839
18 years of age	Total	92	121	92	99	89	104	118	113
	CS	83	110	80	90	79	91	104	104
20 years of age	Total	162	177	176	174	141	155	136	136
	CS	123	146	138	146	107	125	115	112
22 years of age	Total	194	197	171	178	155	202	165	150
	CS	142	132	116	133	106	138	112	106
25 years of age	Total	204	174	174	187	197	210	177	167
	CS	122	104	100	106	107	112	101	95

Source: FSO (2020).

9 In Switzerland, the total period of compulsory education amounts to eleven years – including two years of kindergarten (according to the informations of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI): https://www.edk.ch/en/education-system-ch/compulsory?set_language=en (access date: October 2023).

Furthermore, according to Table 5, the older the YAS get in Basel-City, the lower the proportion of YAS within the group of young adults on social assistance. As we already know, the transition from school to work does not always follow a linear path and consequently, a considerable number of young adults, even though they successfully complete vocational training, do not enter the labour market on the first try and are obliged to apply again for social assistance. For the age group of 25-year-olds for instance, only half of the young adults on social assistance have not yet completed a vocational training.

The following Table 6 describes the same matter for the canton of Geneva. In 2018, 2,202 of the 3,477 young adults on social assistance have no vocational training or higher education and belong to the category of the YAS. In other words, the YAS constitute 63 percent of all the young adults on social assistance in the canton of Geneva. Compared to the canton of Basel-City, the proportion of YAS is slightly lower. This rate is still above average; however, it seems that the transition from school to a general education or a VET is slightly more successful within the canton of Geneva. Moreover, we can note that there is the same pattern we have already shown for the canton of Basel-City: the proportion of the YAS within the group of young adults on social assistance gradually declines as they get older.

Table 6: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, compulsory school (CS), 2011–2018

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	2275	2891	3017	3060	3111	3389	3470	3477
	CS	1497	1874	1974	1951	2007	2113	2124	2202
18 years of age	Total	234	337	299	341	303	330	362	359
	CS	173	264	243	262	229	248	269	266
20 years of age	Total	317	406	381	414	395	454	433	429
	CS	246	293	280	293	271	312	306	295
22 years of age	Total	290	355	428	380	396	442	438	466
	CS	188	208	267	238	247	262	248	311
25 years of age	Total	278	335	391	391	399	509	469	424
	CS	148	158	212	199	212	265	227	201

Source: FSO (2020).

Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate the employment situation of the young adults on social assistance. The FSO statistics divides the beneficiaries into three categories, ‘employed’, ‘unemployed’ and ‘inactive’. If a beneficiary is

gainful employed, he or she falls under the category of 'employed'. The second category englobes the beneficiaries who are considered employable and are currently looking for a job or a VET. Part of the YAS are in this category – the ones who participate in an integration programme, for instance. The third group, the 'inactive', are those YAS considered unemployable because they lack key competences or are simply too sick (most of them psychologically) to look for an apprenticeship. Often, these YAS have other more urgent hardships like housing or health issues that have to be solved before addressing a possible re-integration via VET.

As the following Table 7 shows, the evolution of the numbers within the category of the 'inactive' young adults (most of them without a VET) has slightly increased since 2011 (from 300 to 342) in the canton of Basel-City. Simultaneously, the numbers in the other two categories (employed and unemployed) have slightly decreased, which means that there are slightly more YAS with multiple problems today compared to a decade ago – assuming that the more complex the life situation of a young adult on social assistance is, the more likely it is that this individual will be categorized as 'inactive'. The 'inactive' youngsters on social assistance make up nearly 30 percent of all 18-year-olds to 25-year-olds on social assistance in 2018 in Basel-City. They only made-up 24 percent in 2011. This means that social workers have to deal more frequently with this type of youngsters nowadays. Furthermore, if we compare the 18-year-olds with the 25-year-olds, we can clearly see that the younger ones deal more often with multiple issues than their older counterparts. 46 out of 113 are considered 'inactive' compared to 53 out of 167 in the category of the 25-year-olds.

For the canton Geneva, the above-mentioned development is even more explicit. Congruent with what other colleagues have showed for other regions in Switzerland (Haller 2012), the growing number of YAS considered 'inactive' because of complex life situations and multiple deprivations becomes more and more common. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of YAS considered unemployable at the moment ('inactive') increased from 736 cases (out of 2275) to 1,634 cases (out of 3'477). Compared to the data of 2011, in 2018 there are approximately 1,200 more young adults without any financial means and employment perspective within the canton of Geneva, however, only 170 young adults more are considered employable by the frontline workers. In 2018, the young adults deemed 'inactive' make nearly 47 percent of all young adults on social assistance. This is nearly a fifteen percent increase of YAS with 'multiple problems' within only seven years.

Table 7: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, employment situation, 2011–2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	1260	1357	1249	1239	1156
	Employed	373	343	268	302	297
	Unemployed	579	626	571	551	495
	Inactive	300	364	375	360	342
18	Total	92	92	89	118	113
	Employed	17	15	16	29	21
	Unemployed	36	29	25	36	39
	Inactive	35	40	43	46	46
25	Total	204	174	197	177	167
	Employed	67	50	46	55	45
	Unemployed	88	73	87	65	64
	Inactive	47	49	55	51	53

Source: FSO (2020).¹⁰

Compared to Basel-City, the same observation can be made for Geneva: the younger the YAS, the more fragile and complex their life situation. For both age groups (18- and 25-year-olds) we can determine a growth in ‘inactive’ cases. However, for the 18-year-old this increase is more explicit and the proportion within this age group is bigger: out of 359 young adults on social assistance who are eighteen years old, 256 are jobless and considered unemployable, amounting to over 70 percent of the 18-year-olds on social assistance. Comparatively, around 27 percent of the 25-year-olds were classified as ‘inactive’.

The next variable I can present is the housing situation. As earlier studies suggested on a national level (Dubach et al. 2009), the housing situation is rather heterogeneous in the case of young adults on social assistance. This has stayed the same in the past decade, as the following Table 9 shows. Most of these young people in the canton of Basel-City live in a private household with other people. We do not know the exact constellation of these households. However, we know that within this category, there are young people living with their parents or with roommates; or they are themselves parents living with partners or on their own. There is not a big difference between 2011 and 2018

¹⁰ The numbers of the three categories (employed, unemployed and inactive) do not always add up with the total number of youngsters on social assistance. This is due to the missing data. The statistical categories “missing” and “don’t know” have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

concerning the housing situation in Basel-City. In 2018, out of 1,156 young adults on social assistance, there are 239 youngsters that live alone, amounting to nearly 21 percent of the young adults on social assistance. Since social assistance in Basel-City applies the SKOS/CSIAS guidelines, these youngsters have a reduced subsistence level compared to the other young adults living with parents or children. The category ‘particular housing’ comprises all the young adults that have no stable accommodation who could be staying in a pension or hotel as an interim solution. However, this category is negligible as for example in 2018 it concerns only thirty young adults out of 1,156.

Table 8: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, employment situation, 2011–2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	2275	3017	3111	3470	3477
	Employed	619	811	787	782	788
	Unemployed	783	1053	1055	917	825
	Inactive	736	1030	1118	1507	1634
18	Total	234	299	303	362	359
	Employed	39	60	42	54	44
	Unemployed	31	37	60	25	27
	Inactive	142	183	174	247	256
25	Total	278	391	399	469	424
	Employed	84	116	111	134	122
	Unemployed	127	178	173	183	159
	Inactive	53	87	102	130	117

Source: FSO (2020).

Table 9: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, housing situation, 2011–2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	1260	1357	1249	1239	1156
	Living in a home	84	74	106	93	85
	Particular housing	46	62	50	43	30
	Private household: living alone	299	273	248	262	239
	Private household: Not living alone	829	946	843	836	800

Source: FSO (2020).

The category ‘living in a home’ refers to all accommodations with professionals who provide assistance. The category ‘particular housing’ refers to atypical housing situations like travelling communities or living in a pension/hotel.

Table 10 shows the housing situation of young adults on social assistance for the canton of Geneva. There are no noticeable differences compared to the canton of Basel-City. Most of the youngsters live with other people in a private household, which means with their parents, with their own children, or with roommates. The numbers remained stable between 2011 and 2018.

Table 10: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, housing situation, 2011–2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	2275	3017	3111	3470	3477
	Living in a home	37	76	90	84	70
	Particular housing	154	177	177	168	170
	Private household: living alone	467	565	529	576	515
	Private household: Not living alone	1554	2156	2292	2589	2688

Source: FSO (2020).

Tables 11 and 12 show the breakdown of the numbers of young adults according to the reasons for termination of support. This information has been linked with the education level of the young adults. Table 11 categorizes all the case terminations of young adults in the canton of Basel-City in the three categories ‘better economic situation’, ‘upstream social benefits’ and ‘not in charge anymore’. With this data, we can find out which of the young adults previously on social assistance made it out via gainful employment, via an upstream benefit like invalidity or unemployment insurance, and finally and most importantly, how many of them are no longer supported but we do not know exactly why. This last category is interesting because it shows that in some cases, there is a loss of contact either because the young adult moved and is not in the jurisdiction of social services anymore or simply because the young adult decided to end the support process.

For the canton of Basel, the most apparent evolution is the decrease in the number of closed cases between 2011 and 2018 due to an improvement in the economic situation. Indeed, in 2011, 156 young adults made it out of

social assistance via gainful employment, whereas in 2018 only ninety-six young adults managed to leave social assistance via the same opening. The same is true for the YAS category. This could be interpreted as an indicator that the labour market within the region of Basel-City is increasingly saturated – especially for young people without vocational training and performance shortfalls. Even young adults with completed vocational training are less likely to find a gainful employment in 2018 compared to 2011. The other numbers remain relatively stable. The number of young adults who terminate the support process with social services in Basel-City is practically the same in 2018 as it was in previous years. A second interesting evolution is the increasing importance of upstream social benefits relative to labour market integration. The number one reason for closing cases in the canton of Basel-City in 2018 was the claim of other upstream transfers like unemployment or disability insurance benefits.

Table 11: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, exit reasons and education level, 2011–2018

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	441	341	412	421	371	329	351	317
	Better economic situation	156	124	159	153	137	120	129	96
	Upstream social benefits	125	99	125	129	110	100	113	106
	Not in charge anymore	71	51	56	68	59	70	62	63
YAS	Total	298	225	248	277	254	204	241	210
	Better economic situation	94	66	83	76	93	69	75	52
	Upstream social benefits	84	69	77	95	70	70	90	72
	Not in charge anymore	50	34	40	51	39	40	42	50
Young adults with vocational training	Total	130	105	147	126	106	106	103	101
	Better economic situation	59	54	75	72	43	49	51	40
	Upstream social benefits	40	29	45	28	38	28	22	33
	Not in charge anymore	12	12	9	13	14	16	18	13

Source: FSO (2020).

Finally, it is important to note that, even though this figure remains stable, sixty-three out of 317 young adults in Basel-City (for the year 2018) leave social assistance without a sustainable solution. This corresponds to 20 percent of all the young adults. We do not know the concrete reasons for the termination of the support process. However, what we can say is that in 20 percent of all the cases, social services have to close the cases, sometimes against their will, without having ameliorated the life situation of the young person – meaning an approved economic situation via a job or vocational training.

The following Table 12 illustrates the situation in the canton of Geneva regarding the exit reasons for young adults, YAS, and young adults with a VET degree. As there is an overall increase of young adults on social assistance in both absolute and relative terms, all three categories of exit reasons have also increased. However, if we take a closer look at the evolution between 2011 and 2018, one can see that the exit reasons ‘upstream social benefits’ and ‘not in charge anymore’ present a sharper increase than the category ‘better economic situation’.

Table 12: Geneva, Young adults on social assistance, exit reasons and education level, 2011–2018

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total 18–25	Total	495	522	593	618	612	651	737	723
	Better economic situation	160	167	161	163	193	199	247	222
	Upstream social benefits	92	116	105	118	154	152	171	183
	Not in charge anymore	171	169	201	199	191	227	226	250
YAS	Total	296	267	275	366	368	379	427	434
	Better economic situation	88	78	61	81	105	91	129	107
	Upstream social benefits	57	60	49	76	97	99	100	116
	Not in charge anymore	115	95	108	127	121	150	146	171
Young adults with vocational training	Total	127	129	115	151	156	160	177	186
	Better economic situation	56	50	45	56	71	72	73	88
	Upstream social benefits	24	27	21	26	39	32	37	44
	Not in charge anymore	33	34	29	43	33	38	44	37

Source: FSO (2020).

In other words, between 2011 and 2018, the number of young adults on social assistance who terminated the support process with their social workers for unknown reasons increased gradually. The same observation can be made for young people who left social assistance via upstream insurance benefits. This evolution is even more clear for the YAS: In the year 2018, 171 out of 434 YAS left social assistance because they moved away or because they did not show up anymore. An additional 116 of those YAS left social assistance via upstream social benefits and only 106 improved their financial situation during the year 2018 via gainful employment. For the canton of Geneva, there is a clear link between obtaining a VET degree and the chances of improving the economic situation. Approximately half of the young adults with a VET degree managed to find gainful employment and leave social assistance during the year 2018.

The next two Tables 13 and 14 illustrate the evolution from 2011 to 2018 regarding the median duration for both the closed cases – meaning the cases that could be closed during the survey period – and for the ongoing cases – the young adults that remained on social assistance.

For the canton of Basel-City, Table 13 illustrates quite clearly the growth in complex cases regarding the young adults on social assistance. Indeed, the median duration of cases remaining on social assistance has increased both for the closed and for the ongoing cases. On average, young adults leave social assistance in Basel-City after nine months – one month longer compared to the reference year 2011. More noticeable is the evolution amongst the ongoing cases. In 2011, amongst all the ongoing dossiers, young adults were receiving social assistance for eleven months. In 2018, this number has increased to fourteen months. This matter is a clear indication that nowadays the challenge to close cases for the social services in Basel-City is more significant when facing young adults than it was a decade ago.

Table 13: Basel-City, young adults on social assistance, benefit duration, 2011–2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Closed cases	Cases	441	412	371	351	317
	Median benefit duration (in months)	8	7.5	8	9	9
Ongoing cases	Cases	988	1060	1018	1008	973
	Median benefit duration (in months)	11	14.5	13.5	14	14

Source: FSO (2020).

For the canton of Geneva, an increase in the number of months between 2011 and 2018 for the closed dossiers can be seen. This means that the young adults who manage to leave social assistance tend to have had a longer trajectory within social assistance today compared to a decade ago. Again, this finding points to a growth in the number of complex cases and more young adults with multiple problems and limited VET perspectives. Regarding the ongoing cases, median duration has stabilized in the past decade. Half of the young adults currently receiving social assistance are being supported by their social services for at least a year.

Table 14: Geneva, young adults on social assistance, benefit duration, 2011-2018

		2011	2013	2015	2017	2018
Closed cases	Cases	495	593	612	737	723
	Median benefit duration (in months)	7	8	9	9	10
Ongoing cases	Cases	1455	1867	2031	2176	2180
	Median benefit duration (in months)	12	13	12	12	13

Source: FSO (2020).

This data describes the current situation of young adults on social assistance and the subcategory of the YAS for the two cantons, Basel-City and Geneva. To sum up, we can affirm that the trend discussed in previous studies regarding the growth and normalization of the ‘cases with multiple problems’ within social assistance (Beyeler et al. 2017; Drilling 2004; Haller 2012; Schaffner 2007; Schaffner and Drilling 2013) is visible in the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva. There are certain variables within the statistics provided by the FSO that point to the trend that it becomes more and more complicated for social services to strive for a quick and sustainable closure of cases regarding the age category of eighteen to twenty-five.

We can state that for both cantons the proportion of young adults on social assistance, considered ‘inactive’, has increased, which means that there are more youngsters with health issues who cannot focus their attention on finding an employment or a VET. This coincides with another development: There are fewer young people who manage to leave social assistance via an amelioration of their economic situation. Interestingly, this is true for all the young adults as well as the YAS. This is a clear indication that it is more difficult

to find a job or a VET for young individuals with performance shortfalls. In addition, more young people leave social assistance via upstream social benefits. If we take into consideration other indications like that there are more young people in both cantons who break the contact with the social services for unknown reasons or that for those who remain, the duration of support seems to grow, a picture becomes evident, which puts the YAS with multiple problems in the centre of socio-political attention.

2.5 Transitioning from welfare to work

Having reviewed the state of research on social assistance in Switzerland, its guiding principles, and the corresponding statistics with a specific focus on young adults, we can affirm that there is a growing area of tension in this specific policy field. On the one hand, the mandate of integration has gained the upper hand compared to the other major mandate of securing a livelihood. The SKOS/CSIAS norms as well as the cantons (taking the examples of Basel-City and Geneva as a frame of reference) have reduced the subsistence level for this age group in recent years in order to favour an increased attention on the integration efforts of the YAS. On the other hand, there is a growing number of YAS with multiple problems with no immediate perspective of finding a VET or job opportunity. This observation points to an increased polarization within the social assistance practice: Some youngsters benefit from a closer accompaniment towards a VET or job integration and others, with multiple disadvantages (low school achievements, precarious housing, debts, breaks within the family, health issues, etc.) face a reduced subsistence level and no immediate professional prospects.

For these YAS, transitioning from welfare to work implies a long-winded trajectory with many tries. Failing or delaying this transition, however, comes at a great cost for the youngsters. The evaluation of the available data on social assistance gives some indications regarding the importance of vocational education and training (VET) when it comes to protecting oneself against future economic adversities. The more advanced the educational degree, the higher the chances are of entering the Swiss labour market successfully and in a sustainable manner. Once this transition has been achieved, the risk of having to apply for social assistance in the future will be lower as well.

Up to this point, I have dealt with this subject from a point of view of poverty prevention. However, ensuring a smooth school to work transition or, in the case of the YAS, a welfare to work transition concerns other policy fields

as well. A first policy field concerns economic policies. The Swiss welfare state depends financially on a comprehensive participation of the able-bodied and skilled population to the regular labour market. Furthermore, the continuous demand for high-qualified employees within the service sector is considered one of the political priorities.

In 2011, the Federal Department of Economic Affairs (EVD) launched the Skills Initiative (EVD 2011). The background of this initiative is the difficulty for various Swiss companies to hire skilled workers for their specific tasks. According to this broadly supported strategic document¹¹ all involved actors commit to supplying the need with skilled workers and prioritizing domestic solutions. This matter is directly linked to the phenomenon of the YAS, because one of the many measures to ensure a qualified supply of workers for the Swiss labour market was to increase the number of adolescents and young adults with an upper secondary degree. At the time of the Skills Initiative in 2011, the overall quota of young adults with such a degree, aged between eighteen and twenty-five, was 90 percent (FSO 2018). Although this is a comparatively high rate in Europe, the issue became a political priority and consequently, the expectations and pressure towards the young adults and the YAS increased.

A second important policy field concerns educational policies at the cantonal level. In light of this new federal initiative to push for the highest possible quota of young adults with an upper secondary degree diploma, all cantonal units in charge of VET have gained in importance as well. The new dogma for combatting youth unemployment and future social and economic exclusion is to pursue the uncompromising strategy of what can be called 'education first'. Education first means that the first course of action in dealing with youth unemployment should be to complete a vocational training (as opposed to other approaches like 'work first', for instance). I will take a closer look at this policy field because the social services in charge of YAS work closely with VET departments and their units specialized in accompanying youngsters without vocational training.

This subchapter discusses first the current Swiss VET system in order to discuss the formal possibilities and paths for young people in Switzerland to acquire an upper secondary degree. Furthermore, it allows positioning the YAS in relation to the educational system and discussing that system's poten-

11 Before launching the initiative, the EVD conducted a consultation with social partners (employer and trade unions), professional organizations, and entrepreneurs from various branches.

tial to integrate the most disadvantaged youngsters. Second, a lot of research has been done on the specific vulnerabilities of young unemployed individuals in Europe. These results will be used to put the phenomenon of the YAS and their specific vulnerabilities in a broader context. It will reveal the current challenges youngsters have to face in order to build their own trajectories in a modern, post-industrial, and market-based economy. Finally, the subchapter will conclude with the description of the afore-mentioned ‘education first’ shift, which discursively affected greatly the role of social assistance within cantonal welfare regimes.

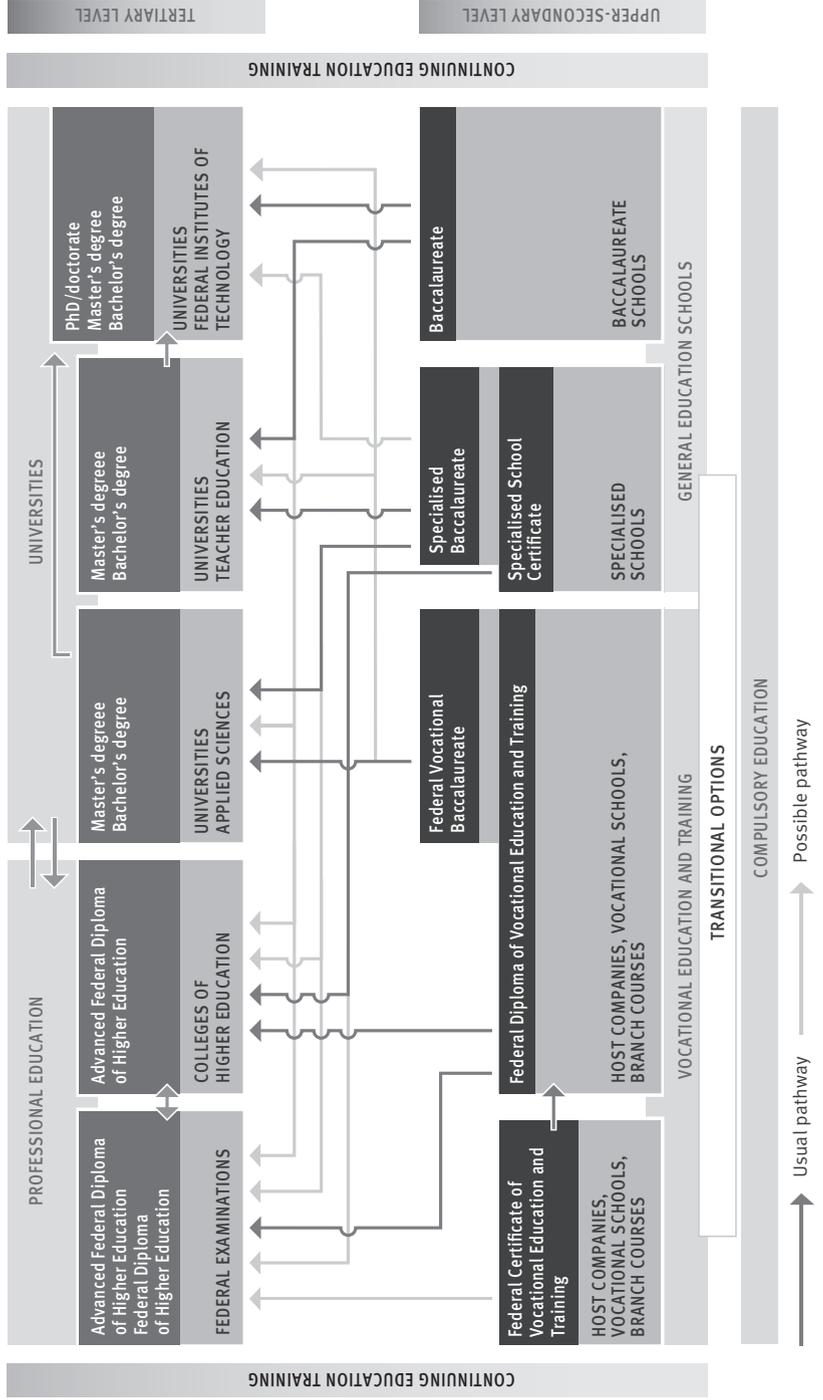
2.5.1 The Swiss dual VET system

The Swiss dual VET regime is embedded in a broader educational regime called Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) system (SERI 2020). The VPET system is divided into two sectors: upper-secondary level vocational education and training (VET) and the tertiary-level professional education. The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) advocates, amongst other things, the permeability of the system, in that adolescents and young adults can easily switch from one vocational pathway to a more general, tertiary educational pathway and vice-versa. Regarding the ‘dual-track’ learning of the VET regime, the SERI (2020:4) states:

Most VET programmes are of the dual-track variety, i.e., training content is divided between different learning locations (part-time classroom instruction at a vocational school, part-time workplace training at a host company, and for some occupations also branch courses at a branch training centre). The school-based variety of VET programme (i.e., full-time classroom instruction, no apprenticeship) is less common in Switzerland.

Thus, Switzerland combines school-based learning with company-based training. Education takes place at three sorts of location: training companies, vocational schools, and branch training centres (Schmid 2017). The SERI explicitly states the important role of the private sector in determining the requirements for individual upper-secondary level vocational qualifications and tertiary-level professional. According to the SERI (2020:4), it is designed “to impart only those professional competences that are actually in demand and only for existing job vacancies”. The VPET system is built on the principle that each person undergoes training for a specific professional activity. Figure 3 shows the various intended pathways for Swiss adolescents and young adults from compulsory school up to a traditional university or a university of applied sciences.

Figure 3: The Swiss VPET system



Source: SERI (2020).

After completing compulsory education, adolescents have to choose between two different tracks: the VET pathway or a general education. The first can again be roughly differentiated into two tracks: a vocational education and training course can lead to either a Federal Certificate of VET (2 years) or a Federal Diploma of VET (3 to 4 years). The general education programmes (*baccalaureate*) lead to a *matura-diploma*, which grants access to a traditional university and the universities of applied sciences. The permeability of the system can be illustrated by the fact, that several 'bridges' have been installed between the different pathways. With a Federal VET diploma an apprentice can, for instance, complete a professional baccalaureate, which grants access to a university of applied sciences. Apprentices with a Federal VET diploma can also work several years in their occupation sector and enter a higher vocational training in a higher non-academic education institution later on. Although it is a Swiss innovation and cannot be found in the same way in other collective skill formation systems like Austria, Germany, or Denmark for instance, the de facto permeability is still limited because of the selectivity of the system (Dahmen and Bonvin 2017:283).

If we want to situate the YAS within the Swiss VPET system, we need to put them at the first junction between compulsory school and the upper-secondary level (transitional options) or outside of the educational system, as most of them are currently on social assistance and are recovering from their breaks within the VPET system. Most of them have at one point in their earlier life started an apprenticeship and had to abandon it again. Others have never found their way from obligatory school into a VET opportunity. Rudin et al. (2018) show interesting findings regarding the number of Swiss youngsters in need of transitional solutions ('bridging measures'). The proportion of school graduates who are in a bridging measure – like a motivational semester or a preparatory course for VET, for instance – has not changed overall in the past few years and remains at 25 percent of all the youngsters. Furthermore, nearly one-fifth (17 percent) of the VET graduates have had negative experiences in the past and have needed to terminate their apprenticeship contract at least once. According to this study the quota of apprenticeship contract termination was at 21 percent in 2012. Nearly 80 percent of these individuals experiencing this kind of setback found another educational pathway afterwards (Rudin et al. 2018).

If we look at socio-political debates in Europe and at the scientific research on youth unemployment in OECD countries as well as at the phe-

nomena of youth transitions specifically, vocational education and training (VET) is often presented as the best institutional response to these social challenges. This is particularly true when it concerns adolescents and young adults who lack the resources, skills, or motivation to continue with higher education (Eichhorst et al. 2015). These scholars and policy-makers argue that apprenticeships and training provide useful skills adapted to the concrete needs of the firms, and in doing so, ensure a smoother transition into the labour market (Quintini and Martin 2006).

With its worldwide proportionally largest apprenticeship system the Swiss dual VET system has received much scholarly attention in recent years in the field of comparative research on VET politics (Di Maio, Graf, and Wilson 2020; Emmenegger, Graf, and Strebel 2020; Gonon and Maurer 2011; Rohrer and Trampusch 2011; Schmid 2020). The reason for the growing interest in the Swiss VET system as well as on European skill formation systems in general are the various national reconfigurations of VET policies facing new structural challenges due to various liberalization processes like the transition to a 'knowledge-based' economy, the outsourcing of low-skilled manufacturing jobs, and the automatization of production and services (Thelen 2014).

Switzerland applies a collective skill formation system within a coordinated market economy (Iversen and Stephens 2008; Rohrer and Trampusch 2011). Coordinated market economies are typically characterized by strong vocational training institutions and relatively generous welfare policies. Strategically, the involved private and public actors encourage individual investments in occupational skills (Dahmen and Bonvin 2017). In Switzerland, the employer coordination through associations and apprenticeship training in general is even more significant than in other collective skill formation systems (Di Maio et al. 2020). Switzerland combines the elements of restrained state intervention and highly organized business interest with a high influence of employers' associations, a relative weakness of trade unions, a dominant position of the federal government in VET policy making, and a "strong tradition of self-regulation by economic associations" (Rohrer and Trampusch 2011:5). Compared to the more 'social' German case of collectivist skill formations systems, Emmenegger et al. (2020) argue that Switzerland must be considered more 'liberal', in the sense that the *Organisationen der Arbeitswelt* (OdA, Organizations of the World of Work) play a major role in VET policy formulation and implementation – alongside the federal government and the cantons (upper secondary education). The OdA is an umbrella term

to denote all the non-public actors involved in VET legislation. Many of the Oda are firstly responsible for at least one of the 230 initial VET occupations in Switzerland. Secondly, they are heavily involved in the strategic development of the Swiss VET policies at the federal level. This means that for many of the apprenticeships, the authorities delegate the definition of content and working conditions to the firms themselves. The idea behind this logic is to ensure that a VET curriculum provides the skills the labour market actually needs and in doing so favours smooth education-to-work transitions (Emmenegger et al. 2020:268). While this logic makes sense from an economical point of view (the firms get to train their future work force in the manner they see fit), it also explains the current function of social policies, which is to cushion the residual part of youngsters who are not taken into consideration by these firms and prepare them for a possible re-entry into the VET system.

The ‘liberal’ face of the Swiss VET system (Armingeon 2001, 2011) can be illustrated by several features. Firstly, according to the SERI, the Oda “must” organize and represent the interest of host companies and they “may” represent the interests of the employee (SERI 2019:1). This indicates that the perspective of the employees and the trade unions is relativized on the federal level. In fact, Emmenegger et al. (2020:268) show that almost all of the Oda (97 percent), publicly responsible for an occupation in initial VET, represent employers’ interest. Therefore, the collective agreements that determine the apprentices’ wages and working conditions are less comprehensive and standardized compared to Germany¹² for instance, where the trade unions are more dominant. Secondly, the comparison with Germany showed that the Swiss apprentices earned less money during their apprenticeships and spent comparatively more time with ‘productive’ tasks (meaning activities from which the firms would directly benefit) than with studying in vocational schools. One could therefore argue that the ‘cost’ for host companies for hiring and training an apprentice is lower in Switzerland than in Germany

To sum up, the Swiss dual VET system is critically acclaimed for its efficiency and potential for innovation. It is also often credited for the low youth unemployment rate and a low supply-demand mismatch on the labour market (Dahmen and Bonvin 2017). However, taking the most disadvantaged

12 Within international literature on collective skill formation systems, there has been a strong focus on Germany given the size of its economy and its role in world markets. Due to its similarity to Switzerland (with a more liberal version of the same system) scholars have advocated the need of comparative research on both cases (see for instance Emmenegger, Graf, and Strebel 2020:264).

young people in the focus of interest again – the YAS –, its liberal face with the domination of the employers' interest suggests high pressure and competitiveness. There is no social right to an apprenticeship after completing compulsory school. The youngsters have to apply for an apprenticeship contract in the same way they would apply for a job on the regular labour market. Due to their low school achievements and health issues, their chances to be hired are relatively dim and there is no guarantee of success during apprenticeship as the employers have every right to terminate the contract whenever they consider the youngster unfit for the job. Schmid (2017) studied the phenomena of apprenticeship contract terminations in Switzerland. Interestingly, apprentices and apprenticeship trainers give different reasons when asked for the reason for the terminations. According to the trainers, in nearly all cases, it is the apprentice who is responsible for the termination of the contract. The above-mentioned study (Emmenegger et al. 2020) points to the fact that compared to Germany, Swiss host companies expect a high productivity from their apprentices in order to lower their costs. In contrast, the apprentice frequently points to the poor quality of the training. After the termination of a contract, the apprentice usually looks for another solution in the same occupational sector. According to Schmid (2017:139), up to 75 percent of youngsters who find another apprenticeship manage to end up with a Federal VET diploma or certificate. An early termination of an apprenticeship contract remains a considerable risk of never having an upper-secondary level qualification. According to the author's estimations (Schmid 2017:139), up to a quarter of all young adults in Switzerland, leave the educational system without formally graduating.

At the end of compulsory school (eighth and ninth grade), students start to look for apprenticeship openings and they are encouraged by their teachers to write applications. Most apprenticeship places are filled between November, third month into the final 9th school year and the end of June. There is an informal rule stating that apprenticeship places should not be filled before the first of November, in order to reduce the pressure on the youngsters. However, this informal rule has not been respected in recent years and companies have repeatedly filled their vacancies before November first (Schmid 2017). Since the mid-1990s, approximately half of all youngsters enrolled directly in a VET programme. Slightly more than a quarter of them started general education. About 15 percent of the students make use of a transitional option (e.g., a 10th school year or a preparatory course for VET), and another 10 percent choose another informal transitional solution (e.g., learning a language abroad).

Even though one has to acknowledge a relatively high performativity of the Swiss VPET system, in that most of Swiss youngsters find their specific pathway through, there remain considerable insecurities during the transition from school to post-compulsory education, and this transition is often difficult especially for those young people who are socially disadvantaged or were disadvantaged at school. Studies show how the social and cultural origin – independently of school performances – codetermines whether a young person will find an apprenticeship or not. This effect has been documented mostly for company-based VET (Sacchi et al. 2011; Seibert, Hupka-Brunner, and Imdorf 2009). The Swiss educational system has been criticized – especially regarding the lower secondary level – for its incapacity to reduce social inequality and for being highly segmented and selective. Scholars have shown that among the OECD countries, they found the strongest effect of parental occupational status on literary scores for Swiss pupils. Moreover, Switzerland has one of the biggest differences between school performances of native and first generation immigrants amongst OECD countries (Fuentes 2011). A more recent study analysed whether social-origin gap in school-track attendance and learning outcomes further widens thereafter for children with comparable school achievement (Combet and Oesch 2020). Social origin plays an important role for future educational achievements in Switzerland. The authors find, amongst other things, that the influence of social origin on educational attainment does not dissipate over the teenage years. This demonstrates that even though the Swiss dual education system is particularly praised in the academic and political context for ensuring smooth school-to-work transitions for young people, there are still advert consequences for youngsters who happen to experience unemployment and/or are brought up in lower social class households.

2.5.2 *The vulnerable ‘youth’ phase*

Due to the competitiveness and selectivity of the Swiss VET system, the most disadvantaged youngsters often do not find a concrete solution after compulsory school and accumulate exclusionary experiences until they reach adulthood. Having professional prospects remains primordial for young people in a psychological sense. It is one of the dominant spheres of society, where young people need to be able to build a plan for their future. The YAS experience a specific life phase, which poses certain challenges and vulnerabilities. Becquet (2012:55) defines two normative references that are relevant

for young adults in Europe with regard to their vulnerability. 'Vulnerability' in this context is understood as the potential to experience exclusion in the future. When it comes to making choices in life, a first frame of reference for young adults is their own juvenile subculture (Becquet 2012:55): which behaviour and life choices separate the adolescents or the young adults from other age groups like children or adults? How can one position him- or herself as an adolescent or as a young adult? Those young adults who feel excluded or left with no access to this subculture are regarded as vulnerable.

A second frame of reference is the adult world (Becquet 2012:56). This perspective refers to necessary passage from a 'dependent' young adult to an accepted, productive, and autonomous member of society. Consequently, vulnerabilities occur at crucial junctures and passages like finding a vocational training after compulsory school, achieving a professional education, finding a job on the regular labour market and keeping it, leaving home and dealing with parents or relatives, managing a financial budget and a household for the first time, and founding a family. Becquet (2012:57) notes that there is a specific tension nowadays appearing between these norms and the phenomenon of the extension of youth.

Indeed, already since the early 2000s, the juvenile life phase seems to be stretched and therefore tensions emerge more regularly between the common statutory roles and the identity building process of the young adults. Research in Europe has shown that the transition from youth to adulthood has become increasingly complex in the last few decades. Chevalier (2016:4) notes, for example, that there are three reasons for youth discontinuities. Firstly, the extended periods of education throughout Europe have considerably prolonged the childhood phase (Cavalli and Galland 1995). Therefore, the insecurity of achieving a degree and finding a first employment is also prolonged. Secondly, typical events characterizing the transition to adulthood, such as leaving the parental home, handling a financial budget, entering the labour market, and starting a family, have become disconnected from one another, and are not crossed at the same pace anymore (Billari 2004). Thirdly, youth transitions have become de-standardized and individualized, leading to fragmented and so-called 'yo-yo transitions' of young people (Stauber and Walther 2006; Walther 2006). The term 'yo-yo' refers to the assumption that in post-industrial societies there is no standard life course anymore. Rather, patchwork careers emerge, both for young men and women, characterized by an increased number of transitions that do not follow pre-determined patterns

and can at any time be reversed due to unemployment, divorce, forced or chosen job change (Stauber and Walther 2006:244). Therefore, scholars have argued that youngsters nowadays have to deal with a climax of vulnerability due to ongoing tests and performance evaluations within obligatory school, VET, and the labour market (Soulet 2007). Those who can master the permanent evaluation of their capacities during education and employment can develop their plans. Those who fail to pass the various tests suffer exclusion and stigmatization. Every failure of important tests leaves the individuals hurting. Regarding these exclusion processes, YAS are particularly vulnerable because they failed the tests and expectations in various domains that are crucial for staying on the expected educational trajectory.

Experiences of joblessness and barred occupational perspectives leave permanent psychological and tangible scars. For the United Kingdom for instance, Gregg and Tominey (2005) found negative so-called 'scarring' effects – specifically on wages – even twenty years after experienced unemployment episodes during youth. In the Swiss context, a more recent study found similar effects on skilled young workers who experienced phases of unemployment during early work life (Helbling and Sacchi 2014). They showed for Switzerland that these young people are more likely to be neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) later on and that they also would earn less money compared to a similar group of youngsters who have not experienced early unemployment.

European welfare states as well as Swiss cantons respond to these youth vulnerabilities with the creation of so-called "transition regimes" (Walther 2006:120). They focus on cushioning the perverse effects of market selection and reorientate young unemployed people back on track. In this respect, VET institutions have gained in importance for accompanying vulnerable youngsters towards a sustainable labour market integration. Indeed, against this socio-political background, policy makers as well as frontline workers have specific expectations – especially towards those young people who seem to have fallen out of the 'institutionalized life course'. Life course scholars have argued that the welfare state in European countries 'tripartitioned' the life course – separating and thus institutionalizing three life phases: childhood, adulthood, and old age (Kohli 1997, 2007). Based on what we now know regarding the specific vulnerability of young people in Europe and Switzerland, the idea of a fourth life phase called *Youth* can be introduced. It is characterized by uncertainty, does not evolve linearly, and is unpredictable as well

as prolonged. The paths that young people have to take are rather circular, in the sense that a growing number of them will need to complete the same paths repeatedly (for example, in the case of a failed apprenticeship) before achieving objectively and subjectively the next desired status (vocational training degree). Other examples for the intensified uncertainty of this fourth life phase include the growing numbers of cantonal bridging measures for adolescents without a solution after compulsory school or the fact that completing an internship after having achieved a tertiary degree before entering the regular labour market has become normalized. In doing so, youth transition regimes add more and more thresholds and 'evaluation moments' for young people to master and prove their worthiness as employable, adult citizens.

Dubet (2015:14) affirms that being young is not a status anymore but rather a set of examinations, which forces young adults to build their own experiences – thus rendering them vulnerable. Furthermore, one has to acknowledge current global sources of insecurity like climate change and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which, although they are not taken into consideration for the present analysis, might accentuate the above-mentioned sources of insecurity for young people in Europe and Switzerland because they make it much more difficult to picture a safe and promising future.

2.5.3 The 'education first' paradigm

The dual VET regime and the broader VPET system are part of an overall political willingness to make sure that Swiss adolescents and young adults will master the transition into the labour market via suitable upper-secondary education. The Swiss cantons and other actors involved in governing the unemployed youth have a clear mandate to accompany and push these youngsters as directly and smoothly as possible from school-to work – preferably via a VET pathway, which will ensure the much-needed domestic skilled labour force for Swiss companies. Pushing for the VET pathway can be considered more profitable for two reasons: Firstly, a company-based apprenticeship will provide apprentices with specific skills that are needed for a specific occupational sector and this in turn will enhance the chances of a sustainable transition into the labour market. Second, during the completion of the apprenticeship, the apprentice earns money and has access to cantonal scholarships, which reduces the possible need for social assistance benefits. In fact, in some cantons, YAS are only reorientated towards a company-based VET and not general education because of that reason.

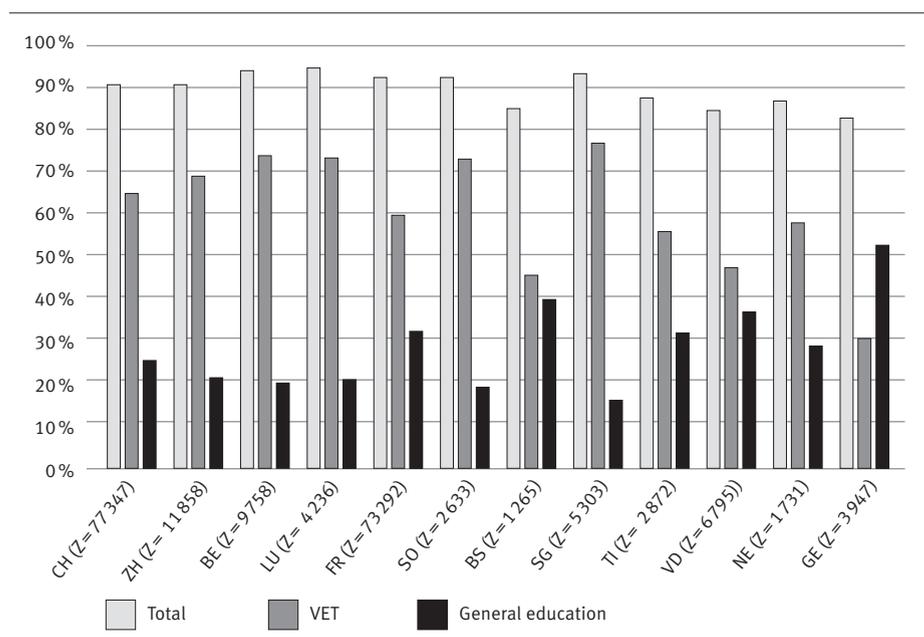
The cantons have put great effort into rearranging their apparatus in order to push forward a new course of action, which focuses on prioritizing whenever possible an upper secondary pathway as a first integration step before thinking about labour market and economic independence of their young social assistance beneficiaries. From a historic perspective, this is a rather astonishing shift, since for decades the subsidiarity principle and the principle of fulfilment of demand dictated that social assistance is not allowed to finance any expenses for a long-term education. It was considered contrary to the very nature of social assistance, which is to bridge a given hardship and not to install a long-term support. Despite the great diversity of practices due to the regional and local implementation, one can assume that most of the cantons followed the same principles.

Even though social policy in Switzerland is largely a cantonal matter, it was on the federal level that these strategic impulses were generated. One of these important impulses has been the consensus of the corporate actors in the field of vocational education and training (VET) to aim at a higher percentage (95 percent) of young adults with an upper secondary education degree. The cantons started to adjust and restructure their administration by focusing on interinstitutional collaboration and most notably by introducing the principle of 'case management' (BBT-SBBK 2008). Discursively, this administrative shift has been accompanied by studies identifying new 'risk groups' within the group of young adults and adolescents, arguing that these young people have no chance to enter the Swiss VPET system and that they will consequently be 'dependent' on social assistance permanently (Egger, Dreher, and Partner 2007). Being young and receiving social assistance was clearly something that was (and still is) considered as morally unbearable and unacceptable. The 95 percent threshold of young adults with VET diplomas and certificates had been set to be achieved by 2015. The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) evaluated the cantonal achievements regarding this matter in 2018. Overall, the cantons missed the strategic goal of 95 percent. In total, 90.9 percent of all young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years had completed an upper-secondary education by the time of the evaluation (FSO 2018). However, there are big regional differences between the cantons (ranging from 83 percent to 98 percent). The two cantons I am interested in have rather lower achievement rates in comparison to other cantons. This means that the pressure to react politically and programmatically is higher than in other cantons. The overall quota of young adults between eighteen and

twenty-five years with a completed upper-secondary education is 85 percent in the canton of Basel-City (BS) and 83 percent in the canton of Geneva (GE).

Figure 4 shows the cantonal differences¹³ and the comparatively lower achievement rates for these two cantons. Additionally, to the lower rates, young people in Basel-City (40 percent) and Geneva (over 50 percent) seem to choose more often to pursue a general education and not VET in comparison to young people in other cantons.

Figure 4: Young people with an upper secondary level qualification by the age of 25, Swiss cantons, 2015



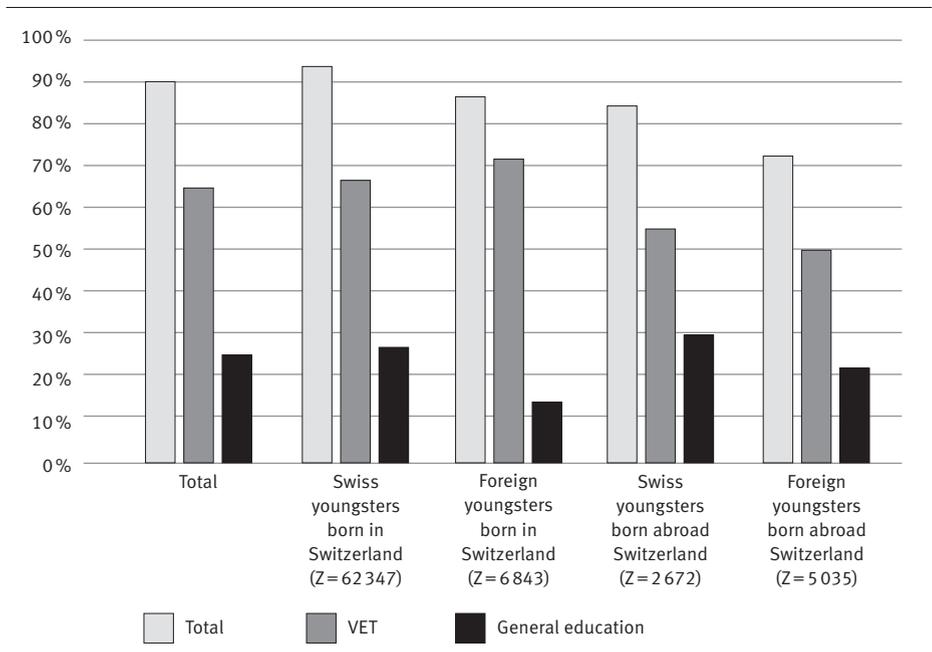
Source: FSO (2018), own presentation (Z= number of certified individuals).

Another factor which seems to impact the upper secondary achievement rates of young people is whether these youngsters have been completing compulsory school in Switzerland or abroad. Also, the residency status has an effect in general on upper secondary achievement rates. The overall percentage of young adults with migration backgrounds and who are born in Switzerland with an upper-secondary level diploma, certificate, or a general

13 11 out of 26 cantons from the French-, Italian- and German-speaking regions of Switzerland have been selected to illustrate those differences.

education is lower compared to average and lies at 86.2 percent. Conversely, taking into consideration only young adults with a Swiss passport, their total goes up to 94 percent. However, Swiss youngsters who are born abroad (double nationalities) perform worse (50 percent VET rate) compared to foreign youngsters who are born in Switzerland (70 percent VET rate). In other words, the question seems to be first and foremost whether a youngster has been able to attend Swiss compulsory school from early age when it comes to persisting within the Swiss educational regime. Figure 5 illustrates that matter as it shows the upper secondary level qualification by the age of twenty-five according to nationality and whether the individuals were born in Switzerland or abroad. The achievement rates decline if a young person was born abroad and came to Switzerland later during childhood.

Figure 5: Young people in Switzerland with an upper secondary level qualification by the age of twenty-five, 2015



Source: FSO (2018), own presentation (Z=number of certified individuals).

Another notable national impulse was the initiative of the SKOS/CSIAS, which promoted the introduction of scholarships for YAS in 2011 (SKOS/CSIAS 2011). The goal was to provide YAS a living wage and get them out of

social assistance. The slogan of the SKOS/CSIAS was ‘scholarships instead of welfare’ arguing that every one of these young adults should not be relying on social assistance but rather be completing vocational training (SKOS/CSIAS 2011). SKOS/CSIAS developed the initiative along experiences gained in a critically acclaimed programme in the canton of Vaud that had been put into practice in 2006 (Formation pour jeunes en difficultés, FORJAD; in English: Vocational Training for Youngsters with Difficulties). This scheme of the canton of Vaud granted young adults on social assistance a living wage scholarship – as soon as they sign an apprenticeship contract – and by this means got them out of social assistance. FORJAD has been praised for having reasonably high redemption rates due to the installation of coaches who closely accompany the development of the youngsters during the apprenticeship to avoid early contract terminations. However, it remains ambiguous for the young adults, as they need to find such an apprenticeship before benefiting from those scholarships and close accompaniment. Not many qualify for this scheme because it is hard for them to find the apprenticeship (due to several before stated reasons such as low grades). Rather than acknowledging the structural problematic behind the low number of youth qualifying, the discursive presumption is that the beneficiaries are unwilling and not motivated enough to enter an apprenticeship (Dahmen et al. 2017:153). Consequently, the fear that after compulsory school too many adolescents fall out of the institutionalized life course into the VPET system, has led the cantons to adapt their welfare regimes with ‘case management vocational training’ as the main instrument. The newly created agencies have the mission to track the identified risk group and accompany them towards an apprenticeship and a sustainable labour market integration.

As I have mentioned earlier, the notion of subsidiarity is fundamental for the alignment and implementation of social assistance. The households that apply for support at local social services enter the so-called process of ‘intake’ where social services make sure that they have no other upstream means to alleviate their hardships. Only after this scrutiny will a case be officially created for the beneficiaries. This is linked to the principle that households receiving social assistance cannot be offered an advantage in comparison to other households in similar economic situations but without access to benefits (SKOS/CSIAS 2020). Social assistance is designed to be a short-term support for households – reacting to concrete and immediate hardship and not to a structural problem requiring long-term support. Social

assistance to this day is still considered to be a debt that has to be repaid – though not every canton consistently implements this obligation (Kutzner 2009; SKOS/CSIAS 2018). With regard to the YAS, the eligibility and the nature of the assistance depends not only on their proven hardship but also on their age and their relationship to their parents. There is a legal responsibility for the parents to financially support their children and young adults at least until the legal age of majority, which is eighteen years, or until twenty-five years of age, but only if they have not completed a post-compulsory education. During the phase of ‘intake’, social services are therefore instructed to reconcile the young adult applicants with their parents whenever possible (SKOS/CSIAS 2020). Consequently, this puts social assistance in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, the social services are committed to collaborating with all the involved cantonal actors in pushing for upper-secondary integration and on the other hand, the more ‘traditional’ logic of social assistance (subsidiarity, fulfilment of demand, etc.) suggests a more pragmatic take – meaning closing the cases as quickly as possible.

To sum up, the ‘education first’ narrative, which has been launched on a federal level and pushed forward by the cantons in the last decade, translates the willingness to ‘leave no young adult behind’ within a post-industrial economic context that puts the accent on skills like ‘lifelong learning’, ‘flexibility’, and ‘global competitiveness’. The chances of entering this new knowledge-based labour market without an upper-secondary level qualification are considered slim. In order to avoid long-term social assistance and social exclusion of these young individuals as well as growing social security costs, the cantonal administrations under a new tri-departmental cooperation (unemployment offices, vocational training department, and social services) have reorganized their regimes. Chapter 5 will lay out two examples (cantons of Basel-City and Geneva) of such rearrangements.

2.6 Concluding remarks

This second chapter contextualized the Swiss welfare state and elaborated social assistance and the youth transition regime in Switzerland with a special attention towards the category of the YAS. There are six key points, which are particularly pertinent for the further argumentation of the present research.

2.6.1 *The role of the SKOS/CSIAS*

The first crucial point is the normative role of the SKOS/CSIAS as the umbrella organization of social assistance in Switzerland. Despite a very fragmented and heterogeneous social assistance practice that differs from canton to canton (and even from municipality to municipality), this organization sets the tone and heavily influences the legal frameworks and discursive orientation on a cantonal and municipal level. Recent reforms have been driven by the belief that there is a need for cost containment and a reduction of social assistance expenses in general. This has led, amongst other things, to a reduction of the minimum subsistence level for YAS in general and especially for those living in their own households. Discursively, part of the players within the SKOS/CSIAS (representatives of cantonal and municipal administrations for instance) have justified this with the argument that the benefit reduction will condition YAS to be more individually responsible and more motivated to build their own professional project, which could lead towards economic self-sufficiency. The underlying normative idea of the SKOS/CSIAS is that there should be no young people on social assistance anymore as these youngsters should all be either economically independent or completing vocational training. In the case of the completion of an apprenticeship, their parents (or legal guardians) should be held accountable for their legal obligation to financially support their children and if this is not possible, the youngsters should receive cantonal scholarships in order to sustain their livelihood.

2.6.2 *YAS with multiple problems*

Secondly, the review of the literature points to a growing challenge in the social assistance practice: the YAS with 'multiple problems'. The life situation of these young people is characterized by limited prospects and long periods of social assistance reception. They often deal with multidimensional hardships and cumulated disadvantages like low school achievements, health issues, irregular residency status, breaks within their families. Furthermore, these studies show that these YAS and their complex, discontinuous trajectories have become the new standard cases in urban social services. Even though approximately half of all the young people between eighteen and twenty-five manage to exit social assistance relatively quickly, data indicates that there is a considerable risk for those young people to need support later on because of their fragile school-to-work transitions.

2.6.3 *Similar legal contexts between Basel-City and Geneva*

The analysis of the legal frameworks of the cantons Basel-City and Geneva demonstrated that, thirdly, their contexts are similarly ambiguous. Both cantons stress the importance of the guiding SKOS/CSIAS principles (subsidiarity, individuality, fulfilment of demand) and the need for accompaniment of young people towards economic independence. Furthermore, even though the framework in Geneva appears to be more formalized, to a certain degree both cantons link their material support to the active behaviour of the youngsters. The nuance between the frameworks is that the canton of Geneva formally introduced integration contracts, which need to be signed by social assistance beneficiaries in order to get a continuous financial support by the social services.

2.6.4 *'Inactive' youngsters receiving social assistance*

A fourth key point is the analysis of the national statistics on social assistance, which tends to confirm the indications found within the literature review. With respect to the phenomenon of YAS 'with multiple problems', the evaluation of the national statistics showed that in both cantons there is an increase of young people considered 'inactive' in recent years. This means that social services have to deal more frequently with YAS considered as unemployable or not ready for an apprenticeship compared to earlier years because they are either too sick or there are other more pressing issues, like debts or housing. Another important indicator is the fact that in both cantons the YAS who manage to exit social assistance, are less frequently exiting via an amelioration of their economic situation. Again, this indicates that compared to earlier years it is more difficult to find a job or a VET for young individuals with performance shortfalls.

2.6.5 *The 'education first' strategy*

Fifthly, the cantonal social assistance and its social services are embedded in a broader youth transition regime, which puts an accent on the importance of completing a VET before entering the labour market. It is considered a necessary investment that allows (ideally) every young people to achieve a sustainable professional integration (see chapter 2.5.3). In this vein, this programmatic shift is still part of a willingness to 'put all young people to work' (Nada 2019). The increased focus on education and vocational training must be viewed as a strategic adaptation to the new requirements of a high threshold, knowledge and skill-based labour market.

Two notable federal initiatives pushed this strategic shift from ‘work first’ towards ‘education first’: The first one came from the federal office for vocational training together with the cantons in the mid-2000s. They introduced the idea of ‘case management’ – a close accompaniment of adolescents and young adults with transitional difficulties. The second one came from the SKOS/CSIAS, which propagated the expansion of scholarships in order to allow youngsters completing apprenticeships to exit social assistance in 2011. Traditionally, social assistance has always preferred quick-fix solutions compared to a long-term accompaniment of their beneficiaries. Hence, the social services had to adjust their practices and coordinate with other cantonal departments/offices (vocational training and job centres).

On a national level, there is a willingness to prevent YAS from taking up of social assistance in general by affirming that the social services are not the competent institution for the accompaniment of them. This stand corresponds with the principle of subsidiarity, which dictates that every upstream possibility of support (other social benefits like scholarships or individual solutions like the support of parents) should be prioritized before turning to social assistance for financial support. It also corresponds with the traditional role of Swiss social assistance as a bridging solution for hardships as opposed to a long-term social benefit. Conversely, this perspective is mirrored by an increase of particularly vulnerable young people in urban social services – YAS ‘with multiple problems’ – which have unrealistic chances of exiting social assistance via vocational training or gainful employment.

Consequently, there is a discrepancy between the original objectives of social assistance (prevention and quick-fix solutions for young people) and the reality of the current developments at the frontline in the case of the YAS. Delving into the discourses on social assistance practices in urban cantons can thus reveal how the administrations deal with this discrepancy. This publication will do that by contrasting two cantons (Geneva and Basel-City), which have recently readjusted their administrative take on the YAS.

2.6.6 The double programming of VET

Finally, Switzerland applies a collective skill formation system within a coordinated market system. It pushes a dual VET system, which is characterized by combining school-based learning with company-based training. In European comparison, this regime is similar with the German VET regime but has more liberal characteristics (dominant role of employers in VET reg-

ulations, competitiveness etc.). The Swiss VET regime has proven its potential for innovation. However, there is no social right to apprenticeships – rather, the youngsters must apply for a job similar to the conditions of the regular labour market and have to prove themselves worthy to the employers. Current research shows that considerable insecurities remain during the transition from school to post-compulsory education, and this transition is especially difficult for those young people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. In light of the ‘education first’ strategy, the double programming (work and education) of the Swiss VET regime is particularly interesting. Like other European countries struggling to find answers for the ‘problematic youth’ – adolescents and young people out of the educational system, Switzerland puts an accent on education for all. In the case of Swiss VET, this means productive work for firms as half of the ‘education’ is company-based. The apprenticeship is constructed as a life phase where youngsters need to develop both their ‘work’ and their ‘educational’ skills. The downstream role of social policies and programmes is to first make sure that there are as few youngsters as possible that are left behind without any VET options and second, to make sure that those who did not make it, learn the missing social and professional skills to be reintegrated.

3 The governance of unemployment and poverty

This chapter lays out the theoretical understanding. Many scholars have studied configurations of welfare states in Europe and in Switzerland from various angles. I align myself with previous work arguing that social policies include a great deal of moral judgement, disclosed within political discourse on ‘the poor’ and subgroups of ‘the poor’ like the YAS (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020). As early as the 1970s, Piven and Cloward (1972) described social policies as ‘relief programmes’ and as a means of maintaining a specific public order by ensuring that all individuals are engaged in productive work. Indeed, an important function of welfare policies in European contexts and beyond is the structuring and defining of the meaning of productive and unproductive work. By limiting the access to unemployment benefits for instance, they co-define the conditions in which an unemployed individual is expected to look for a job or not. In doing so, such policies have continuously contributed to altering and redefining modes of social participation within working society and, in consequence, have shaped the moral debate of who is eligible for social benefits and to what extent. In this vein, social policies can be viewed as vectors of moral values that, for their part, are deeply rooted in understandings of what is considered a model citizen.

An institutional arrangement of a given welfare state is affected by a moral belief system that is constituted by the continuous discursive negotiations of what is considered a model citizen. This is the starting point of the analytical lens of this research. The next section starts therefore with a discussion of the origins and normative foundations of welfare states, their associated social rights, and their evolution since then. Building upon this discussion, I then elaborate on the importance of capturing social policies as vectors of moral values to understand current policies in Switzerland relevant to the YAS. Third, following Handler and Hasenfelds’ (1991:17) notion of “institutionalized production of symbols,” I discuss a set of moral values (work ethics, gender, age, territoriality/ethnicity) and their importance for the current discourses on welfare deservingness – especially for the policy field of social assistance and the target group of the YAS. Finally, I present four research questions, which will guide the empirical analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.1 Welfare state and social citizenship

Citizenship rights are part of the ethical foundations of the welfare state. That is, social rights and their implementation via social policies and concrete institutions like social services do not simply grant material support or counselling services. Rather, the design of such services, the eligibility conditions, the definitions of target groups and segmentation practices are normatively intertwined with what is considered a model citizen or a model employee. Citizenship, in this vein, is a strategy of governance where social rights as well as public services serve as an unwritten social contract between a state and its members.

Since the famous contribution by Marshall (1950, 1965), the concept of citizenship has received much attention (Chevalier 2016, 2018; Procacci 2001; Turner 1993). According to Marshall (Marshall 1965) three types of citizenship rights are to be distinguished: civil, political, and social rights. Civil rights include all the rights that emerged via the state under the rule of law like the right to freedom of speech or the right to conclude business contracts. Political rights consist of all the rights enabling political participation like the right to vote or to be elected. Social rights as a third constitutive category of citizenship rights refer to the welfare state and the emergence of social protection like the right to lead a dignified life even if an individual or a household experiences hardship.

Citizenship rights can firstly be understood as juridical, economic, political, and cultural *practices*, which define, whether a person can be considered as a competent member of society (Turner 1993). These practices also shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups. Citizenship rights are shared entitlements and duties, socially constructed and evolving over time. Secondly, Marshall's definition links the notion of citizenship with the concern of inequality because citizenship and the way in which a given society designs it is closely linked to the concerns of just distribution of scarce resources in order to create virtuous outcomes like shared solidarity, social participation, and employment or education. Citizenship deals with the question of the nature of social participation within modern, western societies and shifted during the major democratization and modernization processes of the past decades.

The focus in the following subsection lies on the emergence and significance of social rights inherent to the development of the modern welfare state after the Second World War.

Marshall (1950, 1965) describes social rights implemented through welfare benefits as being constitutive for the prosperity and security of the whole society. These rights are not primarily concerned with the individual but with the collective. The understanding here is that individual risks need to be addressed because they create a collective vulnerability. Without citizenship rights, full membership to a democratic society is not imaginable. A historical example is, for instance, the 1834 English Poor Laws. They illustrate the exclusionary effect of missing social rights. Under these laws, the poor were interned in workhouses and gave up their rights as citizens to receive support for their livelihood. Thus, the status of being poor and receiving help implied being stripped of citizenship rights and hence, disqualification as a full member of a community. The same is true for many charity and workhouse programmes of the 19th century, which implemented practices which were all opposed to the very core idea of social rights. The aim of social rights, if we follow this argument, should always include the improvement of social participation.

Having social rights is morally linked to having duties. The classical example of Marshall (1965) is compulsory education. The duty of education (compulsory school) benefits not only the individual receiving an education and/or training but also benefits the whole society because educated individuals will prosper collectively. Education, in this sense, can be regarded as a condition for a functioning democratic society because political, social, and economic participation presupposes educated citizens. Consequently, there is a societal concern inherent to the idea of social rights. Following this logic, social policies should not respond to individual needs per se, but rather respond to individual trajectories that are deemed deviant in order to maintain the social order and prevent the exclusion of individuals.

In modern (labour) market societies, individual trajectories deemed deviant to societal norms are often associated with the absence of economic independence. Accordingly, social rights and duties interfere with market logic. Indeed, becoming a citizen means having a certain degree of protection against the threat of experiencing unemployment and economic precariousness due to the inability to endure within a competitive market system. In this vein, the design of welfare policies should be based on the provision of a minimal standard of well-being for all (Procacci 2001). This provision is necessary due to the unjust distribution of wealth within a social order ruled by the free market and competition principles. Furthermore, such a provision serves an

economic purpose as well, as beneficiaries can keep their purchasing power to a certain degree within a consumer society (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017). Welfare policies are thus indispensable to the idea of social citizenship and economic participation. Citizenship-orientated welfare policies are policies that grant universal rights to all members of society – irrespective of their market value, social status, and bargaining power. Procacci (2001:57) goes on to elaborate, in this way,

“[...] the development of welfare systems has deeply transformed contemporary democracies, and has broken up the reliance on market criteria to regulate social solidarity. It has transformed the role of the state, its relation to the economy, and the nature of social conflict.”

Social rights cushion the vulnerabilities of a market-based social order and thus broaden the notion of citizenship beyond political and civil rights. They contribute to enhancing equality, as their goal is ensuring equal access to common resources. If we apply this understanding on the subject at hand – the YAS – this phenomenon cannot be addressed as an individual problem or a charity issue but as a collective concern.

However, this idealistic understanding of social citizenship as a unifying and egalitarian concept is and has always been challenged by the reality of the practice. All welfare states continuously produce outsiders (non-citizens). For various reasons, outsiders have no access to basic or equivalent social rights compared to insiders (citizens). Welfare states have always, without exception, included internal distinctions of ‘deserving’ citizens and ‘undeserving’ (non-)citizens or ‘active’ citizens and ‘passive’ citizens. The justifications for such distinctions are mostly of a moral nature – in the sense that there are no objective or scientific reasons for separating categories of deserving and undeserving welfare claimants. There are no objective reasons, for instance, to reduce the subsistence level for YAS compared to other households on social assistance: The costs for basic needs like food, clothing, communication, etc. are the same for every adult and in every canton. Consequently, the reasons for treating young people differently can be traced back to moral narratives like ‘young people should be able to live with less resources than others’ or ‘young people have not yet contributed to society and thus they deserve less’. Welfare policies, in this vein, always reflect the current moral framework regarding solidarity and inequality – stratified across society and different social groups (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020; Krenn 2012; Wyss 2007).

The concrete institutional arrangement of a given welfare state is affected by idealizations of a model citizen. Such imageries are territorially bound, in other words, what may be regarded culturally as a model citizen in a given state may or may not be congruent with the idealization present in another state, for instance, Switzerland. Welfare states evolve within national boundaries. The image of a model citizen is bound up with a collective and shared representation of loyalty towards a nation or a culture. A second important reference point evolves around what is considered a model employee or a model “work citizen” (Lessenich 2012:104). The welfare state sets the stage for functional cooperation between work and capital by introducing labour and social legislation as a fundament – the groundwork for the individualized and market-based exchange of labour against wage income. In this perspective, the welfare state and its fragmented branches (social assurances, means-tested benefits, public programmes, and counselling measures) support and regulate the inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms of the labour market. The various institutions of the welfare state accompany the regulatory effects of the labour market and they step in when needed (Lessenich 2012).

Beyond the regulatory function, the welfare state also acts as what Lessenich (2012: 103) calls “allocation instance of livelihood opportunities”. It is the welfare state that defines which individuals get which benefit and under what conditions. It thereby initiates a structure of positions with different opportunities for accessing resources. It acts as a judge categorizing individuals according to socio-economic value and position – and like an usher in a movie theatre guiding you to your seat, your position within the space will correspond to your economic value. In this sense, the various institutions of the welfare state and their activities convey a moral worth on their subjects entering their jurisdiction and this morality follows an economic and territorial logic.

Welfare states can have more inclusive or exclusionary phases. Scholars agree that the 30-year post war boom saw European welfare states expand and grant social rights with a Marshallian understanding. However, by the end of the 20th century, critical social scientists agreed that the very notion of reciprocity and unifying principles of social rights has been redefined and altered (Cox 1998; Paz-Fuchs 2008). The post-war welfare state era of social rights expansion was at an end, making way for a formalized, individualized, and selective workfare state. Instead of advancing a narrative of solidarity,

arguing that social rights can produce an equal distribution of resources and opportunities, the *workfare* state (Dingeldey 2007; Wacquant 2010) has since then prioritized a more discursive interpretation of social rights, putting the accent on limiting expenses and creating behavioural incentives.

3.2 Activation and social investment

In Chapter 2, I discussed the recent evolutions regarding the phenomenon of young adults dependent on social security and the subcategory of the YAS from a juridical as well as statistical point of view in both cantons, Basel-City and Geneva. This descriptive data demonstrates the heterogeneity in the YAS group. A notable variance, amongst other things, is their housing situations: they live alone or with their parents, some are parents themselves, and some live in flat sharing communities. However, their common denominator is a lack of financial means to secure their livelihood and their difficulties experienced during their educational trajectory, leaving them with little perspectives for the future. Many YAS have to deal with multiple problems, including health issues, addiction, splits within their families, etc.

While the cases of young adults eligible for social assistance are getting more and more complex and the need for prolonged support is increasing, over the course of the last twenty years both cantonal social assistance regimes have further restricted YAS access to the support system. This is especially true for YAS not currently completing a VET, who have to prove their employability, their inability to live with their parents (or legal guardians) and, in the case of Geneva, who receive reduced cash benefits until they present a suitable professional project. As mentioned earlier, taking a Marshallian social rights perspective, there is no objective reason to separate these two categories of young people – those with VET and those without VET – when it comes to financial support. The principle of ‘fulfilment of demand’ would rather suggest that all young adults obtain the same level of benefits, since livelihood costs like communication, food, mobility, etc. are the same for everyone.

The differing treatment of YAS with and without VET is a moral distinction and presupposes a political decision. It is linked to normative ideas and representations of which subgroup of the ‘poor’ should get what kind of benefits or be excluded from welfare entirely. Clearly, there must be moral underpinnings guiding the separation of YAS and all other young adults on social assistance in order to justify them internally (within social assistance regimes) and externally (*vis-à-vis* the rest of society). Social policies, in this

perspective, are used as instruments to regulate, contain, and alter what is considered a 'social problem'. Put differently, social policies are not 'social' when it comes to providing individual support. Rather, they answer to a specific concern in a society and regulate, control, and manage groups of people considered deviant due to the exclusive structure of one or a number of sub-systems of a given socioeconomic context (cf. Hasenfeld and Abbott 1992). Moreover, the mechanisms of social policies, i.e., how they function, what they entitle, the level of benefits, and the circumscription of target groups, do only partly reveal the normative patterns that guide them. What remains hidden are the legitimizing strategies of those who design and implement the policies. For example, if at the start of a newly created integration measure for school dropouts the director of a particular programme tells me that they work on 'social skills like punctuality' with their participants, then this director's perspective on the social problem at hand is informed by a discursive framework that problematizes a specific set of features of their participants. Every implementation of social policy entails a moral background that informs the action of a professional. In this vein, social policies are never value neutral. They are implemented in order to uphold dominant moral values (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Hansen 2019). Moral representations of deservingness and broader discourse on poverty and conceptions of social justice matter. They guide the strategic alignment of social policies. More recently, academic research on welfare policy has developed two related notions to describe ongoing shifts regarding social policy discourse and practices: 'activation policies' and 'social investment'. The following two subchapters discuss the state of research regarding these two notions and look more deeply into the aspects relevant to the YAS.

3.2.1 *The 'active turn' of social policies*

Attempts at dealing with the transitional discontinuities of YAS in Switzerland are part of a broader discursive readjustment process of the welfare state, present throughout Europe. The ideological origin of the welfare state is to protect its citizens against acknowledged risks like unemployment, old age, disability, illness, etc. In case of proven incapability of contributing to the working society, individuals and their households are granted social benefits to substitute the loss of income from paid work. It represents an implicit social contract between the state and its citizens based on reciprocity and solidarity. However, since the alleged crises of the welfare state (Alber

1988) and its “active turn” (Hansen 2019), this social contract has been fundamentally renegotiated and the focus nowadays is being laid on ‘activating’ the recipients of social policies in order to get them out of welfare in a more efficient manner. The central aspect of those policies is that the provision of unemployment and other welfare benefits should no longer be unconditional, but rather focus on the promotion of labour market participation (Krenn 2012; Stelzer-Orthofer and Weidenholzer 2011). As such, “welfare conditionality” (Dwyer 2018) links the eligibility for social benefits and services to a certain set of particular responsibilities and criteria of behaviour the recipients have to answer to. In this sense, the principle of ‘fulfilment of demand’ (discussed earlier as one of the main principles of social assistance in Switzerland) loses influence. Morally, beneficiaries must prove that they will not remain ‘passive’. The objective existence of hardship is no longer sufficient to open legitimate access to social assistance.

Three main points of criticism have guided the gradual instauration of activation policies (Bonvin 2017). At the core of the ‘active turn’ is a globally formulated criticism that the welfare state has become too costly and that it is not sustainable for future generations. Several social changes have led to this financial pressure on the welfare state.

A first evolution in Europe beginning in the 1980s (the 1990s in Switzerland) is the growing portion of the working-age population in need of financial support by welfare programmes (Bonoli and Champion 2014). This first evolution is linked on the one hand to an increase in employment participation of women. More and more women are entering the labour market, which contributes to the viability of the welfare state thanks to the increase in contributors, but at the same time makes it more difficult to maintain full employment (Bonvin 2017:113). On the other hand, it is linked to macroeconomic policy changes, which consisted of surrendering so-called Keynesian economic principles. European states applied these macroeconomic principles during the thirty-year economic boom after the Second World War. They advocated a demand-sided fiscal and monetary policy, which means an increase in government spending during recessions to create jobs and fight unemployment. Rather than continuing to pursue this policy, welfare states started focusing on keeping a balanced budget household and concentrating more on the supply side, which means creating employable citizens. In short, the duty to create suitable job opportunities (suitable in quantity and quality) was left to market forces, while the states concentrated on creating

individual employability rather than employment. At the same time, due to the expansion of citizenship rights, achieving full employment in a modern market-based society was no longer restricted to men but included women as well. This increased the supply side of the equation and contributed to finance the welfare state. However, as mentioned above, this meant providing employment for the whole working population and not just for the male working population. Such evolutions provide some explanations with respect to the growing number of unemployed individuals and political pressure on welfare institutions.

The second criticism is ideological. Since the 1980s, critical voices argue that the welfare state itself is responsible for the phenomenon of unemployment. The underlying argument is that ‘generous’ welfare benefits create a ‘dependency trap’ because they lack ‘incentives’ to strive for economic independence (Bochsler 2020; Bonvin 2017).

The third fundamental criticism argues that welfare should no longer be designed via standardized benefits for all but rather focus on deploying more custom-made programmes that would impact the beneficiaries according to their individual life situations. According to Bonvin (2017:114), this characterizes the shift from the principle of ‘social rights for all’ to a welfare state based on a formalized and more relativized idea of support in need. How individuals would benefit from a concrete social policy depends on their individual life situation and their commitment to collaborate with social services and provide a ‘counter-performance’ for the reception of the support. This corresponds to the evolution of the SKOS/CSIAS norms, notably the 2005 reform, which introduced a bonus/malus regulation – rewarding good behaviour with an integration allowance and penalizing unwanted behaviour with sanctions (see Chapter 2).

Regarding the concrete configurations of activation policies in OECD countries, Bonvin (2017:115–16) distinguishes two distinct models of implementation. The first accentuates the need to re-commodify the welfare state and corresponds to a paternalistic interpretation of support. The ideological assumption behind it is that social benefits are fundamentally harmful for welfare beneficiaries because they represent a disincentive for individuals to change their life situations and get out of welfare. In this sense, paid work should always be preferred to social benefits – even the most precarious conditions of paid work. In addition, financial support should be minimal in order to provide the greatest possible incentive to leave welfare or to not apply for

social benefits in the first place. For Bonvin (2017:115), this model represents a “negative activation” because the main purpose is to scare beneficiaries off welfare. In Switzerland, we can find several policy examples clearly inspired by such an understanding. It is, for instance, a common practice since the mid-2000s in various social services in charge of implementing social assistance to hire ‘social detectives’ with a mandate of investigating specific cases of suspected fraud – even though the estimated quota for fraud within social assistance is negligible. However, the effect of such a practice conveys a message of distrust with the aim to push forward the above-mentioned ‘negative activation’.

The second model of activation policies lays the focus on the enhancement of the employability of the beneficiaries. The ultimate goal is enabling unemployed individuals to re-enter the labour market by providing them the necessary social and professional skills. The expenses of the welfare state are not interpreted as inherently harmful but rather as an investment in human capital, which will be profitable for the unemployed as well as for the economy and the sustainability of the welfare state itself. However, these expenses can no longer be passive, in the sense that unemployed individuals would get a financial support without specific commitment and obligations of counter-performances. There are many examples for programmes following this activation logic in Switzerland. Unemployment insurance, for instance, finances refresher language courses or courses on how to present oneself efficiently during job interviews. Disability insurance finances (under certain circumstances) training measures for individuals who have lost their ability to work in their usual occupations. In the field of social assistance, the willingness to accompany YAS for several years during their apprenticeships – in collaboration with other agencies like vocational training departments, for instance – is another example.

In general, one can observe that both models of European activation shape the design and implementation of Swiss social policies – though it is unclear which one is dominant. Taking a closer look at the policy field of social assistance, the introduction of the bonus/malus regulation and social detectives in the mid-2000s are examples of ‘negative activation’ discourses and their practical manifestations (see Chapter 2). At the same time, the cantons have introduced a panoply of integration programmes and measures pushing forward the ideology of enhancing the individual economic potential of certain categories of the unemployed – a characteristic of the second model of

activation. Focusing on the moral underpinnings of these activation models, I argue that they are intertwined and complement each other. The first one establishes the perspective that unemployed individuals are responsible for their own hardships and that they are not to be trusted because giving them too much welfare is considered harmful and furthermore, they should be 'scared' into employment. The second one builds on this 'negative activation' and uses the induced compliancy at the frontline in order to push a neo-liberal integration rhetoric based on individual responsibility and the necessity to capture social policies as an economic investment into human capital (see also Atzmüller and Knecht 2016; Tabin 2017).

3.2.2 Towards a 'social investment' state

Since the 1990s, debates concerning the welfare state and social rights are dominated by an economic narrative, placing an individual's responsibility at the centre of attention. This transformation process evolves around notions like the 'resurgent market' and an 'economic rationality'. According to Procacci (2001:57), this process diminishes or even rejects the moral principles of solidarity that used to guide welfare regimes as well as the normative foundations of citizenship rights. While poverty was traditionally considered a social concern that handicaps individual freedoms and therefore needs to be collectively addressed, it is now welfare itself that is considered as a handicap to individual agency.

Scholars have attributed this growing critique to the neo-liberal movement (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017; Wyss 2007). While during the three post-war decades, the 'Keynesian phase of the welfare state' acknowledged role was de-commodifying and minimizing the negative effects of the labour markets, the neo-liberal view reversed the role: The welfare state itself is seen as having negative effects on its beneficiaries by creating passive and dependent individuals. The belief is that the longer one receives welfare benefits, the more one becomes accustomed to them (referred to as 'dependency trap'). It is thus the welfare state who needs to justify its expenses and not the labour market who needs to justify the production of inequality (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017).

In response to this criticism, scholars as well as policymakers throughout Europe have formulated a new ideological strategy, which meets the neo-liberal criticism halfway by saying that one can no longer justify the expenses of the welfare state using social justice and egalitarian arguments. Rather, one should demonstrate the economic value of the welfare state in

terms of efficiency (Bonvin and Dahmen 2017; Morel et al. 2012). These policymakers and scholars argue that the Keynesian welfare model is outdated and that there is a need for a new, more active, welfare state. A variety of new terms emerged, like 'the enabling state', the 'active welfare state' or the 'social investment state'. They all describe the willingness to readjust the European welfare regimes with the aim of investing more in human capital in order to re-commodify the part of the population previously unable to enter the labour market in a sustainable way.

In retrospect, Bonvin and Dahmen (2017:10) argue that academic scholars played an important part in establishing this discursive shift during the legitimization crises of the welfare state during the 1990s – the most emblematic example being the publication *Why we need a new Welfare State* (Esping-Andersen 2002). At the same time, this new perspective also gained ground within EU institutions and left its mark with the adoption of the new European Employment Strategy in 1997 and the Lisbon Strategy in March 2000. The recommendations of the EU towards its member states build on two arguments. First, welfare policies need to be able to adapt to new social realities and challenges like the emergence of a globalized, service-orientated, and knowledge-based economy in desperate need of a qualified and flexible labour force. The old welfare model based on the 'passive' reception of welfare benefits is not considered financially viable for this purpose. Social and economic inclusion should be achieved by investing in human capital and thus enabling unemployed individuals to adapt to the enhanced requirements of the labour market. Second, in order to respond to the neo-liberal criticism, the productivity and efficiency of the welfare state in economic terms should be at the core of all considerations. The expenses of the welfare state are, thus, no longer evaluated based on values like producing an equal society, but rather by demonstrating its economic value in producing economically exploitable individuals who used to be 'passive' welfare claimants. In this vein, it is this 'return on investment' that will ensure the re-legitimization of the welfare state. This is why social investment policies put the accent on investment in human capital, education and vocational training as well as on social spending on early childhood (Esping-Andersen 2009; Ferrera 2009).

One of the main consequences of the 'social investment' alignment is that preventing structural causes of poverty – such as working poor situations or the health issues of the YAS – is no longer at the centre of public concerns. We can focus on the Swiss context to illustrate this argument. Scholars have

shown for Switzerland that public debates on social assistance and poverty focus mainly on what individuals should do in order to reduce their risk of experiencing hardships in the future – like completing a VET as a young person or investing in continued training during one’s working trajectory. They do not focus on the structural causes of these hardships, which could be the growing selectivity of the labour market, for instance. And individuals relying on social assistance and other social benefits are viewed as socio-economic liabilities for the society, who need to be ‘activated’ towards employment (Vorrink 2015).

Another consequence is that younger people have become the primary target group of social investment policies. Various authors throughout Europe illustrate this matter (Bilfulco et al. 2015; Lima 2012). Youth are used as a laboratory for such policies. Several reasons explain this phenomenon. First, the emergence of youth unemployment in the early 90s in Europe and in the early 2000s in Switzerland as a social problem and challenge – especially for urban regions – emerged simultaneously with the discursive shifts discussed. The idea of investing early on in human capital in order to create a skilled work force later on is by definition linked to age and thus to youth policies. Second, as these policies aim at transforming unskilled individuals into skilled ones, there is also an educational issue at stake. These policies convey the moral message that their subjects need to be responsible, learn from their mistakes, and adapt individually to the new requirements. The assumption here is that the younger a person is the more likely this adaption process can and should be triggered.

One of the most pertinent critiques regarding the social investment discourse is the fact that it weakens and relativizes the concept of social citizenship. Some authors, for instance (Paz-Fuchs 2008:63), argue that the concept of social citizenship has changed from status to contract and that this could lead to arbitrariness either generated by market mechanisms or through the emergence of “rulers who tell people what to do and when”. More importantly, the understanding of a need to support those people who are structurally excluded from vital resources and opportunities is turned upside down. These groups of people have to prove their worthiness regarding social benefits from now on. Hansen (2019:4) cites in this respect:

“The active turn is therefore also saturated with myriad questions that put both policies and people to the test. Are you active? Why

not? Could you be even more active? Are you at risk of becoming passive? How can we activate you?"

With the emergence of activation policies and neo-liberal narratives to support their implementation (Dubois 2014), the role of social policies in Europe as well as in Switzerland has shifted from their initial function of enhancing equality, solidarity, and social security towards the affirmation of dominant demarcations of the deserving and undeserving poor. Wacquant (2013:27) states, for instance, that the Keynesian state used to base its legitimacy on counteracting the unfortunate effects of recessive labour market cycles and protecting the most vulnerable part of the population in order to reduce the most acute social disparities. Following the alleged crisis of the welfare state, this understanding has been replaced with a conception of governance, which celebrates 'unlimited individual responsibility' and concurrence. Wacquant (2013) analyses this shift more deeply and in doing so provides insights for further research on the ambiguities of current social policies in European contexts. He argues that the political view of those groups of people without possessions or perspectives has shifted. While the initial idea of a welfare state regarded them as victims of systemic exclusion processes, they are now regarded as perpetrators of instability and insecurity. YAS, homeless people, drug addicts, and others have become the living embodiment of social insecurity threatening the prosperity of the society as a whole.

Instead of cushioning and acknowledging these new social insecurities and risks, the 'enabling state' gradually shifted towards a combination of increasing penalization on the one hand and a more economic and selective welfare regime on the other hand. In the case of the latter, beyond the cutting and conditioning of social benefits through activation policies, it is pertinent to notice a rhetorical transformation, which illustrates the gradual instauration of an 'economic' language within the social sphere. What used to be called public goods is nowadays referred to as social services. Like any other business transaction, Swiss cantonal social services refer to households experiencing hardships as 'clients' who are claiming certain social services. Like any other business transaction, the value of these services is evaluated along criteria like productivity and efficiency.

To sum up, welfare programmes have become negotiable claims in OECD countries. Freedom and autonomy of welfare claimants need to be constantly balanced against the concerns of other members of society – as they finance these programmes. Within such an interpretation of social rights,

suspicion, control, and constant re-negotiations of benefit levels and eligibility conditions are strengthened, which also means that the fiscal aspect of social policies gains in importance.

More recently, scholars have raised further critical questions in face of this development – both on a discursive and tangible level. They argue that such policies are either a discursive pretext for neo-liberal retrenchment reforms (Atzmüller and Knecht 2016; Tabin 2017), or that they would only benefit the middle class because they would have difficulty reaching the most disadvantaged part of the population (Bonoli, Pisoni, and Trein 2017; Cantillon 2011). Thus, the potential impact of a social investment strategy to fight poverty and contain the rise in inequality is considered inexistent or limited at best (Bonoli 2020).

3.2.3 *The effects of the ‘active turn’ and ‘social investment policies’*

Even though the activation and social investment shift are not the primary focus of the present publication, it is worth mentioning recent works on their effects on beneficiaries. These studies show how social assistance procedures change according to such discursive shifts and more importantly, they reveal the consequences for the beneficiaries. For the Swiss context, scholars showed how local social services apply new, more selective approaches, focusing on those beneficiaries with the most promising prospects and neglecting the more complex cases of youngsters experiencing hardships. This is called ‘cream-skimming’ practices within the critical social policy literature. Pisoni (2018b, 2018a) disclosed for instance how such ‘cream-skimming’ practices enable frontline workers to cope with strict assessment criteria on a daily basis. Furthermore, a recent longitudinal report investigating the countries of England and Scotland concluded that welfare conditionality is “largely ineffective in facilitating people’s entry into or progression within the paid labour market over time” (Dwyer 2018:4). Frontline workers at jobcentres and work integration programmes would be more preoccupied with ensuring compliance according to benefit claim conditions rather than supporting beneficiaries in finding jobs or training – creating a counterproductive ‘compliance culture’.

Kutzner (2009:46–52) provided further valuable frontline analysis with respect to moral values guiding the actions within Swiss social assistance. Notably, he demonstrates that there are different “human images” like the “paternalistic social assistance” and the “activating social assistance” inter-

secting and informing the actions of frontline workers. Both aim at helping beneficiaries to improve their life situation and be independent financially in the future.

The human image of the 'paternalistic social assistance' is problematic because frontline workers assume that the beneficiary is very or partially limited and does not have the authority over him- or herself to know what is best. The frontline worker does not consider the beneficiary as an equal. One could say that the frontline worker has an educational duty and the beneficiary is in the position of a pupil (Kutzner 2009:46). Therefore, the interaction between the two is defined by a dependence relationship. If the beneficiary accepts this position, he or she will adjust needs to the expectations of the frontline worker. However, it is hard to imagine an emancipatory movement from such a position towards independence, if there is no room for intrinsic motivation. If the beneficiary does not accept his or her inferior position, it might trigger more emancipatory movement, but the frontline worker cannot accept someone undermining his or her authority. Consequently, such a paternalistic setting might end up in endless authority battles, where sanctioning tools are used to remind the beneficiaries of their 'place' and of what behaviour is expected of them.

The second human image identified as potentially problematic is the 'activating social assistance', based on utilitarian moral values (Kutzner 2009:48). These moral values draw on economic assumptions and rationalities, dictating that human behaviour is solely guided by financial incentives. Following this logic, the government aid one receives must never be higher than the lowest wage from a paid job because it would give the wrong incentives to the beneficiaries: They would ultimately choose welfare over paid work and remain stuck within government dependency. This perspective on social assistance and social policies in general is problematic for two reasons. First, it ignores the fact that human behaviour and motivation are guided by more than external financial incentives (such as the intrinsic will to be part of society and to be recognized as a productive member, for instance). Secondly, such an alignment tends to focus on beneficiaries with realistic chances of enhancing their employability - in other words, the ones not yet economically 'too damaged'.

Such empirical studies tend to confirm critical contributions from various scholars on a theoretical level - affirming that there is a neo-liberal shift in European welfare policies, which contributes to ignore structural causes of

social exclusion and poverty (Atzmüller and Knecht 2016; Wyss 2007). Within such discourses, the structural risk of unemployment and poverty tends to be transferred to individuals, who are held accountable for their own poverty situations. The focus is laid on individuals and their deficiencies, like being ‘socially incompetent’, for instance, or ‘unreliable’, ‘unpunctual’, ‘not committed enough’, or ‘not eager to learn’, etc. (Vorrink 2015:135).

Furthermore, these studies show that social policies often contribute to strengthening a social problem rather than solving it. In this vein, vulnerabilities of young people cannot be understood only as a by-product of exclusionary market mechanisms but also as a direct consequence of social policies (Nada 2019). Again, if we consider the body of work from various researchers analysing these policies in different contexts, we must conclude that there is rarely any measurable effect in terms of enhancing labour market participation. Rather, these studies often conclude that the effects of such measures are limited or illusionary at best (Mäder and Nadai 2009) or that they are ineffective in advancing the capabilities of young people receiving social assistance (Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016).

To sum up, comparative research on social policies in various national contexts shows how poverty tends to be considered as an individual problem. Entire groups of welfare claimants tend to be blamed for their lack of economic autonomy by suspecting them of being illegitimate welfare users (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020). This trend is directly linked with the recent shifts of ‘activating’ the unemployed and with the social investment paradigm. The interest within the discipline of social science is directly linked to the “active turn” (Hansen 2019) of European social policies and their tendency to be more and more selective and explicitly or implicitly excluding subgroups of previously eligible welfare beneficiaries. It is the inherent exclusionary effect of activation policies that triggered scholarly interest. Rosenstein (2018, 2021) for instance cites different examples regarding this active turn in relation to the production of new forms of non-take-up. A considerable number of individuals and households who would be eligible for social assistance (and other means-tested benefits), for various reasons, do not ‘take up’ their claim. Schuwey and Knöpfel (2014:79) estimate the non-take up ratio of social assistance in Switzerland between thirty and fifty percent, which is a considerable number of individuals, taking into consideration that these benefits allow access to financial resources for basic needs. A more recent publication for the canton of Bern

estimates that one in four people do not receive any social assistance, even though they would be entitled to support from a mathematical point of view (Hümbelin 2016).

The effect most pertinent for the topic at hand is that activation policies have a discouraging effect on the most vulnerable part of unemployed individuals because they cannot manage the new ‘active’ behavioural expectations of those policies. Consequently, this population prefers to remain in a financially precarious situation rather than apply for certain social benefits because it would mean entering a stigmatizing and overstraining sphere of ‘active’ social policies.

3.3 Social policies as vectors of moral values

As Hansen (2019:4) puts it, “making people active is saturated with moral issues”. Investing in the right target group, where a return on investment can be expected presupposes a segmentation beforehand, which inevitably builds on ideas of deservingness. Not all citizens experiencing hardship have access to the same state support, nor are they put under pressure in the same way to find solutions as quickly as possible.

The design and implementation of social policies evolve around collectively shared beliefs of what a model citizen should be. This image is very much linked to the notion of productive work and to images of a model employee – but not only, as we will see. Welfare state researchers have pointed out the recent changes characterized by the ‘active turn’ and ‘social investment policies’ and I have outlined the moral fundament that this shift is based upon: the establishment of an individualized, formalized, and discursive interpretation of social rights. However, in order to have a suitable analytical framework for the specific context that interests me (the cantonal social policies addressed towards YAS), we need to delve deeper into the analysis of the concrete moral foundations of welfare. Which concrete moral values are being negotiated with the implementation of social policies and how do they correspond with one another?

Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:15) introduced a nuanced analytical perspective on welfare policy – in other words, on all governmental activities that deal with the phenomena of poverty. The starting point of their take on welfare is the understanding that social problems are discursively constructed. How social policies define and tackle the social problems at hand is always ideological. As Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:15) put it:

“[...]social problems serve the interest of those who define them. The distinction of the deserving and the undeserving poor is a moral issue; it affirms the values of the dominant society by stigmatizing the outcasts.”

In this vein, social policies are both tangible and symbolic. They are tangible because they concretely regulate which category of the poor are eligible for which social benefit and under what conditions. The activities of a social welfare agency are structured to “process, sustain, or change people who come under its jurisdiction” (Hasenfeld and Abbott 1992:2). These activities contribute to defining and affirming the dominant social order. Social policies must therefore be analysed with a broader frame of reference – in the case of Switzerland, a capitalist market economy. The sphere of employment and the intention of making sure that every adult member of society participates actively by entering the labour market are not the only ideological concerns. Other social issues and values like ethnicity/migration or family and gender are intricately interwoven with economic concerns. Therefore, Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:11) argue that social policies should be captured as a

“[...]set of symbols that try to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving poor in order to uphold such dominant values as the work ethics and family, gender, race and ethnic relations.”

Social policies have different social purposes. One such purpose is upholding dominant values. The very existence of ‘the poor’ or other subcategories of unemployed and social groups constructed as precarious questions the socioeconomic order in place. Thus, social policies have a symbolic function: they convey messages regarding the social conditions that are morally acceptable or unacceptable. Social policies regulate, for instance, the conditions for young adults to have their own household or not. They define at which point a young single mother will be counselled towards a labour market reintegration. In other words, they regulate the conditions for being excused from what is considered to be ‘productive work’.

Thus, although this theoretical lens provided by Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) has been applied as early as thirty years ago in the context of the US welfare regime, it can also be applied in the European and Swiss welfare contexts. Other more recent works have put forward a similar understanding of social policies. Dubois (2014:38), for instance, argues that “state acts are inseparably symbolic and material”. Governmental action via social policies

is inherently discursive and shapes the perception of subjects as well as their material conditions. Hansen (2019:5) emphasizes that “the governing of unemployment does a lot more than just respond to a functional problem”. He goes on to argue that (Hansen 2019:5):

“[...] ‘the active society’ is continuously fighting against unemployment and in doing so shapes the problem, [...] the lives and behaviour of those who fall either inside or outside the immense categories that are tied to this abstract and statistical artefact of unemployment.”

For the purpose of creating a suitable analytical framework, I follow to a great extent the works of Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:11–37). They discussed a defined set of dominant values linked to the designing and implementation of social policies. Their research suggests that there are four key categories that need specific attention when analysing configurations of welfare regimes and their moral underpinnings: work ethics, age, gender relations and territoriality/ethnicity. The following subsections discuss the relevance of those categories and their intersections. I will use examples from the Swiss welfare context to illustrate their importance.

3.3.1 Social policies and work ethics

Much of the moral ambiguity of providing welfare for citizens with no economic means to support themselves centres on the relationship between welfare and productive work (gainful activity). The term ‘work ethics’ in this context, is used to describe the moral underpinnings of all governmental activities that aim at strengthening this relationship. Since the activation shift in Switzerland, making sure that individuals remain ‘active’ has gained in importance. As I have shown earlier, current social policies focus more on creating individual employability rather than employment in Europe and in Switzerland. The moral assumption is that individuals are egocentric and antisocial. Consequently, there is a fear that providing too much welfare benefits would have the unwanted consequence of eroding motivation to work. One can distinguish two levels, when taking the ‘work ethics’ as an analytical point of reference.

The first one concerns the societal level and addresses the question of who is exempted from productive work altogether. The idea is to ensure that those who can work will not choose welfare (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:17).

Consequently, social policies need to be carefully designed ensuring that they will not provide too much comfort. Only individuals or groups of people with a legitimate excuse to explain their state of unproductivity are exempted from the obligation to work (like old age, for instance, or sickness). Activation policies, however, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, have reinforced the ambiguities regarding the moral legitimacy of all social benefits. Welfare entitlements have become more discursive and increasingly negotiable claims. The assumption is that an individual would rather stay in the 'social hammock' than participate in labour. Therefore, social policies have an inherent control function and are designed to remind everyone on a societal level that they need to participate in productive work.

The second level of concern affects all beneficiaries of social benefits. As the most important civic duty is participation in productive work at any cost, beneficiaries need to constantly prove that they are making all possible efforts to regain their economic independence as quickly as possible. For this purpose, the welfare state itself has adopted a more economic and individualized approach that honours unproductive welfare-citizens who accept their individual failure, cooperate within the workfare framework, and remain 'active'. Unproductive welfare-citizens, however, who are considered 'passive' and do not behave accordingly need be reminded of their deviancy. Their individual responsibility to work has to be reinforced. The range of activities, which are related to these reinforcement activities, is at the core of what the analytical term 'work ethics' translates to (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:17). Thus, the heart of welfare policy is deciding which categories of unproductive citizens will be excused from work and under what circumstances. Stigmatization in this sense becomes inherent to the design of social policies, as it is part of the moral construction: social policies need to make sure to remind the 'passive' and 'unproductive' individuals of their deviancy. According to this perspective, the poor themselves need to problematize their life situations in order to trigger behaviour changes.

The access and conditions for support are therefore more and more relative to the labour market status and the employability of the individual. Meeting the demands of households experiencing hardships can no longer be the sole preoccupation of social services. Their symbolic role is closely bound up with conveying the sense of what an active working citizen is supposed to do. Taking the 'active turn' of social policies as frame of reference (Hansen 2019), one can assume that the category of unproductive citizens

that are excused from work within the design and implementation of social policies has been gradually reduced in Switzerland. As the understanding of solidarity is more and more linked with the notion of individual responsibility, there is less legitimacy to accept that a major part of society remains 'inactive' – regardless of the true agency and prospects of the beneficiaries to find a sustainable employment.

For Switzerland, we can cite several examples. The latest reform of Disability Insurance (DI) in 2013 has literally put the issue of work ethics at the centre of its concern. The reform has discursively accentuated the fact that the aim of the insurance is first and foremost the rehabilitation of their beneficiaries – not granting material support and ensuring the livelihood of their households (BSV 2011). Symbolically, during the debate and in order to legitimate the bill, the political players created a narrative of 'passive' insurance beneficiaries, for whom there is an economic potential that can be squeezed with the right tools (Rosenstein 2018). In doing so, they suggested implicitly that there are some beneficiaries of invalidity insurance – the 'undeserving invalids' – who are not applying themselves enough regarding their economic independency and thus are benefiting illegitimately from the solidarity of productive citizens. Additionally, this particular insurance was under financial pressure. As a consequence, the access conditions have been gradually restricted (especially for young adults) and the reform has discursively been accompanied by the slogan 'rehabilitation before pension', making it clear that the welfare state will no longer allow 'passive' beneficiaries to benefit long-term from this insurance (Rosenstein 2021). The consequence is an increase in selectivity and more standardized approaches. These reforms are in several cases accompanied by a discourse of austerity – obscuring thereby the underlying moral construction that drives these reforms. The economic discourse becomes naturalized and politicians and bureaucrats, in this vein, argue that 'we' as a society can no longer afford such expenses and that 'we' need to cut back.

Similar evolutions can be observed within cantonal social assistance regimes. The implementers of social policies have to be very careful regarding which groups they support, how much help they grant and under what circumstances. The reinforcement of the work ethics of social assistance beneficiaries is one of the main driving ideals of current social policies in Switzerland and this perspective will be at the centre of the empirical analysis (see Chapters 5 and 6).

3.3.2 *Social policies and gender relations*

The reinforcement of work ethics is not the only guiding moral value of social policies. Social policies tend to produce and affirm specific representations of gender relations as well. Scholars have argued that the welfare state reinforces all dominant exploitation mechanisms in place within a society and therefore social policies are functional not only for the capitalist market system but also for patriarchal structures (Abramovitz 2017; Wilson 1977). It has been established that the notion of ‘social citizenship’ is crucial when analysing policy developments. However, it is important to understand that this representation of a model work-citizen or model employee is not genderless. Orloff (2010:252) cites that gender:

“[...] is not an attribute of individuals but a social relationship historically varying, and encompassing elements of labour, power, emotion and language; it crosses individual subjectivities, institutions, culture, and language.”

Comparative welfare state research and feminist studies have demonstrated that social policies affect and alter women’s material livelihood and shape gender relationships as a whole (Fraser 1987; Hernes 1988; Orloff 1993). Social policies evolved around the male model employee embedded in a family ideal of a male breadwinner household. Indeed, without the activities of care workers, there is no economy that can subsist in any form, since care work lays the groundwork for it. Care work englobes many different activities like childcare, support and caregiving work for elderly, or handicapped people in daily life. In Switzerland, care work remains, for the most part, unpaid or underpaid and it is not sufficiently recognized by the current system of social security. As women overwhelmingly occupy this role, they present enhanced vulnerabilities regarding poverty compared to men. One fourth of all Swiss single-parent households (99 percent of them are mothers with young children) receive social assistance benefits (Stutz and Knupfer 2012).

In Switzerland, women are both considered as the main caregiver and a relatively new exploitable labour force. In the last twenty years, female employment participation has largely increased. Nowadays, the participation rate of women in the labour market in Switzerland is over 90 percent (FSO 2021). However, women remain to a large part in part-time employment, which explains their lower social security coverages compared to men. Although there are more and more varieties of family households with

different arrangements regarding labour divisions, childcare as well as other forms of care work remains predominantly a female task. Furthermore, it is a task which is mostly unpaid or unacknowledged within the design of social policies in Switzerland. As Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:22) put it:

“Welfare policy is family policy because it defines what is a ‘deviant family’, sanctions inappropriate adult gender and work roles, penalizes undesirable sexual relations, and regulates the family’s responsibilities to its children. By constructing welfare recipients as deviant families, the state symbolically institutionalizes the image of a ‘good’ family to the nonpoor and poor alike.”

There is an obvious intersection between the dominant values of ‘gender relations’ and ‘work ethics’. They are intertwined and create a specifically gendered discourse regarding the model female employee. This can be illustrated by analysing the evolution of the SKOS/CSIAS norms. Until 2017, childcare responsibilities exempted single parents (usually mothers) from forced participation in any integration measures or other behavioural constraints – at least until the last child turned three years of age. This threshold has been recently reduced to one year of age. Consequently, these single parents are nowadays increasingly taken into consideration as future economic capital, like any other welfare beneficiary. The normative and moral responsibility for childcare still lies on the shoulders of the mother, however, as does the individual responsibility to be economically independent and remain available for skilled work force. This circumstance creates a structural disadvantage and vulnerability for women in general. Both presuppositions – that productive work is synonymous with employment (not childcare) and that individual self-sufficiency is necessary to lead an independent, adult life – make specific life situations rhetorically invisible and thus vulnerable (Kittay et al. 2002).

3.3.3 Social policies and ethnicity

As Lessenich (2012:105) discussed, the welfare state and its jurisdiction is closely linked to state borders and a cultural, homogenized representation of the ‘nation’. The figure of a model, employable citizen that the Swiss welfare state uses to orient its policies is not just male with impeccable work ethics but also incorporates a certain homogenized representation of Swiss nationality. Thus, welfare states are territorial constructs, and their policies and benefits are primarily designed for those affiliated with the nation state.

Not every individual residing in Switzerland has the same access to social rights. Rather, access to and levels of benefits depend on one's residency status. Thus, social policies participate in structuring which type of migrant individuals are welcomed or unwelcomed. There is a strong nexus between social and migration policies. Migrant individuals, especially poor migrants, are viewed with suspicion since their claims to the state are seen as fraudulent. Social policies question the "bordered reality of nation states that establish belonging along the lines of citizenship" (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020:369–370). Access to a full national citizenship status is conditional and confers moral superiority upon achievement. Governments define specific procedures that migrant individuals must follow in order to gain access to citizenship and especially to social rights. Thus, this affiliation procedure is conditioned upon an individual feeling of belonging to the community. This necessitates a loyalty towards a shared culture (Lessenich 2012:104). The demand for a loyalty to a shared culture explains the systemic doubts about the trustworthiness of migrants and ethnic minorities when it comes to social security. They have to demonstrate their loyalty to the welcoming nation, before being granted (partial) access to the status of citizen including the same social rights as Swiss nationals. The issue of selectiveness and/or being under constant scrutiny within welfare regimes is particularly relevant for individuals with a migration background and a dual nationality (Swiss and foreign). Youngsters with dual nationalities who came to Switzerland during adolescence are cited as a specific social category with a "high dependency risk" regarding social assistance (Schmidlin et al. 2018:50). This is because they must catch up with the expectations of their local schools and because they oftentimes present lower language competencies than their Swiss counterparts without migration background. Consequently, their chances of finding an apprenticeship are also lower. The data of the Federal statistical office confirms this as both groups, youngster with dual nationalities born abroad, and youngsters without Swiss nationality born in Switzerland present lower upper secondary achievements rates compared to Swiss nationals (see Table 16, Chapter 2.5.3)

In recent years, scholars have found a tightening of the nexus between migration and social policies in Europe and in Switzerland. They have uncovered what they call a "restrictive turn" regarding migration policies (Barker 2017; De Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2016; Kalir and Schendel 2017). These authors describe a paradigm shift that consists of increasing border controls and deportations of those deemed unwelcome. Unemployed migrants either

live with a lower subsistence level or take up social assistance under threat of losing their residency permit entirely. Simultaneously, these practices are symbolic because they convey the message to the whole society regarding eligibility and social rights. They affirm the dominance of those who have the power to define the hierarchy of citizenship status and affiliation.

The way in which the discursive justification patterns of these moral values on migrant individuals evolve, varies from welfare state to welfare state. Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:26–27) and others (Quadagno 1990; Wacquant 2013) affirm that the USA has historically always been organized around race and gender. They state that

“[a]s part of the dominant social and economic order, welfare policy has served the societal values of racial hostilities, discrimination, subordination and exclusion.”

In the US context, African American individuals and households were overwhelmingly excluded from welfare because they were deemed undeserving. Interestingly, the authors describe that since the 1960s, the welfare state has opened its arms especially for African American single mothers (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991:27). They describe these welfare programmes as highly ambiguous. On the one hand, the social workfare programmes (Aid to Families with Dependent Children or AFDC¹⁴) were vital for these young mothers to survive in ghetto neighbourhoods. On the other hand, they were stigmatized as the new long-term undeserving prototype of a welfare recipient thereby creating a new racially biased underclass. Indeed, the prospects for economic independence for these households remained dim. However, as Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:27) state, these policies serve another purpose:

“The myth will be that we are providing work and training opportunities; the ceremony will be the few who gain entry and succeed. But the vast majority of young African American mothers, because they will remain on welfare, will continue to be morally degraded.”

In other words, the strategic aim of welfare programmes for young African American mothers in the 1960s focused more on control, management, and stigmatization than on tangible material support and enhance-

14 The AFDC programme ran from 1935 to 1996 and was administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. It provided financial assistance to children whose families had low or no income.

ment of agency of their beneficiaries. In Switzerland, the social assistance regime is demarcated according to residency permit and nationality. There are two separate cantonal social assistance regimes for households experiencing hardships. The first regime, termed public social assistance, regulates regular access for individuals with a Swiss passport and for migrants with an acknowledged residence permission. Regarding asylum seekers, these permits are issued after a legal residence of five to seven years – depending on the concrete permit status (SKOS/CSIAS 2019). The second regime is social assistance for asylum seekers and refugees, which provides a minimal subsistence level only for this target group. However, the benefits are much lower, and the regime is in general more constraining. This second regime is designed in a manner to create second- or third-class citizens based on the understanding that there is no need to invest in a group of people who have not yet proven their socio-economic value to the welcoming society. Research shows (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Kalir and Schendel 2017) that these migration regimes, by linking constraining and marginalized social policies with their status, install destitution practices because their role is to deter other migrants of following their paths.

3.3.4 Social policies and age

Finally, yet importantly, social policies affirm specific values with regard to the age of their beneficiaries. Various scholars (Becquet 2012; Becquet et al. 2012; Perriard 2017; Tabin and Perriard 2014) have demonstrated that the way social policies are constructed and implemented is shaped by collectively shared ideations of what specific age groups are supposed to be doing in order to enter the adult world. Age, in this vein, must be understood as a relative social construct, since expectations towards young people are contextual and evolve over time. These ideations are linked with other values like the work ethics, gender relations, or ethnicity. Modern, contemporary societies define by law, for instance, the compulsory schooling age of children. In doing so, societies normatively determine a specific life period during childhood, where children are supposed to achieve a certain set of skills that prepare them for the transition to adulthood. Adulthood itself represents the period of autonomy and self-sufficiency – nowadays achieved through individual economic independency, usually via employment and paid work. Age is relational because the different statuses and transitions over the life span entail different positions, entitlements, and agencies and most importantly, only exist in

relation to others. The institutionalized status of old age as a social category, for instance, only makes sense in relation to other younger categories of individuals. Young adults, for their part, are set apart from children, but also from the independent grown adult. Furthermore, different power relations shape and legitimize the dynamics of the relationship between different age groups. For instance, as full citizenship evolves around the age phase of adulthood, it is legitimate that the figure of the adult has a certain moral authority over younger counterparts (Chevalier 2018:2–9).

The welfare state has an important role to play in normatively regulating life phases, especially the youth phase. Various institutions of the welfare state articulate and implement implicit and/or explicit youth policies (Dahmen et al. 2017:148–149). Explicit youth policies can be described as all the policies that are formulated in order to have an intentional impact on young people – for example, creating a youth department or ministry driven by an official agenda with respect to this target group. Implicit policies, by contrast, are not labelled as such but nonetheless affect the life situations of young people – this includes the labour market, family, crime prevention, health, housing, education, welfare policies, etc. In Switzerland, research shows that these policies are predominantly implicit. Young people are addressed implicitly by the implementation of the labour market and educational policies at the cantonal and municipal level. These policies are not articulated and implemented in order to enhance the participation or the citizenship status of the young people. They are driven by an economic narrative (e.g., the creation of a skilled workforce for the economy or the reduction of young people who lack skills and qualifications) to reduce potential future welfare state expenses (Dahmen et al. 2017:149).

Tabin and Perriard (2016) conducted a more in-depth analysis into the current socio-political discourse regarding age in Switzerland by contrasting the discourses addressed at different age groups including young adults aged between eighteen and twenty-five in the canton of Vaud. Regarding the category of young adults receiving social assistance, they argue that these young people are problematized by frontline workers because of their lack of realistic future integration plans. From this viewpoint, the canton of Vaud is eager to create and implement a structure to support and constrain these young people individually in finding a realistic vocational plan. According to the authors, this course of action is problematic for two reasons. First, these young adults are artificially viewed as dependent and thus not yet part of

the 'autonomous' sphere of adulthood. Second, these policies individualize the structural problem of poverty and transfer blame and responsibility for failed life course transitions onto the young people. In doing so, these policies obscure and reproduce the discriminatory effects of the educational and labour market system.

This research project exemplifies the importance of understanding 'age' as a social construct. It shows in particular that transitions from one age phase to another (here, from youth to adulthood) are interspersed with moral expectations regarding the specific skills and behaviour an individual has to present in order to be recognized as having successfully achieved the next step. During such transitions, social policies act both as pacifying and as controlling at the same time.

3.4 The analytical lenses of 'work ethics' and 'age'

The previous chapter discussed four moral values (work ethics, gender relations, ethnicity, age), which are continuously negotiated through the design and implementation of social policies. The scientific literature on current discursive shifts like the 'active turn' and the 'social investment' ideology has confirmed that welfare deservingness in Europe and Switzerland has been reshaped (Rosenstein 2021:242). One aspect that has gained in importance is the close relationship between welfare and paid work. It is normatively more and more difficult to find socially accepted exemptions from paid work (gainful employment) and to be considered as a deserving welfare beneficiary at the same time. Furthermore, scholars have shown how the role of the new 'enabling' or 'active' state is to promote individual employability and not employment. Therefore, I argue that it is of great importance to look into all governmental activities aiming at reinforcing the work ethics of welfare beneficiaries and how these activities are discursively legitimized. I argue that by looking through the lens of 'work ethics' in combination with 'age' one gains not only knowledge regarding how welfare policies shape the moral understanding of 'productive work' but also indirectly one can see certain gendered understanding of paid work (and unpaid work). Examples have been discussed for the US and the Swiss welfare context, where welfare dependency figures vary greatly across moral imageries of gender roles. The same is true concerning migration and ethnicity: individuals with a migration background considered valuable in an economic sense are less problematized than the ones experiencing economic hardship and without vocational train-

ing. The former tend to be considered necessary for achieving the goal of full employment, whereas the latter subgroup tends to be regarded as unwanted, costly welfare claimants who could potentially threaten the social order.

By designing and implementing social policies, governmental units define and structure which groups of people are stigmatized as 'dependent' and which ones are considered 'autonomous' or at least 'on the right track'. Stigmatization, in this perspective, cannot be understood as an unfortunate by-product of social policies. Rather, labelling these negative figures of 'welfare dependency' becomes a purpose in itself and an inherent part of welfare regimes, or as Offer and Pinker (2017:62) state:

"It is self-evident that citizens are sometimes subjected to humiliation in the supposedly therapeutic context of social services. This paradox arises because the values of the economic market are always reflected in social welfare systems. The extent to which this occurs in a given society influences the degree to which welfare systems are required to impose sanctions upon users. In so far as social services also operate as agents of social control they combine both therapeutic and stigmatising functions."

Stigmatization serves two purposes. Firstly, stigmatizing 'dependent' welfare claimants affirms the dominant values of a social order. Social policies construct and define social problems and in doing so, they make a distinction on moral grounds to separate worthy beneficiaries from unworthy ones. The governmental activities of the welfare state are directly linked to the phenomenon of unemployment - "the labour market's other" (Hansen 2019:5). Such activities also impact the rest of the population as they send signals regarding who is expected to work and how much. Secondly, beyond its symbolic effect, a given social policy has a tangible purpose of orientating its beneficiaries towards a desirable trajectory. This serves as a form of social control and stabilization of the framework. In this vein, the role of social policies is to deter its subjects from staying on unwanted trajectories and to encourage them to act upon their behaviour according to what is considered economically valuable.

Using the analytical lens of the reinforcement of 'work ethics' and 'age', the purpose of the present publication is to delve deeper into the discourses of this social policy paradox: Providing real support in response to the vulnerabilities of YAS and stigmatizing them at the same time for remaining on a deemed deviant life trajectory.

3.5 Research questions

The research interest is on a discursive level. It focuses mainly on two aspects. The first one is understanding how cantonal social policies grasp, circumscribe, and define ‘the social problem’ of the YAS. The second one is the identification of discursive patterns and narratives justifying the current strategic take on YAS (what I call the ‘socio-political alignment’) and how it has evolved over time. I chose the term ‘alignment’ because there are multiple ways to interpret the ‘social problem’ of the YAS and thus multiple narratives governmental actors can align with.

As has been established, social policies convey a great deal of moral judgments. It seems that within the discussed shift towards more ‘activation’, the moral relationship between work and welfare has gained in importance and is used to introduce a more selective and discursive design of welfare. Social policies rhetorically construct ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ categories of welfare beneficiaries according to their employability. In doing so, they structure the expected trajectory of their subjects and induce a certain ‘normality’ and ‘deviancy’ through the advocacy of model behaviours. Social policies affect their targets and the professional in charge of implementation as well. The targets (or beneficiaries) are confronted with various expectations of frontline workers and have to manoeuvre within a certain welfare regime according to their interests and agencies. The various institutions and their professionals reformulate and position themselves within a given legal framework and ongoing moral discourse on the target groups. Both perspectives will be taken into account in the empirical part of this research (see chapter 5 and 6).

The following subsection takes the state of research and the analytical focus of the work ethics as a starting point and formulates four hypotheses (which serve as research questions) for the policy field of Swiss social assistance with a specific focus on the YAS. These hypotheses guide the data analysis (Chapters 5 and 6). The aim will be to discuss these hypotheses (1 to 4) and investigate their overall presence within the collected data in both cantons.

H1: The current socio-political alignment pushes an intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic discourse with the goal of transforming the YAS into a future skilled work force.

Based on the literature review, there is an ongoing ideological shift towards a neo-liberal governing of the social phenomena of poverty in gen-

eral. This shift reintroduces and renegotiates the old-age question of who deserves what kind of support in case of proven need. The emergence of activation policies and social investment strategies has strengthened the belief that only 'active' measures will create a socioeconomic benefit to both the unemployed and the rest of the 'productive' part of the society. Consequently, governmental units tend to multiply their activities towards a reinforcement of the work ethics of welfare claimants. Within such a regime, narratives of deservingness according to the level of 'employability' of welfare claimants gain in importance. Furthermore, in the case of YAS, one can assume that this neo-liberal shift should intertwine with a paternalistic ideology (Kutzner 2009). The literature suggests that young people are a particularly important target group of such 'active' measures because of their future economic potential and the long-term costs of staying in welfare. Youngsters are considered a laboratory for activation policies (Lima 2012). As they have not yet contributed to 'productive' society and have previously failed to enter the VET system and the labour market in a sustainable way, their 'welfare dependency' is particularly unwanted. The term 'paternalistic' refers to the state of the YAS as not yet entirely adult and thus – in a moral sense – not yet able to be autonomously in charge of his or her own life. YAS are not yet part of the productive work force of the economy. They receive social assistance and are thus considered to be a 'burden.' It is expected that the neo-liberal and paternalistic perspectives intertwine and thus one can also expect that they complement each other. Within a neo-liberal framework, the responsibility of altering this state is transferred to the individuals. The welfare state can provide support – however, individuals (in this case the YAS) are ultimately responsible for adapting their behaviours and altering their trajectory. Within a paternalistic framework, YAS are put in the position of a pupil who has not yet learned from his or her mistakes. He or she is thus not able to judge what is good for him- or herself. Therefore, one can expect that, firstly, the current discourse addressed towards YAS should entail moral judgments regarding the limited capacities of YAS to know what is best for themselves. And secondly, the discourse should reveal a certain degree of individual blaming – since YAS should be more responsible in choosing the 'right' path towards adulthood. Finally, an economic discourse is expected, which legitimizes the various activities of governmental units as necessary investment in order to create the much-needed future skilled work force.

H2: The current socio-political alignment individualizes vulnerable trajectories of the YAS.

This second hypotheses addresses the discursive consequences of the first hypothesis more deeply. If it is true that discourses regarding individual responsibility accompany the current shifts towards activation and social investment, one can expect that the vulnerable trajectories of YAS will be considered in general as individual problems in need of tailor-made solutions for each individual case of YAS. Consequently, the need for various instruments and procedures should be justified with considerations regarding the individual lack of work ethics of YAS for example – thus omitting structural causes of exclusion. In this vein, getting out of poverty will be interpreted as the responsibility of the beneficiary, while the structural cause of hardships on a societal level is not considered relevant. We can thus expect that implementers within cantonal welfare administrations will emphasize that YAS themselves need to put in the work and adjust their behaviour to achieve what is required for becoming employable and thus closer to a ‘model’ adult citizen. The underlying moral construction of the ‘work ethics’ is that those who can work should not choose welfare. In order do that, the conditions of welfare must be less desirable than the lowest-paid work. This should be particularly true for the category of the YAS as they are young and have not yet contributed to the productive system. It should be even less legitimate for young people to have access to welfare programmes than older generations who may already have contributed before needing welfare support later in life. One should find fewer arguments regarding social justice and structural causes of hardships and/or disadvantages as a moral legitimization strategy within the policy discourse addressed to YAS. Furthermore, as the literature suggests that welfare regimes have become more selective and formalized, we can expect that there should be corresponding narratives justifying support for certain subgroups of YAS who present the ‘right’ individual features and present compliant behaviours (e.g., motivation and cooperation). Arguments pushing for a separation of deserving compared to less deserving YAS should be present within the data because, according to the discussed literature, young beneficiaries need to prove their eligibility to the active measures before benefitting from regular material support.

H3: The current socio-political alignment creates structural vulnerabilities for YAS, due to the hierarchization of support, which depends on their 'employability.'

As has been established, one of the most pertinent moral values when it comes to understanding the discursive construction of social policies is the obligation to participate in productive work and display the right work ethics (the set of work-related skills and attitudes). In this perspective, the state actors' role is to provide material support and guidance in this endeavour of achieving the highest economic potential. However, the support should be accompanied by an educational message, as there were failures in the past resulting in misleading trajectories. These messages are symbolic and act as a warning not to make the same mistakes again. Such a regime creates a matrix of different vulnerable positions according to the individual features and past problems YAS have accumulated. As already mentioned, this does not mean that other moral issues like gender or migration backgrounds do not matter or that I will ignore them during the analysis. They are indirectly present as part of the third hypothesis – as I assume that the renewed emphasis on the work ethics will contribute to reinforce structural disadvantages like being a young mother or having a migration background.

This third hypothesis addresses the consequences of this regime, which should hierarchize and position the YAS according to their individual degree of 'employability'. If it is true that there is a predominance of discourses reinforcing the 'work ethics' of the YAS above all else, then one can expect that other issues will not be as present and thus burden the YAS even more. Such a perspective undermines the initial ideological background of social policies, which builds on the acknowledgment and cushioning of structural hazards like accidents, disability, illness or unemployment and their potential threat to the society in creating instability and social exclusion. Furthermore, the discussed shift towards a more individualized and formalized welfare regime in general supports this argument. Welfare regimes (especially within Swiss cantons) have put a renewed accent on individual responsibility and contracts, where welfare claimants need to prove their worth within a competitive market-like context. The combination of this shift with the predominance of the 'work ethics' should thus contribute to invisibilize and reproduce structural causes of vulnerability and disadvantages in relation to gender (e.g., childcare obligations), age (e.g., 'not mature enough'), and migration background (e.g., threat of losing a residency permit). One can therefore expect

that these disadvantages will be reproduced and constructed as undesired individual features YAS have to deal with.

H4: The current socio-political alignment reduces social assistance to an ambivalent financial support for YAS.

According to the subsidiarity principle within Swiss social assistance, everyone is obliged to do everything possible to alleviate his or her own hardship. This includes participating in the resource analysis of the frontline worker and disclosing all the necessary personal and administrative information. In Switzerland, social services can also completely stop financial support in certain cases. From a legal point of view, this is only possible if social services can prove that the person or household experiencing hardship can support himself or herself in another way yet still actively chooses not to pursue this specific opportunity. It seems that based on this principle, the cantonal social assistance regimes are thus organized around the belief that it should remain a temporary benefit and that it is ultimately the beneficiary's responsibility to engage in the modes of participation that society offers him or her, which means, for the most part, a labour market integration. The moral fundament of this institutional organization and legislation is that both social services and beneficiaries must be held accountable to the rest of the 'autonomous' and 'hard-working' community.

At the same time, social investment strategies have contributed to a more selective approach, which allowed long-term financial support and coaching of some young unemployed individuals. However, following the evidence from recent research in this matter, cream-skimming practices contribute to exclude those young unemployed individuals who present undesired features and have multiple problems. Furthermore, social services need to make sure that they put their available resources to use in an expedient and economically efficient way. It can be expected that such an implementation will be discursively accompanied by narratives of how taxpayers' money should be well-spent and how it should not create disincentives or costly welfare dependencies in the case of YAS with multiple problems.

Consequently, this points out a particularly ambivalent discursive context for YAS. YAS as a subgroup of young adults receiving social assistance should have to deal with a particularly ambivalent financial support of the social services in charge because they represent all unwanted socioeconomic features and thus might be the embodiment of a negative welfare dependency figure.

Analysing the 'rituals of truth'

By analysing and discussing these four hypotheses, I intend to contribute to a better understanding of the current discursive constructions and moral underpinnings in the field of social assistance for the YAS target group. The analysis can shed light on the construction of YAS as a 'social problem' and on the current discursive debate of how to deal 'properly' with this social challenge.

The reviewed literature suggests that if one considers specific categories of the 'poor' like YAS, one should take into consideration moral values and issues like work ethics, age, gender relations and migration background because they affect the deservingness framing and contribute and delimitate concrete procedures in the practice. However, regarding YAS, the current state of research does not explain sufficiently to what extent these various moral values are used as justification for past and current policy orientation within cantons. I choose to focus on the first two, work ethics in relation to age, because the current programmatic shift within the Swiss welfare state points to a renewed emphasis on economic logic like the need to use available resources (social assistance benefits, for instance) in a more efficient manner.

We have discussed tangible examples of how these moral values are interwoven and produce "rituals of truth" (Allen 1991:431) and thereby influence current discourses on welfare deservingness. This chapter has also demonstrated how the shift from the traditional Keynesian welfare state to the 'workfare' or 'enabling' state by the end of the 20th century with its discursive interpretation of social rights as negotiable claims, has induced the emergence of a neo-liberal ideology, which is based on assumptions like individual responsibility, market competition, and an egocentric 'human image'.

According to the reviewed literature, the result of this process is a more individualized, formalized, and discursive interpretation of welfare. I will delve into the discourses of two cantons in order to show to what extent such interpretations of welfare manifest itself for the target group of the YAS. During the evaluation of the collected data and the discussion of the research questions, the perspective of the 'work ethics' is at the forefront. If we consider the critical literature at hand and the findings regarding the European welfare state – especially for the case of Switzerland – it seems one of the most prominent moral values guiding current reforms and discourses.

The presented hypotheses will be analysed on two levels (meso and micro) and in this sense take into consideration that the nexus between vul-

nerability and social policy should be understood as a multi-level process (see Chapter 4). The first level is meso because I analyse discourses within cantonal welfare organizations and integration programmes. Social policies are constructed via ongoing political discourses, where various actors (media, parliaments, governmental administration, NGOs, and activist organizations) in different power positions influence, construct, and de-construct definitions of 'the poor' and subgroups of 'the poor'. The second level is micro. Welfare beneficiaries experience vulnerability and hardships and have to manoeuvre within welfare regimes. Official discourses on social policies are very powerful. However, they do not prevent individual differences in how social policies are perceived and used by individuals. As the current state of research has already conducted in-depth investigations on the ambiguous effects of social policies on vulnerable youth (see, for instance, Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016), I will use the micro-perspective of the YAS to have a critical reflexion on the narratives found on the meso level.

4 Methodological approach

The previous chapter laid out the theoretical understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Hansen 2019). The way social policies are discursively constructed and continuously reformed says a great deal about human representations of social justice as well as mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion. Their construction discloses judgments of what is considered productive and unproductive work, including ideas of gender relations, ethnicity/territoriality or age. Furthermore, these moral values shift – one of the most pertinent shifts being the one towards reinforcing the work ethics of individual welfare claimants to produce the much-needed skilled work force. In order to do that, values like ‘individual responsibility’ or ‘adaptability’ but also ‘compliance’ gain in importance.

Based on the prior literature review and the theoretical perspectives that I draw upon to capture social policies as moral values as well as the way they focus on ‘work ethics’, four hypotheses have been formulated to guide the data analysis. This chapter builds on the previous theoretical chapter and presents the methodological approach – detailing the data collection and evaluation techniques that guide my analysis.

Two case studies have been conducted within the cantons Basel-City and Geneva during 2017 and 2018. The research focuses on a three-layered analysis of discourses of ‘implementers’ (administrational experts, heads of cantonal offices and external integration programmes, the providers of integration), the retrospection of YAS, and an in-depth examination of cantonal policy documents throughout the past two decades. While policy-makers are important to analyse because interviews can show the reasons for the creation of a policy, why they should affect their target groups and disclose hidden agendas, frontline implementers have the final say and thus often discretion (Brodkin 2011; Lipsky 2010). The perspective of bureaucrats (frontline or higher officials) allows an in-depth understanding on how policies are re-formulated and implemented. The lived experience of YAS provides insight on the impact of the implemented policy, how the youngsters deal with them and how they reflect them rhetorically. Finally, the cantonal policy documents allow to retrace the strategic evolution of the policy within a given context and provides first indications regarding the discursive framing of a policy.

A set of qualitative data collection instruments (document analysis, expert- and problem-centred interviews) allows for a multi-level understand-

ing of policies and their implementation processes. The evaluation of the data is based on an in-depth coding procedure inspired by grounded theory principles (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Both cantons have undergone structural changes within their administrations in recent years and have introduced new agencies and strategies regarding the YAS. These adjustment activities provide the necessary material to investigate the underlying narratives towards the phenomenon of youth unemployment, and more specifically, the YAS.

This methodological chapter is structured as follows. First, I will lay out my understanding of governmental action, discuss the importance of ‘expert knowledge’, and conceptually link it with the previously detailed understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values. Next, research on vulnerability and social policies should be understood as a multi-level process that needs to acknowledge the multitude of perspectives, including those enduring the consequences of government policies. Discourses on who should get what, when, and why take place on different levels (macro, meso, and micro). I will thus specify the concrete level of discourse I have addressed and analysed. This will lay the groundwork for the description of the data collection and evaluation techniques. At this point, I will address the data sample and give an overview of all the encountered interview partners (implementers and YAS) and organizations I dealt with (social assistance, employment offices and vocational training departments). Subsequently, the coding procedures used for the analysis of the collected data will be outlined. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a reflective note on field access, potential biases, and limitations – including a note on the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1 How to assess governmental action

There are many ways to conceptualize governance or governmental action. One contribution in relation to this matter that has received a lot of scholarly attention (see for instance, Nielsen and Rapport 2017) over the past decades, is the work of Rose and Miller (1992) on governmental studies. According to them (Rose and Miller 1992:175), governments can be captured as a

“[...] historically constituted matrix within which are articulated all those dreams, schemes, strategies and manoeuvres of authorities that seek to shape the beliefs and conduct of others in desired directions by acting upon their will, their circumstances or their environment.”

Indeed, governmental action relies on the power to modify perceptions of individuals or groups of citizens and noncitizens via various forms of intervention or as Allen (1991:431) puts it:

“It is the power to modify the way a subject symbolizes what it experiences subjectively as options, occasions for choice, liberties anticipated, repudiated, actually taken, or denied.”

In this vein, ‘governments’ must be understood as a diffuse network of actors. The state is not and has never been a unified actor (Bevir and Rhodes 2010). One can even observe a continuous willingness to increase the number of stakeholders that take over governmental tasks due to the state outsourcing responsibilities (Borrelli and Bochsler 2020).

According to the works of Rose and Miller (1992, 2010), governmental action must be analysed in two terms. The first analytical perspectives are the political rationalities of the involved actors in a specific policy field, which determine the schemes and strategies to address a defined “problematic of government”. Governmental action is a problematization activity. Politicians as well as civil servants working in governmental administration for instance measure the real state of the current social order against their moral ideals and find it wanting. Thus, the reconstruction of political rationalities englobes discourse analysis because the way governmental action is formulated in a certain field reveals the justification patterns for a certain problematization of a social phenomenon. “Political discourse is a domain for the formulation and justification of idealized schemata for representing reality, analysing it and rectifying it.”(Rose and Miller 1992:178). YAS, for instance, come under the pressure of cantonal jurisdictions because they have fallen out of the pre-defined educational life course. They become a social problem due to their exclusion from what is normatively considered the right track for socio-economic participation. The welfare state itself relies on the future labour market participation of YAS (and other young adults) to sustain the system financially. The second analytical perspectives when dealing with governmental action are what Rose and Miller (1992:175) call “technologies”. These technologies include tangible techniques, procedures, calculations, documents etc., with which the involved governmental actors implement a given political rationality manifested via social policies.

Political rationalities manifested through discourse as well as tangible governmental technologies are intertwined and inter-connected. In other

words, in order to understand fully governmental action, both analytical perspectives must be taken into account. They inform and influence one another. Again, we can illustrate this by taking the example of the current cantonal social assistance practice addressed at YAS. Both cantons Geneva and Basel-City have reduced the minimum subsistence level for young adults without VET in recent years for instance and thus have created a new material threshold within their social assistance regime. These reforms have been accompanied by discourses, which claim, for instance, that there is a need to reinforce the individual responsibility of the YAS. Thus, every social policy reform needs a moral justification – both for the agencies in charge of implementation and for the addressees of the practice.

This conceptualization of governance can be linked with the previously outlined understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values. Rose and Miller (1992:178–179) argue explicitly that political rationalities have a *moral* characteristic. Governmental actors have the power to define and alter continuously such principles like freedom, justice, equality, responsibility and citizenship. As such, they have a great deal of influence on collectively shared norms like questions regarding what constitutes productive work, welfare, family, or social participation. As Swiss youth and social policies are a cantonal matter for the most part, the focus remains on cantonal governance.

4.1.1 The role of experts in social policy implementation

A second important aspect of these political rationalities is that they are “grounded upon knowledge” and are “made thinkable through language” (Rose and Miller 1992:179). Indeed, *expertise* emerged as a solution in western societies, such as Switzerland and other European countries, which might dissolve the ethical problem of an intervening state and governmental action in a so-called *liberal* society. One of the characterizations of liberalism in political philosophy is the limits it places on the legitimate use of power by political authorities. As a principle, the sphere of the political must be as limited as possible. It is no longer legitimate for governments and other political authorities to refer to their *raison d'état*, in which a sovereign exercises his will across a national space. Rather, governmental action takes place through a set of subtle technologies that seek to administer their subjects and shape them in desired directions (Rose and Miller 1992:180). Foucault (1977) pointed out that since the eighteenth century governmental or political control of conduct has shifted and as a consequence has profoundly reorga-

nized justice, health, and welfare. He cites evolutions with which individuals and social groups became objects of scientific or quasi-scientific control. As a result, governmental action does not primarily operate through threats or legislation anymore but rather, through a complex judicial-administrative apparatus. This apparatus functions as a regulator of deviant social behaviour. Even the most extreme form of legal punishments, prison and incarceration, is accompanied by a socio-therapeutic apparatus that aims at disciplining or normalizing deviant behaviour.

“Instead of commands that may or may not be legitimate, we face complex and interconnected patterns of uncoerced submission to what might be called ‘the government of truth’.” (Allen 1991:427)

Consequently, faced with a social problem like the one of the YAS, we turn to what we call ‘expert knowledge’, which refers to individuals who speak and act from a position of legitimized power in the name of governmental truth. The knowledge of these experts is influenced and informed by discourses within their institutions. It is the experts’ truth concerning the reason for the deviant life trajectory of YAS that contributes to the formulation and implementation of social policies addressed to this target group. Needless to say, this ‘expert knowledge’ is not unanimous and rather diverse. As there are various organizations on different governmental levels (parliaments, local social services, cantonal departments, federal offices, etc.) as well as external actors with governmental mandates (integration programmes), there are a multitude of perspectives on the social problem at hand. Nonetheless, these actors work together with the common goal of solving the problem and thus, in addition to the plurality of narratives, there are discursive regularities and commonalities to be uncovered.

4.1.2 A multi-level approach

The previous subchapter points to the fact that there are different actors, levels, and institutional settings to consider and therefore also different knowledges that become relevant in the field of government action. Discourses on social policies take place within the public sphere (media coverages for instance) or within national and cantonal debates (parliaments). As the federalist structure of the Swiss welfare state gives their subunits (the cantons) a lot of margin for strategic manoeuvring, their administration (social services for instance) also have the power to reframe a given policy during the phase of

implementation (see also research highlighting such street-level perspectives of policy implementation, e.g. Lipsky (2010)). In the case of social assistance, it is the cantons who are entirely competent and thus define the entire legal framework. Consequently, there are many 'stages' where discourses regarding YAS take place. At the same time, these young individuals are not only the receivers and targets of policies, but play an active role in the shaping of such policies, by reflecting on them, resisting, or following and thus reproducing them. These various debates contribute to defining and re-defining 'problematic youth' and their deservingness of welfare.

The approach used conceptually follows the works of a Swiss group of scholars institutionally attached to the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES (Bonvin et al. 2023).¹⁵ The present publication is part of the individual project (IP 205) "welfare boundaries". The premise of this research group is that social policies are deeply ambivalent. They are designed to tackle vulnerability processes and as such, provide cash benefits and support to eligible welfare claimants. At the same time, the various conditions and constraints of social policies act as stressors and stigma themselves (see also Spini et al. 2013). According to this work, the complex nexus between vulnerability and social policies should be understood as a multi-level process. This is also in line with prior ethnographic and qualitative work highlighting not only research that is multi-sited (see the classics – such as Geertz 1973) but also the different scales of policy implementation, its effects, causes and embedded discourses that need to be addressed in policy analysis (Bürkner 2017; Chou et al. 2017).

I will take up the arguments of these works and specifically address three levels that cannot be neglected within the field of social policy. The first concerns the definition of social policies. The second refers to the implementation social policies and the front-line work of professionals and the third concerns the individual point of view of welfare beneficiaries.

The framing and definition of social policies

At the *macro level* of social policy analysis the media, national, cantonal and municipal policy-makers, as well as corporate actors (associations for instance) participate in an ongoing discourse on who deserves what, when, and why (van Oorschoot 2000). Research on this level focuses on identifying the actors, their strategic position, and their take on the social problem. The

15 <https://www.centre-lives.ch/en/project/welfare-boundaries> (accessed in October 2023).

elected parliamentarians within the cantons are mandated to define framework laws on social assistance. In doing so, they discuss what category of the ‘poor’ has access to benefits and under what conditions. The public opinion on welfare benefits can also be a research topic at this level – by investigating how the ‘the unemployed youth’ is framed through various media outlets for instance. The public perception of ‘the youth in crisis’ can put pressure on political actors (Oorschot et al. 2017).

This level has not been the prior concern of the analysis as the focus has been laid on the second and third level. However, the conducted document research in both cantons provides a historical reconstruction of both cases regarding the policy field of social assistance and youth. This research discloses the strategic intentions of the cantons and first indications of embedded moral values.

The implementation at the front-line level

At a secondary level, the various heads of social services and offices in charge of managing unemployed youth rearticulate and translate the framework and definitions in order to make them applicable in practice. Such discourses address the *meso level* of social policy analysis. Social services (as well as cantonal and municipal offices) reformulate a given social policy and outsourced private actors like associations, foundations, and social firms become implementing agents. Following the works of Lipsky (2010), these actors can and should also be interpreted as policy-makers because of their discretionary powers to adapt a given policy to what they think the addressees need. In this sense, these so-called ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (SLB) have great influence and co-produce discourses on definitions of what social problems are as well as on deservingness criteria. The SLB help materialize the discussed policies and frameworks in reality. Research on this level has shown the importance of frontline workers – especially with respect to their ambiguous situation and discretionary power (Bertho and Martin 2020). On the one hand, these professionals of social work are bound by laws and procedures, and they themselves can become agents of a penalizing and/or paternalistic social state (Borrelli 2018; Hunter et al. 2016; Wacquant 2013). On the other hand, they can be real advocates within a political discourse for marginalized people experiencing structural disadvantages and generate support for those individuals (Andretta 2019). However, through this process, official discourses and deservingness criteria are reinterpreted and redefined.

The first core piece of the empirical analysis in this publication constitutes on this level and focuses on the perspective of the ‘implementers’. This category comprises key professionals within the administrative structure (social assistance, employment office and vocational training department) as well as what I call the ‘providers of integration’ (heads of integration programmes). They have been chosen for expert interviews because of their strategic position within a relevant institution that targets YAS. The focus is on a discursive level, which means I chose interviewees with a particular room for strategic manoeuvre and thus with a discursive impact within the policy field of social assistance and transition policies. They do not represent the classical SLB because they are not primarily at the frontline implementing the policies (though some of them still have a small amount of cases they are responsible for) but they are planning and designing the procedures within their institutions (like intake procedures, for instance). Their professional profiles are diverse: Some have social work experience, have studied social sciences and/or law, or a combination of those three fields. One could say that they represent a subgroup of the SLB – namely SLBs in executive positions. Focusing on such administrative experts as well as on integration professionals has two advantages. Firstly, their attitudes regarding YAS reflect the macro-notion of vulnerability. Secondly, it permits critical reflection on the discourse regarding the implementation of social policies. In doing so, both the framing of social policies as well as their translation into practice can be discursively analysed.

The perception of welfare recipients

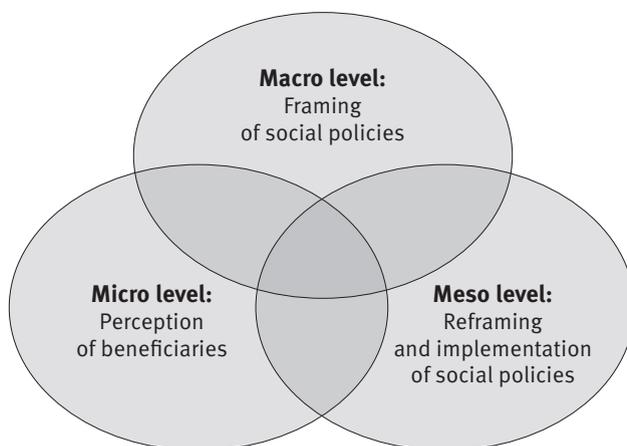
Social policies have very tangible consequences on individuals targeted by a given policy. The individuals need to comply with adherence procedures in order to get access to benefits. Social assistance beneficiaries need to disclose information regarding their financial and personal circumstances before accessing material support, for instance. Furthermore, they have to collaborate actively with frontline workers and be available for professional integration measures. Social policies can provide real support and produce new stress at the same time. At a micro level, researchers can focus on such ambiguous consequences on the life situations of individuals. Scholars have also stressed the importance of including lived experiences in qualitative public policy research for other purposes. Edmiston (Edmiston 2015:34), for instance, argues that the

“[...] phenomenology of deprivation is as much a reflection of citizenship arrangements as it is of lived experience. In this sense, the lived experience of citizens offers diagnostic insight into the reality of, but also the structuring of, deprivation.”

According to this logic, it is crucial to include the individual perspective of welfare beneficiaries as they have experience within welfare regimes and ‘mirror’ the ambivalent discourses on a given social problem at hand. This approach further takes into account their agency which is a pivotal factor in policy implementation processes that can be resisted, or reproduced by these individuals.

The interviews conducted with YAS provide the second core piece of the empirical analysis. Much like the administrative experts and the professionals of integration programmes, the YAS have accumulated ‘expert knowledge’ regarding cantonal social assistance and the transition regime. In contrast to the ‘implementers’ however, YAS face the ambiguous effects of these regimes. They have to react to the expectations of the regime. By capturing their perspective, I am able to provide insights on how they position themselves with respect to those expectations.

Figure 6: Multi-level model



Source: Own research.

Figure 6 illustrates graphically the three levels of social policy analysis. As the figure shows, all the three levels of analysis intersect as they influence each other. At the same time, they can be treated analytically as distinct ‘social

worlds', within which discourses takes place. The main data sources are the *meso* and the *micro* levels, which are used primarily because I assume that the perspectives of YAS and the implementers will reflect and reveal information on how the current policies are morally legitimized on a *macro* level.

'Implementers' are particularly interesting because they are the ones who make decisions regarding the deservingness criteria like integration requirements of beneficiaries or which subcategory of YAS will benefit from an integration programme or not. It is the intersection of policy formulation and implementation (second level), which reflects not only the moral foundations at a macro level but also its translation into practice. The perspectives of the YAS themselves are paramount because the coping strategies and experiences of the youngsters mirror the moral values of the design (third level). The media and public discourse on welfare deservingness of YAS and the parliamentary debates (first level) have been excluded because they do not include the implementation stage of such policies. By focusing primarily on the second and third level, the analysis will shed light on both the general discourse on the 'problematic youth' as well as the rhetoric justification of the administrative segmentation procedure.

To sum up, it is important to separate two distinctive levels of analysis: the first is the discourses within policy formulation regarding YAS in general, like why they pose a social problem in the first place. The second level of analysis incorporates the discourses on the segmentation procedures and the concrete programmes and measures. While the first level will uncover fundamental moral values regarding youth and unemployment and how a modern workfare society should deal with this phenomenon in general, the second analytical level delves into the justification patterns of the concrete programmes, regulations and measures in place. This second level discloses in a more nuanced way, how and to what extent certain moral values like the 'work ethics' have taken hold. This approach allows an analysis of the circumstances, in which these practices come to be. Applied to the subject at hand, it allows to retrace how the YAS became a socio-political target group, how this focus is legitimized and to what extent these discursive legitimizations are mirrored within the policies in place and by the retrospective viewpoints of the YAS themselves.

However, one must be transparent about the possibilities and limits of this approach. While it can bring to light and reflect the discursive evolution of YAS as a 'social problem', the focus on discourses has limited power for

investigating the concrete effects of a given policy on the living situations and vulnerabilities of these young people. This is because it does not allow an in-depth investigation of the contradictions and ambiguities found in practice over time. In contrast to observational research, which can capture such direct effects of policies on those affected by them, the presented approach is able to create a narrative of how policies are felt and how the YAS make sense of their situation in context of policies that target them. Thus, this tells us something about the perceived environment in which the interviewed YAS exist and reflects mechanisms of structural deprivation. As such, this approach contributes to the general research done on social policy implementation (Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016; Fuchs, Gellermann, and Kutzner 2018a; Lanfranconi, Chang, and Basaran 2020).

Based on this specific conceptualization of governmental action and the multi-level approach, two case studies have been conducted using a set of appropriate interview and data collection techniques. The following sub-chapter details the basic methodological assumptions of the case studies as a qualitative research strategy, discusses the data sample as well as the applied interview techniques, and gives an overview of the interviewed actors ('the implementers') and the socioeconomic situation of the YAS.

4.2 Case studies, data sample, and interview techniques

The present research has been conducted in the two cantons Basel-City and Geneva. As such, it follows the classic, qualitative approach of 'case studies' (Schögel and Tomczak 2009; Yin 2003). In social sciences, case study strategies have been used in order to gain an understanding of complex social phenomena within a specific context. In this vein, cantons present such attributes because they are coherent and delimited political systems, within which institutions and discourses evolve. Case studies should be conducted when "[...] why or how questions are being posed [...] and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin 2003:1). They can be used either to test hypotheses or for inductive purposes without a specific theoretical lens. Case studies can serve both descriptive and explanatory purposes (Yin 2003:4). For the present research, I combine both deductive and inductive research logics. The hypotheses (deductive approach) are useful as they help focusing on specific discursive patterns (like neo-liberal narratives for instance) previous social policy researcher have found relevant for the Swiss context (see for instance Bonvin 2008). Furthermore,

the theoretical lens of the 'work ethics' in combination with 'age' gives the analysis a clear analytical direction. However, as this chapter will show, the main data collection and evaluation procedures are inspired by an inductive research logic. My goal is to shed light on the moral underpinnings of current social assistance programmatic. I want to know why YAS have become a specific socio-political target and how the institutions and discourses within two cantons have evolved. In order to address this specific research interest, I used classical qualitative interview techniques and coding procedures (see Chapter 4.3), which are characterized by their ability to generate theory and understand complex social phenomena. The combination of both approaches (deductive and inductive) allows for guiding the analysis with established theoretical knowledge and keeping a relative openness on further discursive patterns hidden within the collected data. In doing so, I can contribute to a better understanding of how neo-liberal and paternalistic narratives relate to each other within social policy discourse while revealing also a plurality of other narratives that might not have yet been revealed.

The case studies will serve both descriptive and explanatory purposes as I will reconstruct the historic evolution of the cantonal administrations (descriptive) and delve into the discursive legitimation patterns for focusing on the 'problematic youth' (explanatory). One of the advantages of case studies is that due to the availability of empirical data one can reconstruct complex explanations.

4.2.1 A comparative approach

There are different types of case studies (Lauth, Pickel, and Pickel 2015:63). Cases can be chosen because they represent a certain model of the object of study. Such a case study would have a *representative* function for a specific phenomenon. Other cases are chosen because they seem particularly *crucial* or *deviant*. In this incident, the chosen cases are representative for a certain evolution in the policy field of social assistance. Three aspects were decisive for choosing Basel-City and Geneva as representative cases.

First, according to the federal statistical office (FSO 2018), compared to the other twenty-four cantons, Basel-City and Geneva account for the lowest upper secondary achievement rate in the age category eighteen to twenty-five. In 2018, the overall quota of young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age with a completed upper-secondary education is 85 percent in the canton of Basel-City and 83 percent in the canton of Geneva (see Chapter 2).

One can therefore assume that the political pressure to deal with ‘problematic youth’ is mounting and induces much discourse on what to do with the problem at hand – thus providing qualitative researchers in this field with ample relevant material on all three levels (macro, meso, and micro).

Second, both Basel-City and Geneva present similar contexts as well as differences, which allow a comparative approach. They can both be situated between most different and most similar case designs because they have the same issues but have different administrative structures and policies as well. In qualitative comparative research, one strategy for choosing cases is to look for similar aspects in order to control exogenous factors, whilst identifying interesting, differing features that are linked to the research interest. Guided by the federally initiated ‘education first’ strategy, both cantons have readjusted their internal administrative structure and created new agencies and preparatory measures (mostly formalized and outsourced) in the past ten to fifteen years. Consequently, we find similar “conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study” (Marcus 1995:99). Beyond these similar conditions, one needs to point out some differences between the two cantons, which influence the comparative approach. A first difference is structural, as there are forty-five municipalities within the canton of Geneva and thirteen CAS (municipal social services), whereas the canton of Basel-City is composed of three municipalities and three social services. According to this structure, the canton of Geneva has a denser and more complex grid of institutions both horizontally (interinstitutional agencies) and vertically (coordination between municipalities and the canton). This is also accentuated by the fact that associations play an importance role in Geneva in terms of both policy formulation (initiation of new programmes for YAS) and policy implementation. A second difference is institutional and concerns the social assistance. The canton of Basel-City has three social service entities. The main one being the social service of the city of Basel, where there is a specialized team in charge of the YAS. In contrast, the canton of Geneva has built a centralized unit, Point Jeunes, which functions as a competence centre over the whole territory of the canton. Furthermore, one can affirm that canton of Geneva has a more formalized social assistance regime compared to Basel-City. An example for this formalization is that YAS in Geneva have to sign an integration contract (CASI, *Contrat d’aide sociale individualisé*) and that upon application, they receive a lower-scale material support until they can submit a ‘realistic’ professional project.

Third, the choice of the two cases is also linked to the potential access to the field, which for qualitative research (especially when state bureaucracy and vulnerable groups of people are involved) is paramount. In the case of Basel-City and Geneva, beyond the fact that it made sense from a methodical point of view (legitimate case comparison), I had institutional affiliations¹⁶, which could enhance the chances of access. Lindberg and Borrelli (2019) discussed challenges for qualitative researchers regarding the unpredictability of bureaucratic agencies when it comes to letting researchers into the field. The more such agencies are charged with policing their addressees (e.g. migrant individuals or welfare beneficiaries) the more there is a chance that they will be hesitant to cooperate.

To sum up, beyond the pragmatic aspect of the access to the field, the cases of Basel-City and Geneva have predominantly been chosen because they are trailing on a national level in terms of post-compulsory degree rates regarding young adults and because they have a different institutional arrangement, which also evolved historically in a different way. These two aspects (dominance of the social problem of YAS and the institutional arrangement) are particularly relevant for a case selection because firstly, both cantons must deal with a similar socio-political challenge – a comparatively large number of youngsters who do not find their way into VET and who also face financial hardship. This stimulates a lot of internal debate on how the competent cantonal offices should deal with YAS. Secondly, institutional arrangements are crucial in policy analysis, again because their historic and current evolutions as well as their programmatic focus disclose information on how the problem at hand (the YAS) should be treated. The decision to put one department in charge and not another one, for instance, must be justified and such justifications for strategic turns within cantonal administrations disclose a great deal of discourse. The fact that Basel-City and Geneva have a similar urban context but different historic evolution of their administration enhances the chance of finding a plurality of such differing justification patterns regarding YAS.

16 At the time of the research, I was a doctoral candidate at the University of Geneva and working as a scientific employee at the University of applied Sciences and Arts, Northwestern Switzerland, which is located in Basel-City.

4.2.2 Data sample and procedure

The research focuses on the socio-political alignment of the cantons regarding the YAS. Such an alignment is continuously changing and evolving over time due to ongoing political discourse and social change.

For this reason, the *first analytical section* addresses the historical evolution of the cantonal administration (Chapter 5). The empirical basis for this endeavor is a document analysis englobing the study of official internal strategic documents of both cantons as well as externally mandated studies on the problematic of ‘youth unemployment.’¹⁷ The common characteristic of all the chosen documents is their purpose to investigate the phenomenon of YAS or youth unemployment in general and ultimately orientate and legitimize a certain form of governmental action. For this purpose, I conducted an online document research within cantonal offices (focusing mainly on social assistance and vocational training institutions). I looked for descriptive documents of specific cantonal offers aimed at adolescents and young adults with transitional difficulties from school to work like the implementation concepts of the newly created case management programmes Gap in Basel-City and Cap Formation in Geneva. Additionally, for both cantons, externally mandated studies investigating the problematic of YAS have also been included. The criterion for including these studies was whether they relate to an important evolution within the cantonal administration (like a new programme or concept regarding the strategic take of the YAS). For Basel-City, an externally conducted evaluation of the first three years of the case management programme Gap and another externally conducted evaluation analyzing the effects of the ‘counter-performance model’ have been included. In contrast to Basel-City, the canton of Geneva has an internal research agency at its disposal: the agency for research in education, the SRED (Service de la recherche en education). This agency has regularly evaluated the cantonal activities targeting young adults and their professional trajectories for the past twenty years. Like for Basel-City, the SRED produced a study in 2016, which evaluates the newly created programme Cap Formation. These studies entail a lot of information regarding the initial situation within the cantons and also the trajectories of the YAS. Moreover, they transport first indications of a specific cantonal strategic take on the problem at hand as they are mandated by internal administrative professionals. Internal commissions who supervise the research process usually accompany such studies. Consequently, these

17 See Appendix 1 for an overview of all the studied documents for both cantons.

studies should rather be considered as part of the expert knowledge production within a canton and not as independent and critical research.

This first part of analysis is complemented by the perspectives of the ‘implementers’ and ‘providers of integration’ (heads of cantonal offices and integration programmes)¹⁸, all of which were asked in the beginning of the interview to describe the historical evolution of the cantonal social policies addressed at the YAS.

The second analytical section (Chapter 5.3) focuses on the perspectives of the implementers and providers of integration and their view of the problematic at hand (the YAS) and uses the interview technique of the expert interview (see next subchapter). The interest of these interviews focuses on how they judge the current state in their canton with the aim to reconstruct the plurality of discursive perspectives and their regularities: Does the canton address the issue of youth unemployment and specifically the issue of the YAS in a proper manner according to them? Are the various cantonal stakeholders working efficiently together and is there an appropriate level of coordination of administrative procedures? The aim is to investigate what they consider a problematic or a successful strategy. Furthermore, they were asked to describe in their own words why YAS constitute a social problem, what vulnerabilities they carry, and what should be the ideal plan to solve the issue.¹⁹ This allows for identifying a variety of narratives in both cantons from a considerable amount of professionals in positions of power within their institution disclosing their ‘expert knowledge’ in the sense of Rose and Miller (1992). The multi-level approach allows different levels of comparison. A first comparison will be horizontal between the implementers across different institutions as well as between the two cantons. Here the focus will be to retrace the differences between the cases. Furthermore, as the legal context and recent strategic shifts (‘education first’) within both cases present some similarities, one analytical focus will be to reconstruct the common discursive patterns in both cantons. This will allow for contrasting the perspectives of the implementers and the YAS later on.

In order to select the *implementers* I applied the same procedure in both cases. As the subject of interest are the YAS and the specific context of social assistance, I identified so-called ‘gatekeepers’ (Wolff 2010) in both

18 See Appendix 3 for a detailed overview of all the interviewed representatives of cantonal offices and providers of integration.

19 An interview grid of the conducted semi-structured expert interviews can be consulted in Appendix 5.

cantons. These administrative experts would then guide the next selection of interview partners. For the canton of Basel-City, I contacted the head of the social service of the city. For the canton of Geneva, I contacted the head of the specialized unit Point Jeunes. In both cases, I organized a first meeting in order to form an initial impression, get an overview of the cantonal regime, and identify other relevant institutions targeting YAS. It quickly became apparent that the main institutions at the intersection of policy formulation and implementation and dealing regularly with YAS are social assistance, vocational training departments, and the employment offices in each canton. As the focus of the research is not to evaluate the effects of implementation but rather to reconstruct discursive patterns and narratives, I contacted only administrative experts in executive positions. In other words, those institutions taking part in strategic commissions like the 'strategy group against youth unemployment' in Basel-City for example or members of the newly created association Accroche in Geneva, which influences the socio-political debate within the canton.

Another selection procedure was to choose amongst the numerous organizations who implement (mostly fixed-term) integration programmes for the unemployed youth – the so-called *providers of integration*. Again, the gatekeepers represent the starting point of the procedure as they provided valuable information regarding the most important supplier of integration on their respective cantonal territories.

A first concern for the sample limitation was to have different types of programmes and associations with a variety of strategic focuses. The aim was to be able to reconstruct the plurality of discourses. Taking both cantons as one sample, there are programmes focusing on young mothers, on youngsters with mental health problems, and others with unique adherence procedures (radical free adherence for example). This is particularly beneficial against the background of the chosen theoretical lens of the work ethics. It allows for reconstructing narratives of work ethics reinforcements in different integration settings. Furthermore, as these programmes target specifically different subgroups of YAS (young women with childcare duties and YAS with mental health issues), the analysis is able to provide insights on how work ethics narratives and their moral foundations shift in relation to specific social status like being a young mother, having mental issues, or having a migration background. As we have seen in the theoretical section, social policies are not only morally related to what constitutes productive work and a corresponding

'responsible' behaviour, instead they are (or can be) gendered for instance or linked to other norms like migration or age. Consequently, it is important to select programmes with different focuses to enhance the chance of having a certain variance.

A second concern was to limit the number of possible organizations who would qualify for an interview. I chose to focus mainly on newly created programmes with a focus on subgroups of YAS who are considered to be the most disadvantaged. The participants of such programmes have fallen out of the intended professional life trajectory and do not present the required individual competences for an immediate VET integration (YAS with multiple problems). For Basel-City, I chose the integration programme AMIE, which focuses on young mothers receiving social assistance and without upper secondary degree. AMIE provides a one-year integration place for young mothers and puts the accent on professional qualification (enhancing both professional and social competences). Furthermore, as one of the biggest providers of integration for young adults on the Basler territory, I also conducted an interview with a representative of Jobfactory and one interview with a representative of its rival organization Overall. For Geneva, I focused on the relatively new programme MoveOn, which differentiates itself by specializing in enhancing the 'social competences' of YAS. I met with the director of Qualif, a programme for YAS with the particularity of having radical free adherence principles: there are no time limits, and the youngsters define the rhythm of accompaniment. While making these choices to enter my research sites, I maintained a process of reflection and snowballing, open to conduct further interviews if and when actors underlined the relevancy of further players in the field. During my fieldwork, it became apparent that associations play an important role in Geneva, and so I met with the directors of Accroche (cantonal platform for all organizations with the goal to prevent youth unemployment), FASE (cantonal organization, which coordinates all mobile outreach work in the municipalities), and Trajets (an association, which among other things, promotes social and professional integration for youngsters with mental health problems).

These choices were made in consultation with the gatekeepers in each canton who confirmed the relevance and unique perspective of these programmes. The crucial criterion is that the gatekeepers and heads of these programmes themselves consider the YAS participating in these programmes as particularly problematic with respect to their future chances for finding

an apprenticeship and getting out of welfare. Consequently, I expected that the perspectives of the implementers and YAS involved in these programmes must contain numerous discursive references regarding their supposedly 'deviant' life trajectory.

Furthermore, another criterion for focusing on the two programmes AMIE and MoveOn was that they are externally mandated and are specialized in individual accompaniment towards a VET.

In total, sixteen interviews (eight in both cantons) were conducted with representatives of the three relevant cantonal offices (social assistance, employment, and vocational training departments) as well as the above-mentioned providers of integration.²⁰ The following Figure 7 presents an overview of the data sample.

The *third analysis* (Chapter 6) deals with the impressions of the YAS themselves. At the moment of the encounter, these youngsters have lived through various experiences with many institutions of the cantonal education and welfare regime. Either they are completing an integration programme or have suffered the consequences of not attending one or most of them have various experiences of educational ruptures (dropping out of programmes or training), or all of the above. Consequently, they have accumulated, like the implementers, though from a more vulnerable position, a lot of 'expert knowledge' about the current socio-political alignment. In order to capture this knowledge, the principles of the problem-centred interview (PCI) have been applied (see next subchapter). Although information regarding the vulnerabilities of YAS has also been gathered, the main focus is their insights into the cantonal welfare schemes and strategic alignment. Compared to the second analysis (implementers and providers of integration) the approach and significance of the micro-analysis is slightly different. Firstly, the data sample is smaller, which means that the data material is less encompassing as the data density achieved for the first and second analysis by combining document analysis and expert interviews. Second, whilst for the expert interviews the goal was to capture the 'expertise' of the implementer on the subject at hand, in the case of the YAS, the goal was to retrace their own view of their own trajectory within the welfare regimes and the lived critical junctures they had experienced (the first encounter with a social worker at a CAS or at Point Jeunes in Geneva for instance). This means that the focus is not only on the

20 A description of the interviewed providers of integration (associations and integration programmes) can be consulted in Appendix 4.

explicit perspectives of the YAS but also on the implicit critical standpoints enclosed within coping strategies whilst facing the constraints of welfare organizations like social services or case management offices.

During the procedure of contacting and meeting the YAS, two criteria guided the selection. The first one was again aspiring to gain a diverse sample (age, gender, housing situation, migration background, etc.) because one can assume that thereby a plurality of perspectives can be achieved. Another criterion was that the sampled participants had lived through experiences with integration programmes. This is important, as the goal is to analyse with the theoretical lens of the work ethics how governmental units try to 'activate' YAS towards a VET. In other words, the YAS encountered needed to be currently part of an integration programme or have had past experiences within such a context. Regarding the goal of achieving a certain diversity, the result is ambivalent due to relatively low number of youngsters who agreed to conduct an interview with me.²¹ However, a certain diversity is present, which allows a focus on migration background for instance. Four out of eight YAS have a dual citizenship and came to Geneva or Basel during their compulsory school years. Having moved from one country to another influences the perspective on the welfare regime and this allows a contrast between YAS with dual citizenships and those without. Appendix 2 discloses all the information gathered regarding the socioeconomic life situation of the YAS.

Figure 7 gives an overview of the data sample, which has been analysed in three stages (historic evolution of the cantons, perspectives of implementer and providers of integration, and perspectives of the YAS).

21 See for instance Fuchs et al. (2018b) on the difficulties to reach socially marginalized people in qualitative research.

Figure 7: Overview of the data sample

	Basel-City	Geneva
Meso (Reframing and implementation of social policies)	8 administration documents (evaluations, descriptions, strategic documents)	9 administration documents (evaluations, descriptions, strategic documents)
	8 expert interviews with representatives of: Social service of Basel (3) Employment service (1) Gap (1) AMIE (1) Jobfactory (1) Overall (1)	8 expert interviews with representatives of: Point Jeunes (1) Employment service (1) Cap Formation (1) Accroche (1) Qualif (1) FASe (1) Trajet (1) MoveOn (1)
Micro (Perspective of YAS)	In total, 5 problem-centred interviews with YAS 2 YAS met at the social services and then in cafés 3 YAS were met at the integration programme AMIE	In total, 3 problem-centred interviews with YAS All YAS were met at the integration programme MoveOn

Source: Own research.

4.2.3 Data collection techniques

Three data collection instruments were combined in order to gather qualitative data with the aim of reconstructing the commonalities and differences between the two cantons regarding their strategic take on YAS and their discursive legitimation. In the following subsection, these three techniques will be detailed regarding their principles and applications.

Document analysis

A document analysis can refer to a panoply of specific techniques of textual analysis. The epistemological principles detailed in the contribution of Karppinen and Moe (2011) has been applied. The first step is identifying a suitable corpus of documents, which then will be qualified primarily as a source of data collection. The difference between a literature research and a document analysis is that the latter serves as a primary source for gathering information about to object of study. As has been explained, the assumption behind the choice of documents is that they will reflect the author's genuine

interests regarding a certain political action or discourse. This is the reason internal cantonal strategy papers have been selected for the analysis as it is assumed that they contain truthful information regarding the strategic evolution and activities of the cantons. For both cantons, external studies have been added to the corpus because they are mandated by these administrative experts. Thus, these kinds of documents also contribute to the legitimization of governmental action towards the YAS.

Expert interview

The technique of 'expert interview' is one of the most used techniques in empirical social studies. It is a theory-generating technique and it focuses on analysing "socially institutionalized expert knowledge" (Sprondel 1979:141) within a specific policy field. The identified actors within this policy field have an "institutionalized competence to produce a certain reality" (Hitzler, Honer, and Mäder 1994). One of the particularities of the expert interview is that this technique aims at reconstructing the specific knowledge arising within the functional context and institutional position of the interviewee. The experts have been selected and contacted because they are in some form (co-) responsible for the articulation of a social problem and for its administration. One major issue of expert interviews is that this specific and socially situated knowledge is rather diffuse and not immediately available. Experts remember decision-making processes and, for instance, the criteria which have been relevant for crucial decisions or changes of strategic paths of their institution at a given moment in time. However, what remains hidden are the foundational logics and the routines of their 'expert actions' (Meuser and Nagel 1994, 2009). Thus, the precise object of investigation is reconstructing this diffuse knowledge and revealing the underlying motives for a certain 'expert' discourse. The technique requires a semi-structured interview grid, which allows building on prior information on the object of study while remaining open for conversational turns during the interview. The main interest was the reconstruction of the discursive legitimation patterns for a given position and attitude towards YAS. These different attitudes have been made transparent through narratives. The term 'narrative' refers to the various underlying storylines used to exemplify a certain attitude, action, or discourse. The term is frequently used in qualitative research – especially in discourse analysis – and is a familiar way of grouping certain common data patterns in distinguished storylines (see, for instance, Dodge 2017; Sandelowski 1991).

Problem-centred interview (PCI)

Much like the expert interview, the PCI is a theory-generating interview technique. The PCI is one type of biographical interview techniques, which builds on both the storytelling of the interviewee and the dynamic communicative exchange with the researcher in order to generate data. The PCIs were conceptually prepared and conducted based on the work of Witzel (1982). Other qualitative researchers dealing with the vulnerable life trajectories of young adults have also used this method in their qualitative research (for example, Schaffner 2007). The main reason for choosing this technique is that the biographical aspect of the method ensures developing “patterns of meaning” because the individual is confronted with certain lived experiences in a reflexive-communicative manner (Witzel 2000:3). The implementation is thus characterized by its openness on the one hand. On the other hand, it is not as openly conducted as the ‘narrative interview’ because of its *problem orientation*, which is to say that prior to the interview, the researcher prepares a semi-structured interview grid in order to have a clear focus during the interview. Another principle of PCI is the *object orientation*, which according to Witzel (2000:3) “emphasizes methodical flexibility in face of the different necessities of the objects being observed.” The third fundamental principle is the *process orientation*. This principle refers to the fluid process of the whole methodology, which begins with the preparation of the interview and continues after the interview is done with the reflexion of the whole dialogue. The collection of data arises thus from the communicative dialogue between researcher and interviewee. The key is letting the interviewee make his or her own theoretical assumptions regarding what constitutes a problem or not. This fits the research interest perfectly as the aim is to reconstruct what YAS consider as problematic or not regarding cantonal welfare regimes. In total, eight PCIs were conducted. The overview of the socioeconomic life situation of all the encountered YAS has been disclosed in Appendix 2.

4.3 Identifying discursive patterns and narratives

There has been a lot of research in the past fifteen years regarding activation policies in Europe and Switzerland and on the impact of those policies on their beneficiaries (Chapter 2 and 3). This publication is an attempt to contribute to this research field with a focus on the moral justifications patterns of the actors designing and implementing these kinds of social policies. For this purpose, a specific coding technique allowing an in-depth retracing of

discourses and narratives within qualitative data has been applied (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Holton and Walsh 2016). The aim is to add another piece of research and knowledge to this scientific field of critical social policy research by focusing on YAS, who have been under enhanced supervision as a target group by Swiss cantons in recent years.

One of the benefits of this present research is the combination of perspectives (implementers, providers of integration, and youngsters). This allows a detailed reconstruction of the dominant narratives around the perceived social problem of the YAS. The combination of perspectives – the rhetoric justification of the implementers, providers of integration, and the retrospective analytical gaze of the YAS – allows an in-depth analysis, which builds on constant comparison, and the identification of discursive patterns and narratives observed in both cantons. I used the common qualitative data evaluation programme MAXQDA Analytics Pro for the coding procedure, which is detailed below.

4.3.1 Coding procedures

The main part of the analysis (Chapter 4 and 5) consists of the reconstruction of the socio-political discourse(s) in the two cantonal jurisdictions of Geneva and Basel-City. The perceptions of the implementers and of the YAS themselves on the subject have been analysed separately. The theoretical assumption of the ‘work ethics’ made explicit through the formulation of research questions guide the analysis (Chapter 3.5).

For the analysis of the data, I followed essentially two principles, which are usually at the core of every coding procedure in qualitative research.

The first is the power of “emergence” (Holton and Walsh 2016:10/11). The main objective here is to uncover abstract concepts that lie hidden within the data. This concept can be described as allowing a “chief concern [...] to guide the emergence of a core issue or problem” (Holton and Walsh 2016:30). The chief concern is closely linked to the theoretical assumptions of the ‘work ethics’ and the reinforcement activities of governmental actors. How do the implementers and providers of integration justify their course of action regarding YAS? What are their “political rationalities” (Rose and Miller 1992:178) towards this target group?

The second core pillar is the principle of “constant comparative analysis” (Holton and Walsh 2016:33/34; see also Glaser and Strauss 1967). To achieve an abstract level of understanding of a phenomenon, the research

process is guided by constant comparison. The assumption is that there is an interrelation and interconnectedness between routinized human action, the interactions within institutional contexts, and biographical events, which need the researchers' attention. For the analysis, this translates into a practice of identifying recurrent patterns within similar contexts but also across different settings (for instance comparing similar narratives of implementers across different agencies and cantons or comparing differing narratives of professionals within the same governmental unit). This allows both identifying commonalities as well as uncovering a plurality of discourses. The following subchapter exemplifies the applied coding procedure.

4.3.2 Exemplifying the coding procedure

Coding procedures allow for reconstructing main concerns in a substantive area and to retrace discursive patterns and narratives regarding how a concern is processed, managed, or resolved (Holton and Walsh 2016). It is used as an instrument to divide and categorize the collected data for their further description, interpretation and analysis (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 2015). The goal is to identify key categories and to put them in relation to each other for the purpose of an integrated analysis. A qualitative researcher needs to perpetuate such a coding procedure until the desired conceptual density has been achieved. Such evaluation procedures have gained in popularity within qualitative multi-level social policy analysis (see for instance Lanfranconi et al. 2020).

During the procedure, I essentially followed three distinct coding levels put forward by Strauss and Corbin (2015): open, axial, and selective coding. I divided the collected data into two segments (implementers/providers of integration and the YAS – twice for both cantons). This division of the data is necessary in order to separate the *meso* level from the *micro* level and in order to be able to compare the two cantons. I will focus mainly on examples from the meso level (perspectives of the implementers and providers of integration) for the following exemplification.

Open coding describes the first encounter and confrontation with the data. The purpose at this stage is to segment the data into broad pieces and to search for similarities and differences regarding recurrent phenomena within the data (words, phrases, discursive legitimation patterns). For the *meso* level I created three open codes (*Attitudes and expectations towards labour and educational market/Attitudes and expectations towards welfare*

and transition regime/Attitudes and expectations towards YAS). Using this code-system as a basis to organize the data, I next coded all the interviews with implementers and providers of integration generating various sub-codes. Taking the second open code as an example, I was able to create various sub-codes like 'free adherence procedures', 'individualized support', 'prevention of intergenerational transmission of poverty' or 'work first vs. education first debate' and many more. Each of these sub-codes is attached to multiple quotes throughout the data. This allows to analyse and compare, which implementer/provider of integration said what in which setting and deepen my understanding of the various positions and justifications of these actors. This way, the formulation of first concepts and categories emerging from the data is possible.

The second part of the coding procedure – *axial* coding – refers to the process of putting the concepts and categories in relation to each other. The main goal here is to reconstruct empirically anchored categories. The concepts and interconnectedness of the categories are refined and reviewed in order to deepen the knowledge about the categories. This can be illustrated by using a core category, which emerged after putting the various sub-codes (like the above-mentioned ones) in relation to each other – the 'welfare dependency of YAS'. This notion is mostly not referred to explicitly by the implementers or providers of integration. However, it is implicitly present amongst different sub-codes: within the debate 'work first vs. education first debate' some implementers or providers of integration argued for instance that YAS should not get 'accustomed' to social assistance and find work as quickly as possible – referencing to the inherent risk of not being able to get out of welfare and becoming 'dependent'. Others argued that receiving social assistance should not be a 'life plan' for YAS – alluding again to the dependency risk but for other reasons (sub-code 'prevention of intergenerational transmission of poverty'). I proceeded in the same manner for other emerging categories like the core category 'deservingness' for instance. There were numerous references towards the need to detect the 'right' YAS and to find a matching measure to prevent squandering the limited resources of the cantons.

Ultimately, I repeated this procedure until I was able to formulate an integrated analysis. This refers to the last coding step – *selective* coding – which means selecting the most relevant codes and categories and their interconnectedness. For this step, the perspective of the 'work ethics' was helpful as it guided my analytical focus regarding the selection of the relevant categories.

The analytical stage of *selective* coding serves as heuristic frame in order to formulate assumptions with respect to the relation between categories and subcategories. Thus, this coding procedure resulted in the formulation of seven narratives for the meso level (Chapter 4.3) and five core categories for the micro level (Chapter 5). The term ‘narrative’ is used to capture the storylines of the interviewed experts regarding their legitimations or their critical standpoint on what other actors and governmental units are doing (asking *why* YAS are a social problem, *what* should we do about it, or *what* is the right plan, etc.).

One important added value of this evaluation procedure in general is the potential for comparison and contrast across the two policy levels (meso and micro). For instance, one recurrent concept associated with the core category of ‘deservingness’ is the affirmation of several implementers that the YAS should present a certain set of features (like being motivated for example) before sending him or her into a specific integration programme. Otherwise, there is little chance of success and the YAS in question would add another negative experience to his or her already difficult life trajectory and valuable resources would be squandered. Therefore, YAS need to adapt to this context and behave accordingly, which I was able to disclose by analysing their perceptions. Another example is the emerging narrative found within the group of implementers in both cantons that YAS should understand that welfare is only temporary and not a ‘life plan’. This corresponds with the narrative found within the youngsters in both cantons, which states that YAS present themselves recurrently as more responsible than other YAS in order to make clear that they do not want to stay indefinitely within the social assistance regime. In other words, the discourse patterns of YAS mirror the perspective of the implementers – enhancing the empirical evidence and validity of the narrative.

This procedure has been reiterated on every level (cases and groups of interviewees) and put into relation until a variety of narratives have been reconstructed from the data. Further analysis showed for instance that moral understandings of welfare dependency and deservingness come together to create an ambiguous context, which tends to feed off paternalistic (necessary rite of passage to adulthood) and neo-liberal (individual responsibility to persist within a competitive context) moral values.

4.4 Field experiences and limitations of the research

The phase of data collection lasted from early 2017 to the end of 2018. The organization of the interviews with the implementers proved to be straightforward and without any complications. Most of them were eager to share their thoughts and views on the subject. Most of them were strategically involved with further developing and implementing social policies and as such, were shaping the cantonal discourse on youth unemployment. The first contacts were made by e-mail and telephone. I presented the research interest at the beginning of every interview in order to be transparent regarding my specific perspective on social policies. However, I made sure not to divulge the specific theoretical lens of the work ethics in order to minimize the risk of bias regarding their legitimization discourses.

The organization of the interviews with the YAS proved to be more complicated. However, this came as no surprise as previous qualitative research did confirm the difficulty to reach this social group (see for instance, Fuchs, Gellermann, and Kutzner 2018b on 'Connecting with the Disconnected'). As a first attempt to make contact, I introduced the research project to YAS with a letter detailing the project and asking for their participation. The director of the social service in Basel agreed to support the outreach and the social workers helped distribute the letter to the YAS during their counselling sessions. After this tactic failed to bear fruits, I spent two weeks at the social service in order to encounter social assistance beneficiaries myself. I actively made contact with several YAS, who were waiting for their counselling sessions and tried to motivate them for an interview by emphasizing the importance of their experiences and knowledge about social assistance. This was more successful as several YAS responded initially to the call – however, only two out of six made it to the appointment. One can presume that the initial willingness to participate is one thing, while the actual participation in an in-depth and personal interview is another matter entirely. The conscious choice had been made not to work with financial incentives but rather with the intrinsic motivations of YAS to speak about their experiences with the social assistance regime. Naturally, the anonymity of personal information (with the exception of gender) has been guaranteed. After having successfully conducted my first two interviews in Basel-City with YAS, I decided to contact other institutions (the integration programmes MoveOn in Geneva and AMIE in Basel-City) in order to have more chances of encountering other YAS. This proved more successful as three YAS from each programme declared their consent for the

interviews. I spent several days in both programmes – even participating in a daily activity at MoveOn in Geneva (preparing lunch). The location of the encounters varied as the YAS themselves chose where the interview would take place. I met four YAS at the locations of the respective programmes (AMIE and MoveOn) and the other four YAS either in cafés or at my office in Basel (eight interviews with YAS in total).

It was important to select YAS who had recent experience with an integration measure, as the aim was to capture their lived experiences within those social contexts. Furthermore, the administration of such measures by the social services is based on a negotiation between the implementers and YAS, which can reveal narratives of legitimation practices and reflect the current socio-political shift of ‘education first’. Although the ‘education first’ strategy shapes the socio-political alignment of all cantons, given the strong federalist structure of the Swiss welfare state, it is important to mention that the results cannot be generalized for all other twenty-four cantons. The interviews have all been anonymized – with the exception of their gender in order to detect disparities and patterns regarding this aspect – as welfare policies tend to reproduce binary gender conceptions and gender inequalities (see for instance Orloff 1993).

It is important to look at the field experiences and the data sample with respect to its quality and potential to represent the social group of the YAS. Three major factors need to be discussed due to either their general potential to produce a bias or their limitations with respect to the presented results of this research project (Chapters 5 and 6).

Difficulty to reach the most disadvantaged

A first bias that became apparent during fieldwork and which had a direct impact on the data sample is the fact that I could not control or influence, which YAS ultimately would agree to meet me for an interview and speak about their trajectories and experiences with social assistance and other welfare institutions. There are indications that point to a specific vulnerability bias. Four YAS who initially accepted to participate in Basel did not show up to the appointment. All four cancelled at the last minute and they were chance encounters at the social service in Basel. One could imagine that the more vulnerable and disadvantageous the life situation and trajectory of these YAS are, the more there was a chance of cancellation as the interview setting required disclosing sensitive information about themselves. Although a safe

environment was promised (anonymity for instance), these YAS took a risk by talking about their ambiguous experiences with various welfare institutions. Ironically, much like the inability of current social policies to address the issues of the most disadvantaged individuals (Bonoli 2020), qualitative researcher deal with a similar challenge as there are practical limitations in reaching the most vulnerable and collecting their perspectives. Based on this assumption, I must consider the possibility that the eight encountered YAS represent a relatively privileged subgroup of all the YAS with a certain level of resiliency.

Limit possibilities regarding generalization of the results

As indicated earlier, the purpose of the present research is not to make generalizing observations and interpretations of current social policies addressed to YAS in Switzerland but rather to illustrate and critically reflect the situation in two cantons, who both have considerably altered and enhanced their activities with respect to the YAS. The two case studies reveal discursive patterns and narratives within their institutional setting, and they allow the discussion of the formulated hypotheses (Chapter 3.5). The focus is to understand and reconstruct the historic evolution of cantonal policies and how they process, legitimize, and implement their current activities and not to draw generalized conclusions. The major contribution of the analysis is the in-depth reconstruction of discursive patterns and narratives, and their moral underpinnings present at the time of research in both cantons.

The Covid-19 pandemic

The present publication draws on data collected before the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Without questioning the validity of the collected data, it is important to bear in mind that the current application of social policies and the concrete social assistance circumstances, with which YAS have to deal, changed radically. The long-term effects of the pandemic cannot be ascertained at this particular point in time. However, two studies have been published, one addressing the short-term effects of the pandemic on individuals living in precarious socio-economic situations in Geneva (Bonvin et al. 2020) and another addressing the short-term effects of the pandemic on the social services and their beneficiaries in Zurich (Lätsch, Eberitzsch, and Brink 2020). These studies give us some indications.

The former report (Bonvin et al. 2020:33) demonstrates that the emergency measures of the canton and the federal state focused primarily on economic measures and not the support of individuals who already lived in precarious life conditions before the outbreak of the pandemic. Indeed, the main measure was to enhance the partial unemployment benefits with the aim of preventing mass unemployment due to inability to work during phases of lockdown. Social groups like undocumented workers and homeless or unemployed individuals without access to social assistance benefits were amongst those most affected. These groups were dependent on the support of private ad-hoc initiatives of various associations and religious communities for their basic needs (food distribution). The second report (Lätsch et al. 2020:21) focused more specifically on the social assistance and showed an increase in social assistance applications in the first two weeks of the lockdown mid-March 2020. Furthermore, the authors discuss the inability to execute certain procedures like the various counselling activities of social workers due to the pandemic. They also discuss the potential benefits or drawbacks of the reduced necessity to show up at the social services. On the one hand, counselling sessions can be beneficial for social assistance beneficiaries because hidden immaterial hardships can be detected during such encounters with social workers and support can be initiated based on these encounters. On the other hand, counselling sessions are ambiguous because they are also used to control, orientate, and sanction unapproved behaviour of social assistance beneficiaries. In this perspective, not having to go to appointments at the social service could also have represented much-needed relief for certain beneficiaries.

These two studies did not provide information with respect to YAS specifically; however, based on these preliminary results, one can presume that the pandemic touched YAS specifically where they were most vulnerable. The most precarious of the YAS, those without stable housing for instance, with health issues, and/or looking for an apprenticeship in economic sectors with fewer opportunities, are comparatively more disadvantaged. The fact that social services has reduced its counselling activities might represent a relief for YAS because of less control or policing or it might also mean an enhanced material precariousness because they have fewer possibilities to develop a professional project and are therefore automatically segmented into a reduced minimum subsistence level.

5 Governing the YAS

The combination of internal reports mandated by the canton and expert interviews provide a rich data basis. It allows an in-depth reconstruction of both cantonal cases regarding their strategic take on youth unemployment with a special attention to the category of YAS. Another concern will be to look for similarities and differences between the two cases. Next, the emerging discursive patterns that encompass both cases will be analysed and discussed. Despite the nuances in their respective evolutions, both the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva are embedded in a broader societal and discursive context regarding YAS and the aim will be to distil these common patterns and abstract concepts emerging from the data. Throughout the analysis the analytical perspective of social policies as reinforcement of the ‘work ethics’ and ‘age’ will be dominant.

This chapter aims at answering the following research questions:

(1) How did the socio-political strategies develop among the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva? What are the similarities and differences between the two cases?

(2) What are the underlying discursive patterns and narratives?

The perspectives of the YAS themselves will be addressed in the following chapter and used to mirror the perspective of the implementers and providers of integration.

5.1 The historic evolution of the cantonal strategies

In Switzerland, difficulties for the youth to enter the labour market in a substantial way can be retraced to the 1990s (Pisoni 2018b, 2018a). By the beginning of the 21st century, the ‘problematic youth’ became a specific category of concern for the cantons (see Chapter 2). In order to understand the evolution of the strategic focus of the cantonal administrations of Basel-City and Geneva, the goals of the relevant institutions as well as different moments of policy changes have been retraced. This allows a critical reconstruction of the current socio-political alignment. As was outlined in Chapter 4, the main institutions within the cantons charged with the responsibility of implementing specific policies towards YAS are social assistance, the employment office, and the vocational training department (‘the implementers’). These actors collaborate with what I call the ‘providers of integration’ – associations, foundations, and social firms that run integration programmes specifically

designed for young unemployed adults. It is important to note that the analysis is limited to the emerging discursive patterns and narratives of these two actors and does not consider public and parliamentary debate nor does it incorporate the media discourse.

Usually, these reports aim at making an inventory of the situation and at determining the features of the target group. In doing so, they actively contribute to defining the 'problematic' features and the deficiencies of these young people. A second goal of these reports is to analyse the handling of the various offices of the cantonal administration and evaluating their success in order to give recommendations to their contracting authority. These reports are valuable because they deliver some insight on the strategic focus of the cantons, the evolution of the focus and the justifications for the chosen strategic course. In conjunction with the conducted expert interviews, this data allows an in-depth reconstruction of the two cantonal cases regarding their critical, strategical shifts in the past twenty years regarding this emerging socio-political category of 'problematic youth'. As the reports are part of broader data corpus, they are not systematically referred to. The following analysis is the result of an in-depth analysis of the administrative reports, which has been combined with the expert knowledge of the implementers. However, an exhaustive list of the studied administrative reports is attached (see Appendix 1).

The following section retraces the strategical evolution within the canton of Basel-City and the alignment of the main institutions in charge of dealing with young adults without vocational training and receiving social assistance (YAS) – the YAS being the specific socio-political target group I'm interested in.

5.1.1 'Preventing social assistance' – the case of Basel-City

The canton of Basel-City experienced a growth of the phenomena of 'problematic youth' in the early 2000s with a growing number of cases of young adults on social assistance and without perspectives of getting out of this regime. According to the current director of Gap cantonal reports (see Appendix 1) and specific studies (Drilling 2004; Schaffner 2007; Schaffner and Drilling 2013), there were several factors that lead to the exceptional circumstances in the early 2000s. They all point to an unprecedented increase of cases of young people between eighteen and twenty-five years of age applying and remaining on social assistance. In 2004, the percentage of young adults (18

to 25 years of age) in need of social assistance peaked at a historical high of 11.2 percent (Götz 2009, see Appendix 1). This resulted in an overburdening of the cantonal social services with a growing number of long-term cases of young beneficiaries.

A first major factor explaining this evolution was the structural shortage of apprenticeship positions for under-performing school graduates. Secondly, the requirements for entering vocational education had increased, leaving these school graduates with no vocational perspectives and consequently no income. Third, there was no coordinated overall strategy on a cantonal level to react accordingly in order to provide alternative pathways for these young people. Finally, according to the observation of an implementer from Gap, there was a “somewhat more repressive social system” in place, which resulted in a growing number of YAS in precarious financial situations and without concrete measures of accompaniment:

“I think we had over 1000 young people in the year 2005 or 2006 receiving social welfare and it was a desolate situation. They hired more people and they unearthed cases and confronted these people. Then they realized that they were no longer in contact with social services. So, we only spend money. Therefore, the problem was also homemade because due to the increase of social assistance cases, the system was overburdened. We just let the young people slide. We paid dearly for this for years.” (Implementer, Gap, Basel-City)²²

Within the social assistance system, a first reaction was to employ more social workers charged with a long-term accompaniment of these YAS who were left without any professional perspectives. On the one hand, the implementers at that time realized that there is a need to reduce the caseload of social service employees and on the other hand, the employees needed to have specific skills and competences in dealing with the “special needs” of the YAS.

“We started to employ social workers for the care of long-term unemployed young people. Before 2008, the cases were only managed by professionals with commercial training, also those concerning young adults in long-term support. Their workload was too heavy to work appropriately with the beneficiaries and most importantly

22 All interviews were conducted by the author in German or French. The English translations were done by the author.

they didn't have the qualifications to work with them." (Social service, Basel)

The increase of youth unemployment put pressure on the administration; the need for a strategical change of action was recognized. The governing council finally deployed an interdepartmental 'strategy group youth unemployment' in 2005 in order to address the issue of "problematic youth", a term explicitly used by members of the council (Schürmann and Arnold 2006a: 5). For the first time in the canton of Basel-City, a political commitment in reducing youth unemployment was articulated. An annual fund of four million Swiss francs to finance measures was installed and the 'strategy group' became a permanent, interdepartmental actor of the administration with members from the social assistance department, the employment office, the vocational training department, as well as the disability insurance office. The strategy group opted for a preventive approach, in the sense that no youngster should drop out of the intended educational and vocational trajectory.

They defined two areas of activity, which aimed at supporting a successful transition from school to work for adolescents and young adults (Schürmann and Arnold 2006a:25): *Initial professional integration* and *professional disintegration*. The semantic separation of 'initial integration' and 'disintegration' refers to the attributed level of employability of the young people. Hence, the designed measures in the first category are supposed to ensure a smooth initial integration for young people who have certain difficulties but do not yet present the typical problematic features of a youth trajectory with multiple problems. For the adolescents and young people who fall into the second category, the canton anticipates a long-term state of 'professional disintegration' and consequently, expresses the desire to create a new focus on social integration and reinforcing the counter-performance principle.

The first area of activities (*initial integration*) involves different traditional measures that aim to support the adolescents and young adults in mastering the first transition from school to apprenticeship (post-compulsory education). They are implemented in every canton in Switzerland. The strategic goal is to 'prepare a solid labour market integration.' The most prominent example for such measures is the motivational semester organized by the cantonal employment office. They explicitly target all adolescents who either have no vocational solution after compulsory school or adolescents and young adults who dropped out of general education or an apprenticeship. For six months, these young adults work on scholastic or language deficits

and improve their job application skills. Other examples include vocational guidance and also the introduction of school social work. These measures aim at preventing long-term unemployment and the emergence of the phenomena of the YAS. Their role is to detect under-performing adolescents at school and accompany them successfully during the transition into an apprenticeship and into the labour market.

The second area of activities (*professional disintegration*) focuses on the group of young people who did not master the aforementioned juncture and permanently remain in a state of 'professional disintegration.' In other words, this strategic focus deals with the emerging phenomena of YAS. It "supports, motivates but also constrains young people between 18 and 25 years of age to achieve economic independence" (Schürmann and Arnold 2006a:25). According to cantonal reports, the first area of activities (*initial professional integration*) is not ideal for some young people because they are orientated towards a return to paid work as quickly as possible, which cannot be achieved in their cases (Schürmann and Arnold 2006a:34-37). The social assistance department plays a major role as most of these young people have no financial means and are beneficiaries of social assistance.

Three notable aspects need to be mentioned regarding the second area of activities (*professional disintegration*). First, Schürmann and Arnold (2006a:35) mention the need to reorganize internal procedures by applying case management as a principle. This came with the internal separation of employees with only administrative duties (e.g., inquiry of entitlements or transfer of welfare benefits) from the social workers in charge of professional counsel and accompaniment of beneficiaries. In this context, a specialized case management team for young adults within the social service of Basel-City was created. Second, the report mentions the need to enhance the inventory of measures and the fact that these measures cannot be narrowed down to 'professional measures' aiming at a direct labour market integration but have to focus on 'social integration' since the young people are not ready yet for the high-threshold measures of the employment office. Third, the report indicates the need to enforce a model of counter-performance in order to introduce the young people to a society based on meritocracy and to have a tool against uncooperative young social assistance beneficiaries. Interestingly, these measures are explicitly linked to other strategical goals regarding the social assistance department - limiting the increasing costs and fighting against the abuse of social assistance benefits (Schürman and Arnold 2006a:36).

In the year 2006, the canton expressed its will to enhance the overall coordination of the existing measures and engage all the concerned actors in a common goal: the prevention of youth unemployment. In order to achieve that, the canton decided to implement a mix of preventive measures for adolescents at risk of failing at the first educational juncture (school to vocational training) and constraining measures for YAS like enforcing test work assignments under threat of sanctions (employability evaluation) and a reduction of the subsistence level.

Based on this understanding, the pilot project “Counter-performance model for uncooperative young adults receiving social assistance in Basel-City” was introduced at the end of 2006. The pilot project targeted a subgroup of YAS, those considered ‘able to work’ but who had dismissed or ignored the proposed integration measures in previous years. This pilot project ran for two years and was not renewed afterwards, based on the lack of participation of the YAS and on the results of an external evaluation (Götz 2009). The evaluation concluded, notably, that in light of the multiple stresses and problems these YAS had to face in their current life situation, as well as their relatively bad preparation for a labour market integration, the model was not effective enough. There would be no effect regarding cost containment and furthermore, the narrow application of the model as a ‘sanction instrument’ could have multiple detrimental effects, such as aggravating the precarious life situations of the YAS or even dissuading other young people in precariousness from applying for social assistance. Though the model as such has been abandoned, the use of counter-performance under threat of sanctions as an instrument was maintained – as it is considered a pedagogical instrument that can potentially unblock certain ‘blocked’ situations.²³

“We did not take the integration mandate seriously. To receive social assistance as a young adult is not a life plan. We are opposed to this. And we will design the system so that it is not like this. And even if it is, well then you have to expect massive cuts of your social assistance benefits. From that perspective, the counter-performance model was not a repressive instrument. I always considered it a pedagogical instrument in order to unblock certain blocked situations. As a last resort, the small repressive counter-performance

23 A situation is considered ‘blocked’ when a young person is receiving social assistance for a longer period (more than one year) and has limited or no social and/or professional prospects.

intervention can be helpful. And the communication behind the intervention was always: Receiving social assistance is not a life plan.” (Implementer, Gap, Basel-City)

According to this implementer, when it comes to ‘problematic youth’, the welfare state should leave no young person behind and these young people should not be relying on social assistance for too long. Another important aspect is that the ‘blocked’ situation is manifestly pushed onto the shoulders of the YAS themselves: YAS need to understand that social assistance is not a life plan.

In the year 2006, the canton Basel-City introduced a new structure named the Centre for Work Integration (Arbeitsintegrationszentrum, AIZ), in charge of segmenting all the beneficiaries of the employment office and social assistance. The AIZ is still operational to this day. It is an evaluation centre for all beneficiaries of social assistance. For the concrete accompaniment of beneficiaries, it is particularly important during the application process of social assistance (intake process), because it is the AIZ that determines the level of employability and co-defines the integration plan. The strategic goal behind the creation of AIZ can be described with the terms control and regulation. Control, because the canton needs to have access to all the unemployed people between fifteen and sixty-five years who are considered ‘able to work’. By doing this, the phenomenon of ‘problematic youth’ remains manageable and the risk of not knowing where young people with discontinuous trajectories are, becomes negligible. The other strategic aspect of the AIZ is regulation, because the canton needs to make sure that scarce financial resources are invested in the ‘right’ target group of unemployed individuals – namely the ones with a potential for change:

“Because segmentation is closely related to regulating resources in an effective way. Hence, we simply invest more resources when we identify a potential for change.” (Implementer, AIZ, Basel)

This evolution laid the basis for the next strategical policy-shift ‘education before employment’ or ‘education first’ as I call it, which came about in 2010. There was an intensification of the transitional problems of the adolescents and young adults at the critical junctures from school to vocational training and from vocational training to employment in the early 2000. The above-mentioned interdepartmental Strategy Group Youth Unemployment in Basel-City understood the importance of VET for a sustainable labour

market integration. Consequently, the new structure Gap was founded in August 2008 under the leadership of the cantonal department for vocational training. This structure embodies the implementation of ‘case management vocational training’ with the aim of identifying adolescents and young adults with transitional difficulties and accompanying them from school to work. Since then, the strategic goal for the canton was to move towards a coordinated ‘education first’ policy with Gap as the main actor coordinating the activities. This policy shift greatly affected the daily work of the AIZ and the social assistance, because the goal was no longer closing YAS cases as soon as possible but whenever possible reorientating the YAS towards an apprenticeship. In other words, the canton strategically accepts to pay for the financial needs of the YAS for a longer period of time with the expectation that these individuals will achieve a more sustainable labour market integration later on.

The first three years of Gap have been evaluated externally (Haller and Hübeline 2011) and the study provides important insights regarding this strategic rethinking. First, Gap, on an organizational level, functions as an institution that coordinates and links the other interdepartmental actors (employment office, AIZ, social assistance) involved with ‘problematic youth’. The goal is to shorten the routes between the different actors and to find the appropriate measure for the individual situation of the young people seeking support. Second, on an operational level, Gap is supposed to ‘penetrate’ the educational and vocational trajectory of the youngsters and act as a bridge to the critical junctures beyond institutional limitations of elementary school, vocational training institutions, and the providers of integration. In this perspective, Gap is in charge of preventing the educational disintegration of young people between fourteen and twenty-five years of age, acting as a networking agent and (without adding another layer to the institutional jungle) an accompaniment in order to disentangle the already dense institutional framework for the benefit of the youngsters. Every YAS who ends up finding an apprenticeship will not only be back on the desirable track, but the cantonal social assistance administration will also have less expenses for the livelihood of the YAS.

The last policy shift that affects the strategic alignment of the canton regarding YAS is the elaboration of a comprehensive concept for the care of beneficiaries of social assistance (Departement für Wirtschaft, Soziales und Umwelt des Kantons Basel-Stadt (2014). Before this restructuring of social assistance, there was a strict demarcation of competences. The administra-

tional personnel were responsible for all the cases, as they were the ones verifying the financial eligibility of incoming claimants and only if a need for social accompaniment was indicated would a social worker assist the beneficiaries. With the implementation of the new concept entitled Q3 in 2016, the administrative procedure and the responsibilities were reversed. The social workers are in charge of the cases at any given time. Conceptually, the procedure is based on the understanding that the material aspect and the personal and social aspect of the support are intertwined and affect one another. Strategically, the goal is to enhance the adequacy of the accompaniment once the beneficiaries of social assistance are eligible for support. The new procedure explicitly cites the purpose of investing more precisely and effectively. This follows the already mentioned economic aim, which specifies that in order to be cost-efficient and effective, you only want to invest in those beneficiaries who show potential for change.

The interviewed implementers in Basel-City, with the exception of the providers of integration (see chapter 5.2.2), all speak of a consolidation phase in the years since 2016. The introduction of the new social assistance concept is considered the last missing piece that completes the institutional framework aligned around an economical segmentation logic and a will to collaborate between actors and coordinate the existing measures around the individual needs of young unemployed people and YAS.

5.1.2 Summary of the Basel-City case

To sum up, the canton of Basel-City changed its structure in the early 2000s with the creation of a strategy group that systemically addresses the question of unemployment amongst youth and the transitional difficulties they might face from school to vocational training and then to paid work. This strategy group had a major impact in orchestrating the new administrative structure. The first decade of 21st century were characterized socio-politically by creating new offices and measures (AIZ, counter-performance model) with the aim to have a better grasp on 'problematic youth' and by pushing forward a segmentation practice that follows to a great extent an economic logic: only invest in those YAS with an expected return on investment.

On the one hand, this reorientation was designed to contain certain costs, which explains the reduction of the subsistence level for young adults within social assistance. Furthermore, the maximal level of rent and health care coverage had been capped as well. On the other hand, the canton

expressed the intention to enhance internal control measures in order to fight “abusiveness within the social assistance” (Schürmann and Arnold 2006a:37). These strategical adjustments reflect certain discursive developments based on the need to have more control over the social phenomena of YAS and on the need to reduce social assistance expenses overall.

Beyond the more transparent economic reorientation of the cantonal regime, the study of the cantonal reports as well as interviews with implementers demonstrated first indications of implicit paternalistic discursive patterns as well. These implicit patterns complement the more explicit economic segmentation practice as they should ‘teach’ YAS how the system works and induce more compliant behaviour. In this vein, reciprocity and a certain firmness when dealing with YAS is needed in order to make YAS understand that receiving social assistance is not a ‘life plan.’ Furthermore, most of the implementers affirmed that their job is to bring the YAS up to speed with the required skills for the labour market and this task is educational – meaning the YAS have not yet understood what is at stake. We find here first indications of the predominance of what has been labelled theoretically as part of governmental activities that ‘reinforce the work ethics.’ Social policies nowadays tend to address exclusion on an individual level by focusing on enhancing employability. Interestingly, the moral legitimization of this focus in this case is that youngsters will learn valuable lessons by adapting to the required skills of the labour market. Regardless of judging such an approach as purposeful or not, in doing so, the responsibility to own up for the unemployment situation and the lack of VET is attributed to the YAS.

Also, with the ‘education first’ policy shift, the vocational training department has started to play a leading role in defining the content and direction of the canton. The studied reports as well as the conducted interviews suggest that the shift has cemented the economic segmentation practice intertwined with the above-mentioned paternalistic alignment. ‘Problematic youth’ has been redefined to be understood primarily as youth with a lack of education. The embodiment of this evolution is the emergence of the Gap counselling offer for adolescents and young people with setbacks in their educational trajectory.

Finally, with the new Q3 concept, social services push for a more selective approach, applying a method of close accompaniment (where behavioural change is expected) and less involvement in cases (where there is no change expected). The potential for change is always interpreted with

respect to getting individuals and households out of social assistance, as it is considered a state of unwanted dependency and a debt to society. These first indications regarding the Basel-City case tend to be in line with what the reviewed literature regarding activation and social investment policies suggest. For the YAS, this context is highly ambiguous as it generates both support and stigmatization at the same time. The selective segmentation procedure means that only those YAS with a certain potential (work ethics, sufficient scholastic level, social competences, mental stability, etc.) and the most realistic chances for an apprenticeship will be selected. The other ones will be left with limited perspectives as they are considered too costly an investment.

5.1.3 Centralizing the activities – the case of the canton of Geneva

According to internal studies (Rastoldo et al. 2016), in the early 2000s, the acknowledgment of growing transitional difficulties of adolescents and young adults towards a vocational or educational training after compulsory school was the starting point of governmental changes within the canton of Geneva. Internal reports showed most notably that adolescents had relatively smooth transitions when heading for a general post-obligatory education. However, when it came to transitions towards a vocational training, the processes were much more complex and non-linear, which means that a great number of young people were dropping out either of the bridging measures or later on of their apprenticeships (Rastoldo et al. 2007).

This led to the first important policy change. Rastoldo et al. (2016) argue that in the mid-2000s the strategical groundwork was laid for the introduction of case management vocational training as a guiding principle as well as a coordinated interdepartmental course of action in later years. The assessment was that there is a need for long-term coordinated accompaniment of young people at risk of dropping out of the intended educational life course. Interdepartmental task forces were created with representatives of different sectors like vocational training, social assistance, social work, employment office, and municipalities in order to discuss the establishment of an interdepartmental network with a focus on social accompaniment and a return to training for young people without educational prospects (Rastoldo et al. 2007).

In the case of the canton of Geneva, there is an institutional reason for a comparatively delayed consideration of the YAS phenomenon. Until 2012, the canton of Geneva had an upstream social benefit – the RMCAS (Revenu minimum cantonal d'aide sociale pour les chômeurs en fin de droit), which

had been specifically designed for long-term unemployed people at the end of unemployment benefit eligibility. This means that the accumulation of long-term unemployed young adults receiving social assistance could systematically not occur in the canton of Geneva up to that point. They remained in the RMCAS regime, which was part of the employment office. It was not until 2012 that the canton of Geneva abolished the RMCAS with the introduction of the modified cantonal law for social assistance (LIASI).

As the following interview passage illustrates, the transfer of cases from the RMCAS to social assistance put the competent department under pressure because one of the critiques of the RMCAS regime was that it was not achieving good enough results regarding the re-integration of long-term unemployed people in Geneva. According to a ‘provider of integration’ interview, there were two consequences with respect to the termination of the RMCAS. The first one is that the RMCAS cases were transferred to social assistance (in Geneva called Hospice Général) leading to a sudden increase of caseload for social assistance. The second one is that the political burden and expectation of dealing with young unemployed people and integrating them in a sustainable manner was also transferred to the social assistance regime.

“So, this was in the early 2000s. Roughly speaking, an unemployed person that was at the end of eligibility regarding unemployment insurance and because there were many of those people, they were transferred to another structure of the Hospice called RMCAS I think. [...] The cases were still managed by the Office cantonal de l’emploi (OCE), but there were no counsellors and no benefits. However, the cases were still there, and the people were in the unemployment statistics. For the financial part, they went to the RMCAS structure. They received financial support and in return, because there were counter-performances required, so in return they had to seek out apprenticeships or work at public organizations or associations. And what happened was that more than four thousand cases accumulated at the OCE of those people and the situation did not change for them. They came there and they never came out again. So, it was not very effective in terms of integration. So, after many years of different projects, they came to the conclusion of reforming the LIASI, the law on social assistance and integration, and they created the new way of functioning. That is to say, when you arrive at social welfare, you need to subscribe at the Hospice, where

they make evaluations over four weeks' time in order to see if the person is linked to a social or professional problem. If there is a social problem you are redirected to the municipal social services (the Centre d'action social CAS) and if not, you are redirected to the SRP (Service de réinsertion professionnelle). But what is happening in fact? The problem of unemployment is transferred from the unemployment office to the Hospice Général, to social assistance." (Provider of integration, Trajet, Geneva)

The abolishment of the RMCAS and the introduction of the new law on social assistance and integration, the LIASI, in 2012 changed the landscape and functioning of the cantonal social assistance regime – which also affected the YAS. The regime change reduced the material substance level – as the financial benefits are now considerably lower than the level of RMCAS – and it changed the segmentation practice. Since the introduction of the new LIASI, for every new social assistance claimant the first four weeks are designed to analyse the professional competences of the claimant in order to categorize him or her into the 'social issue' group or 'professional issue' group. Claimants with a social issue are assigned to social workers dispatched in the municipal social services of the canton (the CAS). Claimants with a professional issue are assigned to professional counsellors of the newly created unit Service de réinsertion professionnelle (SRP) of the Hospice Général.

Prior to this policy change – the abolishment of the RMCAS and the introduction of the modified LIASI – the canton continued to push forward a coordinated course of action regarding adolescents and young adults with a risk of dropping out of the educational life course. In 2009, an interinstitutional unit called EQIP (Encouragement à la qualification et à l'insertion professionnelle) was introduced supported by seven different institutions: The department for vocational training, the social assistance department and employment office, the youth office, the association FASe (Fondation genevoise pour l'animation socio-culturelle) and the municipalities. The importance of the FASe in shaping and implementing the cantonal policies regarding YAS is detailed further below. The strategic goals of EQIP were preventing unemployed adolescents and young adults without vocational training from claiming social assistance, encouraging them to find an apprenticeship, and strengthening the overall effort and coordination of the engaged actors within the cantonal borders (CEPP 2011). In the following two years since the creation of EQIP, several measures and programmes were created or

newly assigned to this interinstitutional unit. One of them is the GSI (Gestion du suivi individualisé) which is equivalent to a case management vocational training measure and targets all adolescents and young adults between fifteen to twenty-five years of age who wish to reboot their educational and vocational trajectory.

This is a notable policy change because it represents the strategical shift of responsibility for unemployed youth from the employment office to the vocational training department. The phenomenon of youth unemployment had been until then under the leadership of the employment office, as that office was structurally in charge of the bridging measures for the 'problematic youth'. The corresponding unit within the employment office was consequently erased in favour of the GSI. Strategically, the 'education first' policy became apparent within the structure of Geneva from then on by more systematically pushing vocational training as a suitable integration path for the YAS. In 2011, two separate studies evaluated the introduction of EQIP and came, amongst other things, to the same conclusion that there is a need for further centralization and interdepartmental collaboration (CEPP 2011; Felder 2011). Both emphasize that there is a dense territorial grid, which considerably confuses the social workers and counsellors as well as the young people seeking help. As a result, the various interventions of the actors and their professionals were not expedient enough because of a lack of coordination. In order to achieve better integration quotas regarding the YAS, the canton would need to reassess the alignment with a focus on concerted action of all involved actors. This led to the next major policy change in 2013, which is characterized by these two issues: centralization and cooperation. This policy change can be described by an administrative willingness to centralize the different structures in order to have more control over the many young adults without vocational training and the activities of all the actors within the territorial grid.

This process was accompanied by a reframing and enlargement of the mandate of existing offers. The first one is the enlargement of a specialized social assistance unit: the transformation of the unit InforJeunes to Point Jeunes. This new structure was set out to become a competence centre for the youth within the social assistance regime. Whereas the preceding offer InforJeunes was conceptualized merely as an information centre for YAS, the new structure Point Jeunes defines itself as a competence centre for YAS with specialized educators in charge of the accompaniment. Structurally

this means that the municipal social services, the CAS, oversaw the financial aspect of the support and Point Jeunes took care of the ‘social’ aspect. The two following quotes illustrate this reframing process. The first implementer works for the association Accroche and was personally involved in the creation of Point Jeunes before working for Accroche. This person affirms the strategic willingness to create a competence centre for YAS. The second implementer works for Point Jeunes and stresses the importance of bringing all involved frontline workers and various professionals (educators and social workers) with different roles together ‘under one roof’ in order to create a more permeable and coherent assistance regime.

“We went from InforJeunes to Point Jeunes. Point Jeunes represents the centralization of the individualized social assistance with a will, in any event, to create a very clear competence centre regarding the question of the young adults.” (Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

“Because on the one hand you had in the CAS... you had frontline workers and social workers who were primarily in charge of delivering social assistance benefits for the target group of the young adults. The target group ‘young adults,’ it’s eighteen to twenty-five years of age. On the other hand, you had a team in charge of prevention with educators who worked primarily on, let us say, on the corollary on a broader scale. They worked on the environment of the beneficiaries of social assistance. So, at one time what was put on the table was: ‘hey, why do we not build one roof over these different profiles of professions in order to create a multi-disciplinary team that can offer a joint intake of young adults and this intake will be at one place.’ And this offer should be, let us say, more linear and less, let us say, geographically distant. Consequently, we created Point Jeunes.” (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva).

The strategic aim of Point Jeunes is prevention – in a double sense. First, Point Jeunes wants to prevent young people from dropping out and to keep them on the right educational and vocational track. Secondly, Point Jeunes wants to prevent, whenever possible, a young person from finding him- or herself in financial need and thus, needing to apply for social assistance. The YAS category is by definition a category to be prevented within the social assistance, according to this perspective. The following passage illustrates this. In contrast to Basel-City, there is an explicit pedagogical mandate for the

professionals in charge to reorientate the young people who come to Point Jeunes. These professionals are ‘educators’, and their role is to challenge the young people by questioning their ‘choices’ – for instance, the choice to apply for social assistance. For this implementer, YAS are a special age category of beneficiaries because there appears to be a need of responsabilization in order to guide them. Furthermore, applying for social assistance is interpreted here as an individual choice and not an absolute social right that corresponds with an objective, concrete hardship.

“So, the result, let us say, the role of the educators, let us say, of the information centre, is to make sure that these vulnerable situations do not turn into a breakdown situation. That is the function. The question is, do we at one time assume with a set of given criteria that it is better to ask for social assistance or is it better, at one time, to work with the young adult and ask questions like ‘at a given time you have to put your acts on the table and face the choices you made.’ So, we ask the question, is it the function of social assistance to answer to those choices, while you had other, let us say, opportunities to pull through or other means that could have been mobilized in order to manage the situation.” (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva)

The particular moment when the YAS applies for social assistance is constructed as a trendsetting moment in his or her trajectory. The act of reaching out to social assistance is interpreted as morally wrong and while help might be granted later on, the first encounter is and should be used to remind the young applicant that his or her trajectory and ‘life choices’ are deviant and undesirable.

A second reframing and enlargement of an existing structure was the 2013 creation of Cap Formation out of the GSI. Instead of encouraging more collaboration via interdepartmental initiatives like EQIP, the aim was (and still is) to centralize all the relevant institutional jurisdictions and professionals. This means also to geographically regroup all the relevant actors in one place in order to create a direct proximity and enforce more collaboration between the involved cantonal actors. Cap Formation is under the leadership of the vocational training department, and professionals from the employment office and from Point Jeunes are directly involved locally at the offices. The following implementer from Cap Formation emphasizes the importance of case

management and the resultant lower caseload for the professionals working at Cap Formation. In the second quote, the same implementer explains how the creation of Cap Formation contributed to disentangle and demarcate the competences of each professional from the different units and how this would be beneficial for both the various involved actors (CAS, Point Jeunes, and Cap Formation) and for YAS as well.

“What really was a game changer, was the development of Cap Formation. This means that we went from a GSI system, ‘gestion du suivi individualisé’, to case management. That was very good at the beginning. Every ‘training consultant,’ I don’t know how else to call them, but every person employed by Cap Formation had a number of cases that was limited, so you could really apply the principles of case management.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

“A young person who arrives at Point Jeunes or has an appointment with a social worker elsewhere, he will probably ask: ‘Did you apply for internships? Did you do your research?’ And so forth. Then he comes to me and I will ask the same thing. ‘So, did you do your research, have you contacted some bosses?’ And so forth. And I will find that it is ambiguous for him. He is unsure who is in charge for the integration now. In contrast, here at Cap Formation, the social workers and also now in a way those who are at Point Jeunes, they know now that they are in charge of the social and financial support of the young people and that we are in charge of the professional integration and that we are competent to do that.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

The strategy of centralization in Geneva, combined with the willingness to have more control over their territory, went hand in hand with the allocation of more resources and discretionary power to the ‘training counsellors’. This logic can be described as ‘social investment’ (Bonoli 2012; Dahmen et al. 2017) as the canton has agreed to invest more resources now in order to prevent costs in the future. In this case, the costs are social and financial as well, as there would be young adults with no perspective for social participation and labour market integration – the latter being quintessential for the financing of the Swiss welfare state expenses. Since the governmental strategy is to create employability rather than employment, the focus is more on the

individualized one-on-one work between the professionals and the YAS. The goal is to 'lose' the smallest number possible of adolescents and YAS without perspectives within the educational and labour market. Hence, the idea is to professionalize the counselling procedures, achieve a better demarcation of the various roles (social worker, educators, and training counsellors) and structures (municipal and cantonal), and finally, to facilitate a close accompaniment of the young people by reducing the workload of the involved professionals.

A third structural change that can be subsumed under the tendency to centralize and coordinate as much as possible, is the creation of the foundation of Accroche – also in 2013. This following quote demonstrates the starting of point of this association with the core aim to bring the different institutions together in order to enhance the coordination amongst them:

“One of our explicit wishes at the beginning was precisely to have institutions as members. It is important that our members adhere as institutions in order to make sure that all the different institutions that work with the young adults who are having troubles can adjust and coordinate their areas of activities, benefits, and jurisdictions according to our common experiences.” (Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

According to this implementer, the assessment of the original founding members (the FASE, the social assistance department, and the commune of Geneva), was to acknowledge the fact that there is no adequate socio-political answer to the growing phenomenon of YAS with multiple problems. The tools of social assistance, the employment office, and vocational training department are neither supportive nor purposeful – at least not for all of them:

“These were the three main institutions that came together and made the assessment that there is a growing proportion of young people for whom we had nothing to offer, except an individual accompaniment that is too high-threshold. These are young people who have dropped out of the education system and are in a complex, precarious life situation. They are sufficiently on the fringe of society so that the classical bridging measures like the semester of motivation, more than anything, added another setback to their life course because they cannot hold on until the end of the measure.” (Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

The creation of Accroche must be acknowledged as one of the most recent and impactful changes within the canton of Geneva. Its purpose is to bring together every actor involved in the field and blur institutional lines since these lines are believed to have adverse effects for the YAS. However, as this quote demonstrates, the main strategic focus is the YAS in complex life situations, who have lived through several personal and educational setbacks. Even though the official alignment regarding YAS within the canton of Geneva is to push for an 'education first' policy, the trigger for the most recent structural change is, one could say, a declaration of the failure of this very alignment: affirming that the threshold for entering a stabilized trajectory within the educational system is not achievable for many YAS. Thus, the focus was to create a new measure in order to give those YAS a breathing space from the institutional narrative 'education first'. The new development within the canton Geneva is the realization that there is a need to innovate and to find adequate answers that address the psychological state of these young people. The consequence of this was the creation of a new measure designed specifically for YAS with multiple problems – Scène Active – in 2015. This measure accompanies young people in precarious life situations (not necessarily YAS) for one year, and during that year, the participants create and perform a theatre project. The focus of the integration measure is social and pedagogic, centred on re-building the confidence of the participants and not on scholastic deficiencies or on acquiring professional skills and competences.

Another association with a strategic and operational impact on social policies addressed to YAS in Geneva is the FASe. It comprises all social work activities labelled as 'mobile outreach' on the cantonal territory with the exception of the municipality of Geneva, which has its own department for mobile outreach. As the founding member of Accroche, it is very present on a strategical level and on the operational level as well. Its mobile outreach social workers (Travailleurs social hors-murs; TSHM) function as a buffer between the welfare and educational system and the YAS. Their aim is to build relationships with the 'precarious youth'. The FASe runs forty-seven municipal centres and in addition deploys several mobile outreach teams that try to 'reach out' to young adults and YAS in order to prevent discontinuous trajectories. The activities are also meant to assist the young adults in understanding the system and to inform them about where they would find appropriate support for their challenges. This following example illustrates how the FASe works with

young people and the involved institutions in order to prevent deinstitutionalized and thus harmful trajectories of the young people.

“Point Jeunes is responsible for the financial support of the young people. And we will collaborate with the public law foundation for housing to ensure that the young person can find an apartment. We will accompany him at irregular intervals, but just to stay in touch with him. And he will work with us until he has reached a certain level and then for instance, he will participate at ‘emploi jeunes’ [a specialized unit for youngsters without a VET at the municipality of Carouge] in the commune of Carouge with the perspective to go further with his professional project.” (Implementer, FASE, Geneva)

This example illustrates how the professionals of the FASE have the function to coordinate the different involved institutions. They make sure that there is a dialogue between the centralized institutions (in this example, Point Jeunes) and the decentralized institutions (in this example, the municipality of Carouge) or as the director of FASE puts it:

“We have an expert role, and we bring observations, and our mission is to work with the cantonal, public authorities. For the municipalities, we represent the transmission link with the cantonal institutions so to speak.” (Implementer, FASE, Geneva)

They also make sure that they stay in touch with the young person as they want to avoid ‘losing’ the young adults (the assumption is that his or her situation will worsen). The challenge to make him or her re-enter the system later on would be much more difficult. Conversely, while most of the analysed institutions are very formalized with delimited jurisdictions and access conditions in Geneva, the FASE stresses the aspect that they function on the principle of ‘free adherence’ and that they work with the desires and problematics of the youth.

“And today, we are still at this point. What we have created is really first and foremost a system of tracking and making contact with these young people. We want to use the characteristics of sociocultural animation, which means a free adherence approach. This means the young people who work with us adhere with what we offer them, and we offer to accompany them during their development

of a training journey. We have intensified this development over the years.” (Implementer, FASe, Geneva)

5.1.4 Summary of the Genevan case

To sum up, in the early 2000s it was the acknowledgment of growing transitional difficulties of adolescents and young adults to find their way into vocational or educational training combined with the assessment of an uncoordinated cantonal system that laid the groundwork for the current strategic alignment in the canton of Geneva. The canton pushes more or less the ‘education first’ narrative, claiming that it is the only sustainable trajectory that could open up integration possibilities for young people with transitional difficulties and for YAS. Strategically speaking, both cantons, Basel-City and Geneva, affirm that they want to ‘prevent’ adolescents and young adults from falling into discontinuous trajectories or even worse, being forced to apply for social assistance.

Prevention means in this context that they want to prevent the emergence of a generation of costly ‘welfare dependents’ without labour market perspectives. First indications from the collected data suggest that this ‘risk’ of permanent exclusion from the labour market is mainly borne by YAS themselves as the failure to master the transition is individualized.

The 2013 creation of Point Jeunes in Geneva can be attributed firstly to the willingness of the canton to have more control and at the same time prevent young dropouts from claiming social assistance. Secondly, it highlights the willingness to toughen up the regime in a symbolic way. One symbolic message is that a young person receiving social assistance is per definition morally undesirable and that being responsible and autonomous means finding a way to live without social assistance – irrespective of whether there are real opportunities to find vocational training or not.

Another interesting evolution in the canton of Geneva is the acknowledgement of the growing number of YAS with multiple problems and of the fact that the current alignment of the system is not producing any solutions for this category of people but rather adding new vulnerabilities. Under the leadership of Accroche, new measures have been created that focus on those YAS with low self-esteem and no immediate educational or labour market perspectives. The strategic argument is that there is no need to look for ‘institutional’ answers – meaning vocational training or employment – rather that these young people need a break from the system with the hope that they

can regain confidence and try one or two years later with the ‘traditional’ VET pathway. There are no statistics providing information on how many YAS would fall under this category. However, during fieldwork, a majority of implementers and providers of integration affirmed that there are a growing number of YAS with psychological health issues which cannot be addressed with the current tools of the welfare and transition regime based on ‘activation’ and ‘social investment’.

In other respects, in the past ten years, one of the major strategic goals in the canton of Geneva has been centralizing and coordinating the existing offer in a more efficient way. The endeavour is keeping track of YAS and soothing the harmful effect of institutional boundaries, which can produce new vulnerabilities because YAS will experience additional setbacks due to uncoordinated and inconsistent offers by the various actors in the field. Organizations like the FASE (mobile outreach association) or Accroche play important roles concerning this matter because they act as mediators between the thirteen CAS and the new centralized units like Point Jeunes and Cap Formation.

Consequently, there seem to be conflicting narratives within the canton of Geneva – polarized by affirmations regarding the need to acknowledge the limited possibilities of the established welfare and transition policies (on the one hand) and the narratives of cost containment and paternalistic conceptions of social assistance prevention (on the other hand).

5.2 Commonalities and differences between the cantons

The previous chapter demonstrated the historic evolution of the two cantons regarding their take on the ‘problematic youth’ and which actors are involved and how they define their socio-political mission. At this point, I focus on bringing to light the similarities and differences between the two cantons. The first part discusses the main institutions and their alignment towards the YAS in both cantons. These institutions taken together build what scholars have called a “regimes of youth transition” (Walther 2006:119). They are all involved in designing and/or implementing policies towards YAS with the aim of impacting their individual trajectory. Secondly, the ‘education first’ alignment will be discussed. Despite their differences in terms of institutions and technocratic procedures, this programmatic alignment was initiated on a federal level and seems to have had a unifying effect, which has led to convergent discursive patterns when it comes to dealing with YAS. These findings

will lay the groundwork for the analysis of the common narratives later on (see Chapter 5.3). Third, I will delve further into the case comparison and analyse the nuances regarding institutional arrangements.

5.2.1 *The implementers and providers of integration*

Both cantons have created new structures and discourses around ‘problematic youth’ in order to respond both tangibly and symbolically to rising questions regarding the transitional difficulties of YAS and their multiple problems. It is important to highlight the four institutions that matter the most when it comes to designing and implementing socio-political strategies towards YAS and their common ground as well as their differences. These four institutions are mandated by the cantons to ensure transitioning of the YAS to the labour market via vocational training: social assistance, case management vocational training, the employment office, and various associations and social companies involved strategically or via the offer of integration measures. I call the first three institutions ‘the implementers’ and the group of associations and social companies involved in providing integration places for YAS the ‘providers of integration.’

Social assistance (social services, Point Jeunes, and the municipal CAS) has two functions. Primarily, it is in charge of securing the livelihood of the YAS by granting them a minimal subsistence level, which includes a monthly budget for basic needs, housing and health insurance. Secondly, it reorientates the YAS towards a suitable integration measure, separating them by using evaluation procedures with respect to their ‘employability.’ If they fall into the category ‘employable’ or ‘able to work’ the YAS are reorientated towards a measure that encourages them to find an apprenticeship. If this is not the case, a new trend, predominantly pushed in Geneva, is to promote integration measures that focus on ‘social skills’ in order to prepare them later on for higher threshold vocational education and training (VET) system. In accordance with the studied administrative reports and the conducted interviews it is important to note that this ‘social’ goal does not stand alone and is not evaluated accordingly. It is politically legitimated with reference to the ‘education first’ strategy and a future labour market participation, arguing that if there are YAS with multiple problems, there should be a low threshold measure preparing them for re-entering the VET system one or two years later. The narrative that accompanies this new alignment is firstly, that some young people need time to adjust and that one has to accept that

certain young people take longer to “untangle the knot”²⁴. Secondly, it is driven by the acknowledgment that some young people have been ‘wounded’ by an uncoordinated institutional action and thus, it is the responsibility of the cantonal actors in charge of transitional policies to supply matching integration measures. Furthermore, both cantons have created departments charged with the discussed economic segmentation of employable versus unemployable YAS, the Service de reinsertion professionnelle (SRP) in Geneva and the Arbeitsintegrationszentrum (AIZ) in Basel-City. Both units are part of the cantonal social assistance departments. In both cases, the goal is to have as few young people receiving social assistance for a longer period as possible, claiming that if they benefit too much for too long, they will remain in a state of dependency.

Case management vocational training (Cap Formation in Geneva and Gap in Basel-City) is in charge of supporting YAS through the transition of finding an apprenticeship and making sure that they keep that apprenticeship until the end. There is a significant organizational difference regarding this type of institution. In Basel-City, Gap has been declared the main actor that is or should be solely in charge of the tracking and accompaniment of the YAS. Once the YAS are enrolled within Gap, social services is no longer involved, respectively social services takes care of the material aspect of the support and meets the YAS once every three months to have an update about his or her professional trajectory but other than that, they should not interfere. In the canton of Geneva, Cap Formation was envisioned as an interdepartmental project from the beginning and the social workers and educators from Point Jeunes are directly involved during the process in order to take care of possible social, financial, or health issues like family, housing and homelessness, debts and addiction problems. Both cantons argue repeatedly that they want to achieve a better coordination within the welfare and transition regime in general. For the canton of Basel-City, this was implemented with more institutional demarcation. In the canton of Geneva, it meant creating a more permeable system with an accent on cooperation of all types of institutions and professions.

The employment offices of the cantons are less involved with YAS – as these beneficiaries fall under the jurisdiction of social assistance and not under the jurisdiction of unemployment insurance. They did in many cases play an important role in the trajectory of the YAS as many YAS have unsuc-

24 This terminology was used by some of the implementers in Geneva I have engaged with.

cessfully participated in a motivational semester – in the sense that they have started such a semester and dropped out. The employment offices are nevertheless important because they participate in the elaboration of strategies and measures that can be relevant for YAS. In Geneva, they are involved within Accroche and in Basel-City they are involved within the strategy group for ‘youth unemployment’.

The associations, foundations, and social firms, from a strategic perspective, are predominantly present in the canton of Geneva, less so in the canton of Basel-City. This does not mean that there are no associations involved within the canton of Basel-City. However, their role is more demarcated as they are not part of the administrative strategy group. They figure as actors within the integration market and adjust their integration offers for YAS according to strategic decisions of the canton. In Geneva, recent evolutions suggest that associations as private actors are directly shaping the socio-political discourse and overall strategic direction regarding YAS. Organizations like the FASe (mobile outreach association) or Accroche play important roles concerning this matter because they act as mediators between the thirteen CAS and the new centralized units like Point Jeunes and Cap Formation. There are no such institutions in Basel-City, or at least they were not mentioned during my fieldwork. A reason for this difference may be the less dense institutional grid in Basel-City, or the fact that there are only three municipalities. Furthermore, the areas of responsibilities between social assistance, the vocational training department, and the providers of integration are more demarcated in comparison to the canton of Geneva.

5.2.2 An ambivalent ‘education first’ alignment

For the last twenty years, the main administrative change in both cantons has been the achievement of a better coordination of the existing offer of integration measures as well as a better interinstitutional and interdepartmental cooperation. Both cantons do so by centralizing the offer. For the canton of Geneva, a particular challenge is the demarcation of the competences of the actors in a vertical sense (municipalities and canton) in order to create an understandable and more permeable welfare and transition regime for those youngsters who fail to find a VET and later on paid work in a sustainable manner. The discursive framing of these structural changes, as has been demonstrated, is based on a programme pushing for vocational training before looking for sustainable labour market integration or ‘education

first', as I call it. It has gained support and thus, the cantons have gradually conferred the strategic responsibilities from the employment office to the vocational training department. However, the growing numbers of YAS with multiple problems have put the cantonal administration, predominantly social assistance, under pressure. As the new strategic alignment is to invest in long-term accompaniment of YAS, the emergence and persistence of this 'problematic youth' who do not seem to adhere to the assigned trajectory is challenging for the actors. The legitimacy of the social investment argument would crumble if the 'return on investment' does not manifest itself. The collected data indicates that both cantons follow a similar discursive path – legitimizing this strategic adjustment mostly by putting an accent on prevention and cost containment (fewer youngsters on social assistance). However, there are divergences to point out between the cases.

A major discursive difference is the acknowledgment of the transition regime as source of vulnerability itself, which could only be found explicitly in Geneva. Certain providers of integrations (Accroche and FASe) as well as passages within the studied documents demonstrate this difference. The internal research agency on VET (the SRED) especially contributes to this critical perspective. The following quote from a study evaluating the newly built structure Cap Formation explicitly mentions that the current measures in place within the canton of Geneva can act as a reinforcement of the norm 'every young person should be in education' and that this could also have the perverse effect of ignoring and/or accentuating the specific vulnerabilities of those young adults, who have accumulated a number of difficulties over the years and do not present the required prerequisites for an immediate professional integration. Rastoldo et al. (2016:8) cite explicitly:

“Incidentally, the evolution and the visibility of these measures contribute to reinforce the norm whereby a young person under twenty-five without a diploma should be first and foremost in education – no matter the difficulties.”

This subchapter will describe such differences and others between the two investigated cases. First, the perspectives of the implementers and providers of integration of the canton of Basel-City on the 'education first' alignment will be discussed and secondly the same procedure will be applied for the canton of Geneva before discussing the convergent aspects in both cantons regarding this strategic alignment.

'Education first' in Basel-City

In Basel-City, the issue of YAS with multiple problems is primarily dealt with within the 'education first' narrative. The implementers within the social assistance and case management vocational training are consistently pushing this discursive alignment, saying that there is no sustainable integration possible for young people without vocational training. They say that it is a new strategy, which had not been applied previously due to the logics of social assistance and its focus on closing cases as quickly as possible. Some call it a paradigm change that started around 2010 in Basel. The following quote of an implementer working for the AIZ illustrates this matter:

"There is a definite attitude within social assistance that we want to promote education. Consequently, we do not urge our young beneficiaries to work, rather, we urge them to start a vocational training. This is paramount." (Implementer, AIZ, Basel-City)

They solemnly affirm that it is the only way for sustainable integration and for social assistance to close a case of a YAS in the long run. If a YAS finds a temporary job for two or three months it does not solve the problem, as he or she will be back later and then must start the integration process all over again. Implementers from social assistance and Gap also affirm that you need to start as early as possible with this course of action because the older the YAS are, the more complicated labour market integration gets and the more the chances for success decrease because of the additional setbacks the YAS have experienced.

Conversely, although they affirm that this strategy is unequivocal for all YAS, it still appears to be a relative concept depending on individual behaviour and concrete circumstances. Those who failed to enter the VET system or those who repeatedly failed to find an apprenticeship and/or to keep it for instance, are reorientated towards a direct and rapid labour market integration. In these cases, the 'education first' strategy transforms into 'job first' because the traditional logic of social assistance (closing a case as soon as possible) takes over. Consequently, one could say that the 'education first' policy is not an absolute or encompassing alignment, but rather a relative approach. It is relative to the individual trajectory (how many times a YAS has dropped out of an integration measure or failed to complete an apprenticeship) and to the concrete behaviour and motivation of the YAS. It is not something YAS can claim as a social right. The professionals (social workers

or educators) assess the individual trajectory and the current situation of each YAS and after this assessment the course of action can be 'education first', but only if the chance of success is probable and if the professional observes a certain level of motivation of the YAS in accordance with this course of action.

During fieldwork, it became apparent that there are some critical voices within the cantonal administration of Basel-City concerning this matter. These voices are predominantly articulated by actors who provide integration measures and they are backed by the employment office. They affirm that the 'education first' strategy is a political discourse, and that the administration does not act upon it – at least not consequently enough. They suggest it is a phrase used politically to take the burden off social assistance and to make it seem as if the 'problem' of YAS is under control. The following provider of integration affirms that in practical terms one cannot say that the 'education first' strategy is applied for every YAS equally and that it is random what course of action is chosen:

"I simply realized – concerning the integration strategies for YAS – this is dealt with very differently. Some social workers just want to close the cases as quickly as possible and then there are others who say: no, stay there for a while so we can work together so that you will find an apprenticeship." (Provider of integration, AMIE, Basel-City)

Usually, the same providers of integration are also very critical regarding social assistance and their professionals in general, claiming that young people do not need 'social' activities but rather what they call 'job integration'. Especially regarding YAS with multiple problems and the segmentation logic within the social services, they claim that it is crucial to aim always at job integration from day one. The following interview segment illustrates this argument. This interviewee affirms that it is not expedient if a professional tries to solve all the 'social' issues of a YAS before addressing a professional accompaniment towards labour market integration. According to this perspective, it should be the other way around; the 'social' issues will resolve themselves via professional integration.

"For me personally, it was also important that it is not some kind of a social offer. [...] The goal must always be job integration – even now. And now there is a similar project in Zurich and she, the person who took it over there, her background is social and she

said to me: 'You know, I need to solve all the problems first and then afterwards I can do job integration.' And I just noticed that this is not the reality." (Provider of integration, AMIE, Basel-City)

The implementer working at the employment office quoted below backs this perspective and questions the one-dimensional alignment of 'education first', saying that it is not for every YAS. Usually, this narrative is also closely bound up with a paternalistic ideation of youth as they affirm that certain YAS just need time to grow and become more responsible and later on, they will realize that they need vocational training in order to progress professionally.

"In these cases, job integration is central. And time can be an important factor here, can it not? Such a person later on, maybe in three or four years... this person will maybe try again and re-enter the path of vocational training." (Implementer, Employment office, Basel-City)

According to this perspective, the idea of solving 'social' issues before dealing with the lack of employment is detrimental for the YAS for several reasons. Firstly, in doing so, the YAS is reduced to a 'social problem' – whether it is family, or mental health, addiction, housing, etc. – and by focusing only on these issues, social workers neglect the importance of working and learning by doing. YAS need to do 'real' work in order to gain acknowledgment from society and feel rewarded like a 'real' adult. Often, this narrative is accompanied by strong ideas regarding ceremonious passages from youth to adulthood, and these professionals frame their role as educators teaching the young adults how to fully enter the adult world in a responsible manner. Other professionals who solely focus on social issues are branded as 'too social' and would only delay the transitioning process to adulthood because they 'de-responsibilize' YAS. The following two quotes from another provider of integration illustrate this matter as this person emphasizes the importance of not 'problematizing' the life trajectory of the YAS and the idea that social integration can only be achieved via labour market integration:

"It is an important phase and when you get the message during that phase that you are a problem and that you are not part of the solution but rather part of the problem... well then this is something you will have to compensate for the rest of your life. [...] Because we have always said that you need to work with people. You have

to do this. And while you are working you discuss the life stories, and you start to work on the deficiencies. But actually, you have to create something together. And this is our philosophy to this day.”
(Provider of integration, Job Factory, Basel-City).

The employment office is more cautious with its criticism – saying that the strategy ‘education first’ is not entirely bad but that it could have the perverse effect of creating new ‘school and welfare dependencies’ because adolescents and young adults are not confronted with the ‘real world’ of the labour market. The following passage illustrates this argument, closely linked to what Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) have argued when they state that the legitimacy of welfare policies is always related to what is considered productive work. This implementer states that you need to be careful when deciding which adolescents or young adults without vocational training will benefit from integration measures. The underlying narrative is that only the ones who really deserve it should benefit from such support – otherwise it will become ‘normal’ to prolong compulsory school with a tenth or eleventh grade. Another perverse effect, according to this perspective, is that it will eventually harm adolescents or young people because employers will get accustomed to their delayed entry into the labour market and will gladly hire an apprentice later when he or she has more experience. In this sense, the ‘education first’ strategy with its bridging measures and other more ‘social’ measures will create passive school and welfare adolescents on the one hand and incite employers and trainers to hire those young people later when others have done the job for them. These following quotes from an implementer working at the employment office puts this argument into perspective:

“The support needs to be only for those who really need it. The ones that – even though they tried many things – did not find a solution. Those are the ones that need the support. However, this support is not supposed to become like a tenth or eleventh school year. [...] And of course, there are tendencies, where firms say: ‘I will gladly take someone who does the tenth school year because he is a bit older and has more experience.’ But actually, we want the employers to take the apprentices when they finish the ninth grade. We want to increase the transition at this point. But if we make too many measures available, then there is a possibility for the firms to say: ‘We will wait until they are older.’ And for the adolescents it is a

possibility to say: 'I will try and if it does not work out, I can do a tenth school year and maybe I'll participate in a bridging measure if I have the time.'" (Implementer, Employment office, Basel-City)

The same implementer goes on to explain that it is dangerous to give too much support and it would lead to 'negative incentives' because it is part of the youth experience to get into trouble and that the realization of being 'unemployed' could in some individual cases even be 'redeeming'. This coincides with the discussed theoretical notion of the work ethics and welfare dependency axiom: Providing too much welfare is harmful for individuals because it will erode the motivation to go out and find productive work. In this sense, the realization or maybe even the stigmatizing experience, of having to file as unemployed and be confronted with that status could be beneficial and also educational because the individuals will understand the necessity of finding a path towards financial sustainability without the support of the state.

'Education first' in Geneva

Similar patterns arise also from the data in the canton of Geneva. The following passage illustrates how a representative of the employment office implicitly challenges the 'social' approach of the social services (Hospice Général and the municipal CAS). During the interview, this person never explicitly said that it would be unnecessary or even harmful for YAS to deal with social issues like housing, addiction, or other health related themes. However, taking into consideration that the pattern of 'giving too much welfare and creating negative incentives' resurfaces recurrently in the same context many times, one can assume that the following critique feeds off this very narrative.

"What I can say about the Hospice Général, as I have closely followed their evolution, is that they are very 'social'. So, I mean of course this is normal because they had this role for years [...] So there is still this 'social' connotation, which is dominant and well, I know that's normal and I don't blame them. However, it is true that if you start to decompartmentalize, I think that you can achieve much more." (Implementer, Employment Office, Geneva)

The invitation to 'decompartmentalize' means in this context to be less 'social' and thus to lose less time with inefficient measures, where YAS or other adolescents and young adults will not get closer to the labour market.

Some voices are also critical regarding the education first strategy because of its paternalistic alignment – comparing the state to a father figure who takes you forcefully by the hand and threatens to sanction you if you do not accept the virtuous path that awaits you. The advantage of a paternalistic alignment, according to this perspective, is that the state does make sure that there are enough financial possibilities and measures. On the other hand, it establishes a coercive structure that leaves no margin for YAS. This following interview segment illustrates this argument.

“I think that we are still in a, the word may be a bit too strong, but in a paternalistic system, in the good and in the bad sense. So, this means that if there is a concern, we take care of it. We take care of the solutions and we also have the means to do it. So, you see, this is exactly the father figure of the 50s. It means, I am watching over you, I will help you and make my means available, but I have my stick. And you stay an infant and you are not responsible.” (Provider of integration, MoveOn, Geneva)

According to this provider of integration, there is an acknowledgement of the education first alignment. Many positive aspects can be cited – like the fact that there is a support system, a clear vision for YAS and the willingness to back it up with the necessary means. However, the system is very constraining and there is no margin for negotiating the concrete path for young people. We find the same pattern of criticism that we observed in the canton of Basel-City, namely that the system is ‘too social’ and thus infantilizing and de-responsibilizing the YAS. Furthermore, there are also indications that the official alignment is ambiguous in the sense that it depends on the individual situation of the YAS, if he or she will get the opportunity to push for vocational training. Much like in Basel-City, the ‘education first’ narrative risks to be perceived as a meaningless set phrase, used only to politically legitimate the alignment and not to create real opportunities for every YAS in the canton. According to the following implementer, this is also due to the cantonal structure that is still uncoordinated and incoherent – even if the canton of Geneva has made every effort in the past to change that. During the interview, I asked the implementer why some YAS are still at the municipal social services, the CAS, when the canton created a specialized competence centre, Point Jeunes, with the specific aim of having more control over the young adults.

“Yes, well... They could be there, and it would be the right structure for them. Except that Point Jeunes is completely overworked. Before the scope was fifteen to twenty-five and now the scope is fifteen to twenty-three or even fifteen to twenty-two, so... after you’ve reached twenty-two... I noticed that from that age on a lot of YAS are pushed towards employment. I mean I don’t see all the YAS of course, I only see a small portion. But we collaborate daily with Point Jeunes. We cooperate and we team up. The youngsters usually show up with their social workers from Point Jeunes when they come here for the first time. Whereas within the CAS the social workers have no time to come here with their beneficiaries. They cannot leave their offices or even worse: They tell the YAS who come here to look for a job. And then we have an incoherence.” (Provider of integration, Qualif, Geneva)

Other providers of integration have also confirmed this matter during fieldwork. They have a unique perspective because they collaborate with the different implementers from social assistance (CAS and Point Jeunes) and thus have a valuable insight on how they function. In general, there are three indications that need to be brought to light, pointing to the ambiguity of the ‘education first’ alignment in the canton of Geneva. The first one is institutional: The dispatched municipal social services, the CAS, add another vertical layer on an already dense institutional grid. This can be obstructive to a coherent strategy of pushing for vocational training at all costs, with Point Jeunes as the arbiter who should be coordinating the alignment. A second factor is the caseload. Both the CAS and Point Jeunes seem to be overworked, which does not favour a long-term course of action regarding YAS but rather favours looking for short-term solutions. A third indication is the fact that Point Jeunes, after three years operating, decided to restrict its own scope of action, targeting only YAS younger than twenty-three years of age. This indicates that, much like in Basel-City, the older a YAS gets, the less the ‘education first’ principle will be applied as the chance of success is judged to be slim. The purpose of Point Jeunes initially was to centralize the offer and to create a competence centre for ‘problematic youth’. The reality seems to be ambiguous as it depends on the concrete practice of the CAS. It comes down to the discretionary power and decision-making of the social worker of a CAS whether a YAS is reorientated towards a vocational training or rather a rapid job integration in order to close the case. It is the social worker who decides

whether the investment in a long-term strategy via vocational training for the individual case at hand is worth it or not.

A particular nuance in comparison to Basel-City is the strategic influence of Accroche and other associations like Qualif that are part of this institution. The 'education first' narrative within Accroche is used programmatically in order to legitimate upstream measures like Scène Active or MoveOn. The latter are framed as social and educational integration measures that put an accent on stabilizing YAS and conveying social skills that could prequalify YAS for higher threshold measures and ultimately successful labour market integration. Ironically, the same actors implementing measures like MoveOn, for instance, and arguing that the current welfare regime is too 'social' and not confronting YAS with the real world, are being legitimized discursively with reference to the fact that there is a need for more social accompaniment and patience when dealing with YAS.

The following interview passage illustrates the above-mentioned strategy to prequalify YAS because of the inability of the current system to provide real opportunities for them. This explicit acknowledgement of the limits of 'active' social policies occurs only within the canton of Geneva. Basel-City does not have a comparable programme. The implementer is talking about the measure Scène Active, which is the poster measure of this association. He/she describes how the current welfare and transition regime of the canton of Geneva misses a layer for 'young people without any projects'.

"Our goal was to say: ok, there are young people without any projects. When they leave our programme then we wish, or we hope, that they are ready to integrate another one, which is a bit more coercive and move on to the next stage. The diagnosis of these young people beforehand was that there is something missing in order to master the next stage. Hence, we need to propose something they can adhere to." (Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

With the introduction of Scène Active, the association Accroche succeeded in establishing a socio-political dialogue on a cantonal level around YAS with multiple problems. They used the 'education first' narrative to legitimate the creation of upstream measures that focus on the missing social skills of YAS. It is important to note though that in tangible terms, these new measures do not provide enough places for those YAS with multiple problems and without any professional project. Scène Active, for instance, offers twenty to thirty places annually for young people and not necessarily the ones living

in the most precarious life situations, as Scène Active does not target predominantly beneficiaries of social assistance.

Furthermore, there are also indications for another tangible practice in place, pushed forward by Point Jeunes, which could be interpreted as counteracting the above-mentioned stance from Accroche. This practice stems from basic social assistance principles like subsidiarity and the duty of anyone to do his or her best to alleviate a given hardship. One of the duties of Point Jeunes is to question the 'choice' of YAS who request support and reunite them whenever possible with their parents in order to both economize costs and hold the parents accountable to their role as educators. In these individual cases, even though in the course of social assistance application the diagnostic would indicate a need for a measure, if the social worker can avoid creating a new case, he or she will choose not to open one. In other more abstract terms, the principle of subsidiarity is more important than the 'education first' principle. One can assume that this deterrence practice of Point Jeunes is successful in some cases and that it is actively contributing to counteracting certain socio-political initiatives like those generated by Accroche. There is no available data on this contradictory practice – avoiding the creation of a social assistance case versus a long-term accompaniment as the 'education first' logic requests. However, looking at patterns found within the data, this points towards a polarized welfare and transition regime with a plurality of discourses regarding how to treat the 'problematic youth'.

5.2.3 'Education first': more than a strategic slogan?

To sum up, both cantons have introduced new structures in the past and pushed the 'education first' narrative in order to legitimate their administrative reorientation. In general, they argue that because of the higher requirements of the vocational training system and the labour market there is a need to invest more in bridging and upstream measures to prepare the adolescents and young adults in a more efficient way for these obstacles. The strategic aim is preventing the youngsters from losing contact with the educational system and ensuring that they remain within the framing of the intended transition from school to VET, even though they have experienced setbacks and are currently without any professional projects. A second goal for both cantons is reducing the number of youngsters in need of financial support from social assistance. It is considered harmful for the YAS (risk of long term 'welfare dependency') and economically inefficient.

Both cantons aim at pushing YAS into building their own professional projects as early as possible. It can be attributed to what scholars have called the social investment programmatic (Morel et al. 2012): Educate the youth according to the needs of the labour market in order to prevent future costs due to professional exclusion. In this discursive perspective, finding an unqualified, precarious occupation for a few months is unsatisfying because it is not sustainable: the YAS will be back applying for social assistance again and the psychological damage of not mastering the transition to adulthood characterized by economic independence could grow even further.

However, the conducted interviews with various implementers and providers of integration reveal that there are ambiguities to this new strategic alignment in dealing with the 'problematic youth' in both cantons.

In the canton of Basel-City, the collected data suggests that there is an ideological debate at work between the providers of integration and the employment office on the one side and the social assistance and vocational training department on the other. The latter are pushing for a long-term approach with 'education first' as a slogan. The former criticizes the approach as illusionary and elitist, either because it constructs the YAS as a social problem that needs fixing (perspective of the providers of integration) or with the argument that it would prolong the school trajectory of the adolescents and young adults in an unnecessary way (perspective of the employment office). Furthermore, the analysis showed that the debate is informed and influenced by paternalistic imageries regarding youth and the symbolic passages to adulthood and individual responsibility. Some actors oppose the 'education first' strategy because they interpret it as 'too social'. The fear is that these youngsters will make themselves cosy within the welfare safety net and never 'learn' what it takes to become a responsible member of society. The quotes have illustrated this matter as the experience of being unemployed should function as a wakeup call for certain YAS to 'finally get their act together'.

For the canton of Geneva, the implementers use the 'education first' narrative predominantly in a programmatic manner. In other words, the alignment is used to legitimate the ongoing readjustments of the welfare and transition regime and it does not necessarily mean that YAS are redirected systematically towards a long-term accompaniment for a vocational training. There is not the same clear-cut ideological divide between providers of integration and social assistance and vocational department as we have found in Basel-City. Rather, we find indications for a more complex and denser

institutional grid with multiple and sometimes contradicting narratives on what the right course of action should be.

Firstly, we find indications for the above-mentioned social investment shift, which builds on the argument of sustainability and prevention of long-term social costs and exclusion processes of YAS. This has resulted in creating centralized and interdepartmental units like Point Jeunes or Cap Formation, who aim at having a better administrative hold on the YAS.

Secondly, we find neo-liberal and paternalistic imageries in relation to youth, individual responsibility, and welfare dependency. Interestingly, in the canton of Geneva, these imageries are implemented by a narrative of 'questioning' the choice to demand social assistance and by the fact that YAS without professional projects receive considerably lower, secondary scale support. This discursive pattern is directly linked with the intersection of 'work ethics' and 'age', which has been discussed in the theoretical section. The attributed characteristics of being young and having not contributed to the 'productive' part of society (meaning paid work) provides the moral legitimation for a distinct and harsher treatment within the social assistance regime compared to older or more educated beneficiaries. Still following the argument of Point Jeunes and Cap Formation, this practice is embedded in the logics of social assistance – as there is a duty for each and every applicant to use every upstream means at his or her disposal to alter a concrete hardship.

Finally, with the emergence of Accroche and programmes like Scène Active, a third narrative surface, which emphasizes the lack of support for YAS with multiple problems who have lived through setbacks due to negative experiences within the welfare and transition regime itself. This is a newer approach and one that seems to challenge the two afore-mentioned strategic directions. It acknowledges the fact that there are YAS who need a break from the current educational system. They believe that paternalistic interventions will not result in a change of trajectory but on the contrary increase the vulnerability of these YAS. This is a major area of tension found on a discursive level between social assistance institutions (Point Jeunes) and providers of integration like Accroche or FASE.

Focusing on the commonalities of the two cantons, one can say that the aim of social assistance is not always 'education first' but can be to close the cases and to avoid further immediate costs. YAS do not have a social right to claim the 'education first' trajectory. Social assistance supports the strategic idea that there should be a social investment towards YAS and that they should

be enabled to master the transition from school to work. However, social assistance does not consider it their responsibility to finance that transition and according to the individual situations of the YAS the traditional dynamics of the procedure can take over: focusing on individual responsibility to get out of welfare in order to avoid the alleged 'dependency trap'. The social workers in Basel-City or the CAS in the canton of Geneva have considerable discretionary power to assess the concrete individual situations of the YAS. It depends on individual features like age or the individual trajectory and failures if a measure is proposed (Cap Formation or Gap) that would aim at a long-term integration via vocational training.

Another strong indication confirming this analysis is the ideological fight that I observed in both cantons between providers of integration and the administrative implementers. Several providers of integration question the programmatic of the 'education first' narrative in a fundamental way. Some say that the canton is not consistent enough with its implementation. Others argue that these measures are 'too social' and could be even harmful for the YAS because they do not convey the values of the labour market and the YAS will not be confronted with the 'adult world'. Using the analytical understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991; Hansen 2019), one can unveil these arguments as inherently critical towards welfare in a fundamental manner. The moral understanding is that too much welfare will erode the motivation to look for productive work. The ideological fight evolves around 'education first' versus 'job first', which in the case of Switzerland is rather interesting and somewhat contradictory, as vocational training combines both aspects.

In this perspective, the 'education first' alignment is ambiguous because there is an understanding that it will not work for everyone and it could enhance vulnerabilities in YAS with multiple problems as their chances of finding and keeping an apprenticeship are slim. These young people have to manoeuvre between structures with a conflicting alignment: Fundamentally pushing an 'education first' narrative but at the same time relativizing it or even rejecting it. Depending on the institution and the diagnostic of the social worker, the narrative can be 'education first' (meaning finding vocational training), it can be 'job first', or it can be a redirection to a more low threshold 'social' measure where the YAS is in a frame of prequalification, acquiring further skills before adhering to a more constraining measure later on.

5.2.4 Differences regarding the institutional arrangement

This subchapter delves further into the case comparison. There are nuances and commonalities between the two cantons that need to be analysed and brought to light. They are discussed on two levels. The differences appear to be firstly institutional with, for instance, an important presence of associations in the canton of Geneva regarding the socio-political alignment, which I could not find in Basel-City – or at least, not in the same way. Secondly, there are nuances that need to be addressed regarding the concrete strategic alignment, which are linked with these institutional differences.

A first key difference between Basel-City and Geneva is the degree of strategic involvement of other actors like associations, foundations, and social firms involved in providing integration measures for YAS and other young people without vocational training. In Basel-City, the actor that defines the pace and the alignment of the course of action regarding youth policies is the Strategy Group Youth Unemployment, which is strictly an administrative group. Members from three departments (employment, vocational training, and social assistance) are represented as delegates from the disability insurance, but the providers of integration (Jobfactory, AMIE, Overall, and others) are not part of the group. A member of the strategy group describes this as normal, as it is an administrative matter. The various actors developing different offers for unemployed young people are competing within a market system. Their job is to react to the socio-political alignment of the canton by providing an adequate offer for unemployed young people. The interviewed providers of integration criticize this arrangement occasionally, saying that they are not actively shaping the socio-political alignment and only reacting, which puts them under a lot of pressure. Furthermore, by excluding the providers of integration from the strategic process and discourse, the risk of making the system rigid is high. This is because there is always a risk for a provider of integration, when creating a new offer or changing an existing one, because they have to bear the financial costs in case the new offer should be unsuccessful. In contrast, a member of the strategy group highlights the importance of remaining 'amongst themselves'. One important benefit of this strategy group is that certain subjects can be addressed privately within the administration and relationships between departments can be built. These personal relationships also have the effect of shortening operational lines, so you can address a coordination problem more easily. As a result, the interdepartmental lines become penetrable, which in the end should benefit the YAS.

Additionally, the strategy group is regularly in contact with all the providers of integration measures and affirms that they are always open to new approaches and measures. However, according to this interview passage nothing would change if they were part of the group:

“So, if somebody arrives and really offers something, which we did not have or think of, for instance jobs that are intellectually more challenging or closer to the labour market and simulate in a way the real needs of the labour market. In these cases, we would definitely examine the offer and then they have a chance to go through with it. But this would not change if they are part of the strategy group or not.” (Implementer, Social Assistance, Basel-City)

This is dealt with in a different manner in the canton of Geneva. The association Accroche can be identified as the equivalent of the strategy group, since they are responsible for pushing forward and defining the strategic discourse around ‘problematic youth’. Semantically, “accroche” means to hold on, which alludes to the transitional difficulties of adolescents and young adults. Members of Accroche are all public and private actors who are dealing (in various ways) with the target group of young people who ‘drop out’ of VET (French: “décrocheurs”).

A second institutional difference is the coordination of social institutions and vocational training institutions. In Basel-City, the tendency (confirmed by nearly all interviewed implementers) is to shift the responsibility of accompanying the YAS via case management to Gap – as Gap is the specialized institution for vocational training and for professional integration in general for young people. This does not mean that the social questions (housing, livelihood, health, family, social entourage, etc.) are not relevant in Basel-City. Social assistance is still in charge of supporting and/or constraining the YAS into the adequate social environment (like finding an apartment within the limitations of the social assistance norms or reconciling them with their parents whenever possible). However, on an organizational and strategical level ‘problematic youth’ is first and foremost viewed as a problem arising from a lack of education and the transitional difficulties they encounter on entering the different educational pathways.

“The current paradigm is in fact to leave social assistance and transfer the responsibility into the vocational training system and with it the task of accompaniment.” (Implementer, Gap, Basel)

In the context of Basel-City, this orientation fits the narrative of ideally having no young people at all in need of accompaniment or financial support within the regime of social assistance. Receiving social assistance is clearly considered an unwanted dependency. The interviewed implementers of social services in Basel-City confirm this, as they stress that within the regime of social assistance the principle of subsidiarity forces them to apply more controlling and constraining measures. Consequently, some YAS would be better off out of this regime and back in the educational system. Ideally, a YAS in Basel-City receives financial support from social assistance and works on his educational perspectives with a counsellor appointed by Gap.

In Geneva, however, the organization of the support is more intertwined, less delimited, and more focused on a permeable collaboration of different institutions and subunits. Regarding the strategic goal, it remains the same – finding an apprenticeship or another recognized ‘professional project’. However, the social institutions (Hospice Général, the municipalities, the mobile outreach social work) collaborate closely with vocational training institutions. Notably, Point Jeunes, the specialized unit of social assistance, works closely with counsellors of Cap Formation, which constitutes itself as an interdepartmental unit supported by the three main departments (social assistance, vocational training, and employment office). The following passage illustrates how the system works. The guiding strategic understanding is that the social challenges of the YAS have to be dealt with in relation to the educational challenges. Thus, because these challenges relate to one another, there is a need for joint interventions and collaboration between the social workers of Point Jeunes and the counsellors of Cap Formation.

“It’s just that at a given time, you need to ask yourself the question of the means of livelihood of the young person. Perhaps he finds an apprenticeship. So in this case everything unlocks: apprenticeship wage, training allowance, and grants. But then you have other young people waiting for a professional project to arise. So in those cases, either the parents are present or there are no parents; either there is a small job or there is social assistance. So this is why there are social workers from Point Jeunes stationed at Cap Formations. You have counsellors who go to the social workers asking ‘Listen, I have a situation here, a catastrophic familial situation and this is a young person who is motivated and engaged and clearly very close to finding his educational project, etc. but he will soon have

financial difficulties. Maybe we need to activate a social assistance case.' So, they are under the same roof and they pass the cases around and they discuss the cases together, make appointments with the young person, maybe create an access to social assistance so he does not need to think about how he will pay for food. In return, the counsellor of Cap Formations can focus on working on his educational project." (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva)

The nuance between the cases refers to the organization and the framing of the institutions. Gap in Basel-City is framed solely as a vocational training department and Cap Formation in Geneva is framed as interinstitutional and interdepartmental.

It is important to note that there are certain path dependencies that affect the organization of a given cantonal assistance system. This has not been the focus of the present research; however, one can assume in the case of Geneva, for instance, that the centralization of the existing offer, combined with the very decentralized organization of the canton (forty-five municipalities and thirteen CAS) has shaped the current alignment. Examples of centralizations have already been discussed: the creation of Point Jeunes, Cap Formation, and most notably the creation of the association Accroche. The idea is to enhance the cooperation across institutional boundaries by overcoming the jurisdictional delimitations, layered vertically on two levels, canton and municipalities, and horizontally with collaborating units (Point Jeunes, Cap Formation, and others) that coordinate the cantonal support for YAS in a pragmatic and permeable manner.

Another more informal effect, but seemingly important, is that the different actors within the welfare and transition regime are encouraged to be honest about their own limitations in order to find a middle ground. The expected positive effects on personal collaborations are similar to what is pointed out by members of the Strategy Group Youth Unemployment in Basel-City: You can build personal relationships with the various implementers of different offices and institutions and hinder the perverse effect of institutions staying in their jurisdictional area without adhering to a global, cantonal strategy. The important nuance here is that in Geneva, with the creation of Accroche, this initiative is not limited to the administration (social assistance, vocational training department, and employment office) but includes all the associations, foundations, and social firms.

“So, in general, we wanted to say from the beginning that the strength of the collective is interesting to utilize. Today, this potential is not exploited. But for this to happen you need an environment where you can trust one another and speak of things by addressing the issues in a trustworthy way. [...] For each membership application, we had meetings where we explained this philosophy and we said that if they want to be a member of our association there is a vital criteria: you have to be honest about your limitations regarding your interventions and the difficulties you encounter on your territory and you accept to play the game. And now, we have what we call interventions, where we gather every six or eight weeks.”
(Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

As a consequence, both cantons affirm that it is important to have a global strategy within the cantonal territory and to have direct and personal collaborations with the different actors. However, in Geneva, avoiding fixed institutional tunnel visions and creating a permeable system are a political agenda in itself and this shapes, for instance, the membership procedures for one of the more influential actors within the welfare and transition regime – Accroche.

A third set of indicators that sharpen the institutional differences between the cantons of Geneva and Basel-City are those regarding accessibility of the newly-created case management offices Cap Formation and Gap. In Geneva, Cap Formation is highly formalized, which creates restricted access for the YAS. There are several conditions that young people need to comply with in order to get access to Cap Formation. They must have completed compulsory school, they are not supposed to have a degree in vocation college (ECG), and they need to have contributed as taxpayers within the territory of the canton. These are just three formal criteria and there are more. The canton of Geneva strives to have a very clear formal demarcation of the target group of Cap Formation. The collected data from interviews with implementers and the studied administrative literature suggest that this is due to the willingness to demarcate the horizontal and vertical jurisdictions of the various actors dealing with ‘problematic youth’.

In contrast, in Basel-City, very few formal criteria determine access to Gap for a young person without vocational training. Rather, the focus is on the young person seeking support. Gap focuses on providing long-term accompaniment to YAS. It is the concrete individual situation of the YAS that deter-

mines the required accompaniment. In this sense, the more complex the life situation of the YAS, the closer the accompaniment is going to be. However, this is only the case if the YAS is actually reorientated towards Gap in the first place. As we have seen, the introduction of Q3 within social assistance does not suggest that the most complicated cases are going to be transferred to Gap. However, once they are there, the accompaniment logic will be reversed. In contrast to Cap Formation, the Gap counsellors are in charge of professional questions but also of all the emerging 'social problems' (housing, family ruptures, health, and so forth). Again, this institutional focus of Gap can only be understood if we put it in a broader institutional arrangement of the canton. There is a path dependency of the canton that shapes the alignment of each office. As we have seen, one of the strategic aims is gradually transferring the administrative responsibility of accompanying YAS from social assistance to the department of vocational training in Basel-City (Rastoldo et al. 2016).

5.2.5 Excursus: Disability insurance (DI)

During fieldwork, one recurrent aspect that became apparent within both cases is the shared frustration of most of the implementers regarding the collaboration with disability insurance (DI). In both cantons, there seem to be substantial difficulties finding common ground both on a strategic level and on an operational one. Nearly all the interviewed implementers reproach the DI professionals for not being interested in a coherent cantonal strategy to tackle 'problematic youth' and for letting their practice take a restrictive turn – leaving social assistance to deal with YAS presenting mental issues. A recently published dissertation (Rosenstein 2018) thoroughly discussed the selective and ambiguous effects of recent DI reforms in Switzerland – reforms that centred on enhancing activation measures and reducing the take-up of long term DI benefits.

Since the early 2000s the DI has started to introduce standardized procedures aimed at harmonizing the handling of benefit claimants and fighting against what in the public debate was called 'undue reception of benefits'. Other than the issue of limiting the number of beneficiaries, the introduction of regionally centralized medical centres with specialized professionals (who are charged with the systematic evaluation of the DI claimants and beneficiaries) was also impactful. Henceforth, DI pushed for a more rigorous control of the medical state of their beneficiaries with a focus on the residual labour market potential of these individuals. Most notably, since 2012, the new accent has been put on enhancing the vocational rehabilitation of DI

applicants. Disability insurance is a social insurance embedded in national legislation and has thus more financial possibilities, according to the interviewed implementers. Furthermore, it follows its own agenda and is not necessarily bound to specific, more intersectional cantonal social challenges, like the ones regarding YAS.

The following passages illustrate this observation for both cantons in the same way. The first affirmation is the assessment regarding the transfer of youth mental health issues from disability insurance towards social assistance. Indeed, nearly all the interviewed implementers affirm that DI is not interested in keeping young people who have mental issues within their system. The problem, they say, is the recent reforms of DI on a national level which were aimed at reducing costs and the number of cases within the DI. Regarding young people, DI seems to be reluctant to grant any long-term benefits in order to avoid long-term dependencies early on.

“DI tends to reduce the number of annuitants. It is the rehabilitation. It is the famous slogan of rehabilitation before pension. So, for a certain number of people this might work, but for the others it does not work.” (Provider of integration, MoveOn, Geneva)

“The other side is disability insurance. They also aim at reducing the number of people who become long-term beneficiaries. This means that there is a tendency not to accept new cases, which implies that the social assistance becomes a reservoir that absorbs everything.” (Implementer, Social assistance, Basel-City)

Beyond this structural change within the Swiss welfare state, which explains to a certain degree the growing number of mental health issues within social assistance amongst young people, the implementers point to what they call a ‘paradox’ in Geneva, or a ‘conflict of objectives’ in Basel-City, that occurs due to this development.

“It’s the same paradox. On the one hand, they should be developing preventive measures, accompanying their beneficiaries towards a rapid integration. However, in my opinion, they do not apply this effectively; in any case, it does not seem to be very effective. On the other hand, they limit the accessibility of their benefits. And consequently, the result is that there are young people that are left with major difficulties.” (Implementer, FASe, Geneva)

The comparison of the cases regarding the role and demarcation of DI and social assistance brings certain nuances to light concerning developments within the overall cantonal administration. Both cantons acknowledge the fact that recent reforms have led to an overburdening of the social assistance. The YAS who would have previously been part of the DI regime are now obliged to be in the context of social assistance. In Geneva, most of the implementers affirm that DI is in the same situation as social assistance in general. The political pressure to economize and have as few young people as possible within their system, combined with the requirement of rapid integration, is a comparable burden to what social assistance faces.

In the canton of Basel-City, there is a slightly different interpretation of the same phenomena. Most of the interviewed implementers would agree that there is a growing structural problem leading to problems regarding coordination and overburdening of social assistance. However, illustrated by the following segment, they affirm that it is rather a conflict of objectives that hinders a productive collaboration between DI and social assistance. The DI can choose to apply a restrictive practice and refuse more and more young people, and social assistance – being the last safety net – does not have that option and is obliged to support YAS.

“Well, we do meet from time to time. After all, we are all part of the same department. But it does not make sense to collaborate because their system works differently than ours and their framing is different. Their framing is not our framing. There is a conflict of objectives. They have to be mindful and make sure that they have nobody or only a few people who get long-term benefits. And we take care of the remaining people.” (Implementer, Social assistance, Basel-City)

Both cantons agree, however, that the lack of coordination between social assistance and DI is problematic and that DI should be part of global cantonal strategy regarding YAS and other young people with transitional difficulties. We have identified the two main strategic actors, who are pushing for more coordination and permeability between the different actors involved with the YAS: Accroche for Geneva and the ‘youth unemployment’ strategy group in Basel-City. In Geneva, the DI is not a member, although various implementers say they have regular contacts with DI professionals. However, these contacts are not structurally embedded within the administration.

Interestingly, in Geneva, there are some voices that do not solely attribute the problematic of YAS to past reforms of the DI and its restrictive turn. Although it is a position that rarely appears in the data, the following segment illustrates that the blame for the occurrence of young people with multiple problems who perceive social assistance is sometimes put on the YAS themselves rather than on reforms of the upstream social security system. According to this implementer, the problem is not DI but rather the young people who prefer social assistance because they do not want to be labelled as ‘sick’ or ‘invalid’.

“So young people with a DI profile, they won’t be accepted by an ordinary firm for vocational training. The boss of the firm will say that he cannot use this one because he is underperforming 40 to 100 percent, so he will not accept him. This is not possible. So, within DI there are more possibilities. The only problem are the young people who desert the DI. They have a negative public image. Facing the DI, the young people will say that they are not sick. Secondly, they will refuse the rehabilitation measures, which the DI offers them.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Genève)

In any case, the presence of the same conflict in the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva as well as between the actors involved in transitional policies for the youth and the DI can be understood as an indicator for the growing socio-political pressure created by the emergence of the social category of ‘YAS with multiple problems’ or ‘YAS with mental issues.’ Social assistance was originally designed as a bridging benefit regime and still looks for any possibility for rapid integration, which means closing cases as quickly as possible. Consequently, the emergence of a group of young people without any perspective of rapid integration is a huge challenge. The cantonal social assistance regimes have tried to set up global strategies in order to share responsibility for this new social problem. However, the DI has its own agenda, which does not necessarily involve other actors.

Although the subject of coordination and demarcation with other welfare institutions (especially social assistance) was on the agenda of the 4th reform of the DI and gave birth to the so-called Inter-Institutional Collaboration (CII) in 2001 (Galster, Rosenstein, and Bonvin 2009), this matter has not been thematized within the interviews and does not appear to be relevant for the YAS category. The CII was introduced precisely to alter the

alleged “silo-mentalities” of both disability insurance (DI) and social assistance (OECD 2001). The aim was to prevent unwanted effects called ‘carousel’ (meaning that DI and social assistance beneficiaries would go from one regime to the next and run in circles without getting out of welfare) and to install top-down structures, which enable the DI and social assistance to collaborate together when dealing with complex cases (Champion and Bonoli 2011). However, despite these efforts, the cantons do not consistently implement the CII and there are no concrete numbers regarding the CII cases in the investigated cantons. The fact that it did not come up during the various interviews conducted in Basel-City and Geneva suggests that the CII practice is not an established practice – at least not to an extent that it is perceived by implementers to have improved the strategic collaboration between social assistance professionals and those from disability insurance.

5.3 Discursive patterns and narratives

Social workers and other professionals of integration (‘job coaches’, for instance) have considerable discretionary power when it comes to decisions regarding both the concrete financial aspects (subsistence level, sanctions) and the course of action regarding integration. The decision process is to a large extent informed by value judgements regarding the subject at hand. Using data from semi-structured interviews with implementers and providers of integration, this subchapter reconstructs this moral system targeting the YAS. As the theoretical section (Chapter 3) outlined, the analytical focus is laid on the moral underpinnings related to values of ‘age’ and ‘work ethics’.

The YAS are under the jurisdiction of several actors who have a mandate to change their behaviours, realities, and perspectives – all with the ultimate goal of bringing them closer to a labour market integration and/or economic independence of some sort in the end. I have already established which cantonal institutions are predominantly involved in these activities, how they evolved, and what their purpose is. Based on the analysis of strategic documents and semi-structured interviews, I also discussed first indications that brought to light an economic segmentation logic (separating the more employable from the less employable YAS) and a paternalistic narrative within the welfare and transition regimes, which predominantly manifests itself during the intake procedures of social assistance. In Geneva for instance, the YAS must ‘question’ their past trajectory and the current ‘choice’ they are

making to ask for support. Implementers interpret their professional role as educators who point the way into the 'right' direction for these 'misguided' YAS – at least, this is what recurrent discursive patterns found within the collected data suggests.

At this point, I want to deepen these emerging discursive patterns and analyse their moral underpinnings. The aim is to disclose the way implementers and providers of integration justify their course of action regarding these young people with trajectories deemed undesirable. Beyond the legal framework they are operating in, some of them are in charge of implementing the policies in a tangible way towards YAS and can initiate new strategic directions. They need to make decisions regarding subgroups of young people – which ones fall into the category of uncooperative or passive young people, for instance, and which ones are considered as model YAS. By analysing how they classify the YAS and describe their features and their expectations, the underlying moral system regarding a 'model adult employee' and the corresponding 'model behaviour' becomes apparent. Another added value of such an in-depth analysis is that it gives us a theoretical understanding of the direction the welfare state as a whole is heading and how values related to the 'work ethics' and 'age' are reproduced.

In the following section, I will delve deeper into the analysis of the emerging patterns, which can be observed in *both cases*. The goal is to expose the encompassing discursive patterns and narratives drawing on the common abstract concepts found in both cantons. There are recurrent discursive patterns shared in both cantons that need to be made visible. It is important to bear in mind that the focus is not only how often a certain pattern reveals itself, but rather bringing different discourses to light and pointing out how these discourses relate to each other. The relation of discursive patterns is made visible with narratives.

An in-depth evaluation of the collected data has allowed for reconstructing seven socio-political narratives that occur in both cases and are specifically in relation to YAS and how they should be governed by cantonal transition and welfare policies. It is important to note that for every narrative, several quotes have been selected to illustrate one particular recurrent pattern. Beyond the differences and nuances between the cases, there are certain moral underpinnings that become apparent throughout the collected data. These patterns emerged from within the data after an evaluation proce-

ture based on coding principles detailed in the methodological section (see Chapter 4.3).

This does not mean, however, that every single interviewed implementer would confirm or subscribe to the following narratives. These narratives cannot be generalized with respect to a homogenous position of the cantons. However, it does mean that they are present and recurrent in both cantons and that they influence to a certain degree the direction of the cantonal welfare and transition regimes as well as the realities and vulnerabilities of the YAS.²⁵

1) “Too much social assistance will discourage YAS”

The first observable pattern in both cantons is that most of the implementers do not consider social assistance for YAS a social right that responds to a concrete hardship but rather an interim support, which should be granted with caution and only to those for whom you can expect a return on investment. The underlying perception is that too much welfare will inevitably lead to long-term dependency. YAS will end up accustomed to the regime and will lose their intrinsic motivation to seek productive work. Hence, the implementers consider their task to be educational. In their view, YAS have not yet understood how the system works and intervention will help them acquire a certain awareness towards their own situation and change their behaviour accordingly. The first step back onto the ‘right path’ for the YAS is thus accepting that they are deficient and that they need to work on their problems. In the following passage, this particular implementer emphasizes the importance of questioning the choice of YAS to apply for social assistance during intake. He or she goes on to explain that it is insufficient to assume a legal perspective because this would mean that it would be too easy for young people to have access to social assistance. According to this argument, the pedagogic responsibility of social assistance is more important than the alleviation of the actual hardship of the YAS. First, you need to make sure as an implementer that the YAS understands that it is not normal for a responsible adult to ask for financial help. If the implementer fails to use the moment of welfare application to remind the YAS of this fact, there is a risk of long-term dependency that could deter the motivation of the YAS to find an apprenticeship. In this logic, it would be harmful for society if YAS thought of social assistance as a social right. This emerging pattern corresponds with

25 The following results follow to a great extent the article I published within the Volume 66 Issue 4 of the “Journal of Social Policy Research” (Bochsler 2020).

the principles of the 'work ethics' in relation to the age group of the young adults. The actions of the implementers of social policies are both symbolic and tangible. The duty of frontline workers, according to this implementer, is to make sure that applicants understand the necessity for some kind of a professional project as trade-off for the material support they receive. The moral justification is that you have to reinforce the behaviour of YAS according to what is considered valuable – in this case their lack of productive work and realistic vocational training project. Alleviating hardship by providing material support is in this view inherently going to deter the individual motivation of the YAS to get off of welfare.

Following this collective logic, social assistance has a moral and educational duty to shape and 'construct' the future generation by providing 'points of references' and 'certain mechanisms' that are desirable and, in the process, eradicating those that are undesirable for a productive society. The following quote illustrates this argument:

“The most important thing for us is to question the choice. This is the most important point. Because if we only take a legal point of view, then any young person could come to us and ask for financial help and this is not the objective, let us say, to facilitate the access to social assistance benefits. The objective is to question their choice to ask for financial support. One of our missions is to build a future generation and to give them some points of references and mechanisms of how things work.” (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva)

2) “Social assistance will inherently harm YAS”

Another pattern emerging from the collected data and which is linked to the argument that the longer YAS receive social assistance the more they will be dependent on the system is the tendency to label YAS as pathological. The implementers repeatedly accentuate the fact that no one wants to be 'dependent' on social assistance and that the mere fact of receiving this social benefit and thus being at the margin of society can be psychologically damaging for beneficiaries. In this view, YAS are viewed as patients who are wounded or ill and for whom social assistance can only provide ambulatory treatment. This near-medical approach becomes apparent when we take a closer look at the first month after a YAS has applied for social assistance and how the implementers speak about this crucial phase of welfare eligibility. YAS have to prove their eligibility for social services. During this 'intake'

procedure, the professionals in charge of the YAS assess their life course and current situation and identify deficiencies that need fixing. However, it can on no account function as long-term treatment. On the contrary, long-term treatment would inevitably lead to a systemic dependency from which the YAS could not recover.

“If someone stays too long in the welfare system, well then this happens, a form of we could call it Hospitalism. You can no longer get out of the system.” (Implementer, Social service, Basel-City)

Conversely, although nearly every legal framework of the cantonal social assistance enshrines the objective of preventing social exclusion, following this discursive construct, social assistance becomes synonymous with dependency and bears an inherent risk of exclusion. The fear is that YAS will psychologically adapt to their circumstances and become accustomed to a life in welfare. From this perspective, social assistance is inherently harmful to YAS. Furthermore, this narrative is clearly connected to a moral and educational goal: It is because YAS are still young and considered irresponsible that social assistance has to be designed like that. In the canton of Geneva, for instance, YAS have to develop a ‘professional project’ before being eligible for the regular social subsistence level. Before that, they receive what is called the ‘secondary scale’ of the social subsistence level, which, according to the following implementer from Point Jeunes is a ‘survivor’s benefit’. Morally, with this reduced scale the implementers want to prevent the emergence of a ‘social assistance functioning’. This educative and preventive measure is specifically designed for YAS and not for other age groups receiving social assistance.

“Why the exceptional scale? That’s because, let’s say, we want to incite the young individual to motivate himself, let’s say, motivate himself to find other solutions, other means of support. Because let’s be honest, this exceptional scale is rather a survivor’s benefit than a benefit to live decently. So, we don’t want to install them into a social assistance functioning.” (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva)

3) “Segment and hierarchize YAS”

As has previously been mentioned, the economic logic of activation policies has led to a segmentation that separates employable YAS from less

employable ones. The 'education first' strategy has programmatically placed vocational training as the primary step towards a sustainable labour market integration in the centre. This shift has clearly left its mark on how implementers position YAS within the segmentation practice. In their view, penalizing or rewarding regulations directed at young people should be reinforced with the criterion 'complete an apprenticeship' as a benchmark for the segmentation. The example of the canton of Geneva illustrates this practice. YAS have six months during the 'intake' phase at Point Jeunes or a CAS to present their 'professional project.' In the meantime, they receive a reduced subsistence level in comparison to YAS who have already presented their project and are now participating at an integration measure like MoveOn or Scène Active or are already completing an apprenticeship. In other words, this six-month time frame is used, both ceremoniously and tangibly (reduced subsistence level) to cement and demarcate positions of recognition within the regime of social assistance. It can be compared to an individualized bonus/penalty regulation, where bad behaviour is punished and good behaviour is rewarded. Conversely, as social assistance itself is framed as harmful in a long-term perspective, the YAS who finally do find an apprenticeship should be rewarded and should not even have the burden of remaining within the regime of social assistance. The material support of these young people, according to this narrative, should be assumed by other upstream social benefit systems, like scholarships for instance, and they should be financially better off than YAS who remain on social assistance. This coincides perfectly with the position of the umbrella association SKOS/CSIAS regarding this matter (SKOS/CSIAS 2011).

"So, the first thing I would change is that all young people in education should no longer be part of social assistance but there should be another upstream social benefit system that takes care of them, like scholarships and grants." (Implementer, Point Jeunes, Geneva)

In other words, the YAS who have proven their worthiness by participating and completing an apprenticeship should not remain in a stigmatizing environment like social assistance – however, other YAS should definitely stay where they are. These findings feed directly into the moral value of reinforcing the work ethic as Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) understand it. As the YAS who are completing an apprenticeship are considered to be on the right track and doing productive work, their worth is rewarded by liberation

from social assistance, which is considered too marginalized for them. On the one hand, social policies are tangible in the sense that the segmentation of employable and less employable YAS decides upon the concrete financial means for the individual livelihood. On the other hand, these practices are symbolic because they hierarchize the worth of YAS. Stigmatization, in this view, is a necessary part of social assistance in order to remind beneficiaries that they are individually responsible for being excluded and ‘not on the right path’. The young people who manage to get an apprenticeship have to be financially rewarded whereas the remaining YAS have to be penalized for their lack of productivity – reminding them that they have to contribute in an economically valuable way.

4) “YAS should feel ashamed for receiving social assistance”

A corresponding pattern emerging from the interviews with the implementers is the one affirming that YAS take social assistance too much for granted. Following this logic, today, YAS are not stigmatized enough compared to the past alignment of social assistance and this is regrettable because receiving social assistance should always have a strong symbolic effect on the lives of YAS. It should remind them that their trajectory is wrong and that they are responsible for this unwanted situation. This implementer explains how YAS have become accustomed to social assistance. According to the professional quoted in the following, it is rather recent that young beneficiaries have such an attitude, and it is considered bad because they will not cooperate with the professionals regarding their professional project. The following passage illustrates this recurrent pattern.

“I think that nowadays the stigmatizing aspect of social assistance is less strong amongst the young people compared to fifteen or twenty years ago [...] They are used to this world in a way.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

Usually, this narrative is closely linked to the observation that a growing part of YAS grew up in a household with parents who had already experienced long-term hardship and benefit from social assistance. According to this perspective, these YAS have ‘learned’ from their parents (who already had to apply for social assistance in order to survive) that there is a nanny state that will support them. In other words, their unfortunate trajectory – growing up in a poor household – has taught them the wrong lesson about individual responsibility and economic independence.

According to this perspective, the problem of transmitting poverty to the next generation is not structural but individual and educational. Again, the recurrent underlying paternalistic attitude appears. The intervention of the professionals is interpreted as an important symbolic moment in the trajectory of a YAS because it will help him or her to understand that he or she should not behave poorly like their parents and take matters into his or her own hands rather than stay passive. During my fieldwork in both cantons, the willingness to fight against what is called ‘transmission of poverty to the next generation’ has been addressed several times. Most of the times in the context of the ‘education first’ alignment: If the cantonal agencies are better coordinated and if more young people achieve a VET level, then one should be able to reduce the transmission of poverty. However, the same implementers repeatedly added to this strategic argument the fact that it is the YAS who need to change their attitude. Blame and the responsibility for the transmission of poverty is thus ambivalent. Implementers will, on the one hand, affirm that the possibilities for YAS with multiple problems within the VET and labour market are limited. However, on the other hand, they will discursively blame the same YAS for their passivity and their lack of cooperation and/or motivation when it comes to finding an apprenticeship or acquiring the necessary skill to prequalify for an apprenticeship. The following quote from a provider of integration in Basel-City illustrates this ambiguity, as this person describes the generational transmission of welfare dependency from parents to children. However, the focus is laid on the problematic mindset of the YAS and not on the structural cause, which is that the household experiences continuous economic hardship, which is transmitted to the YAS:

“Because I do realize that there are a lot within AMIE who have a biography... and the parents were already beneficiaries of social assistance and then you have this kind of mechanism where the young people say: ‘Well, I already have this net that supports me.’”
(Provider of integration, AMIE, Basel-City)

This second quote from an implementer in Geneva highlights even more this recurrent pattern, describing the current YAS who request support from the canton as ‘shameless’. The fact that the YAS experience a lack of professional perspectives and their trajectory (growing up in a ‘poor’ household) as some kind of normality is being problematized on an individual and not on a structural level.

“Yes. They are not ashamed anymore. [...] The parents are also beneficiaries of social assistance... so they know nothing else and discussion with the parents is not helpful at all.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

5) “There should be an individualized help plan for every YAS”

Activation policies and the ‘education first’ strategy aim at accompanying YAS through an individualized integration plan towards an apprenticeship and from there towards a job on the regular labour market. The implementers in both cantons speak of the past decade as an internal stabilization process regarding their structural changes within the administration. Although we have already discussed institutional and strategic nuances between the two cantons, the different agencies and departments dealing with YAS are on the same page for the most part – it is a question of coordinating and adjusting the governmental action. One pattern concerning this matter is the conception of the ‘individualized help plan’. For every YAS, there is or should be an individualized help plan that gets him or her towards an apprenticeship. The special need for this individualized help plan is linked with the fact that the YAS are young and dependent. They are viewed as deficient young people who still need to grow into the role of a responsible adult. This implementer affirms that the YAS do not have the same needs as the adults and they need an appropriate answer that fits the requirements of their individual situation.

“These young people have different needs than adults and we have to be able to respond to those individual needs accordingly.”
(Implementer, Employment Office, Geneva)

In tangible terms, if the YAS do not have the required school achievements, they should get refresher courses, or if the YAS have confidence problems or they lack much-needed work skills like the ability to work in groups or just being punctual, they should be redirected towards an integration programme that works on what the implementers call ‘basic social competences’. If there is a problem within the family or a health issue, you should find the appropriate answers to these issues. Conversely, this course of action is often presented discursively as a generous approach because in comparison to older age groups there is not the same focus or intensity of integration work. The YAS should be grateful for the new socio-political alignment that takes their needs seriously and provides individually adapted opportunities. The catch is that YAS need to comply with the selected course of action. These

answers are being proposed and sometimes even imposed under threat of temporarily reducing the subsistence level. Sanctions are recurrently legitimized with reference to the ‘education first’ narrative and the individual degree of autonomy of the YAS. The implementer’s job is to make the YAS understand that his or her motivation should be to find and complete an apprenticeship – irrespective of past difficulties or setbacks. This following quote from an implementer in Basel-City illustrates this motivational struggle:

“So, I think in general, it is the motivation of these young adults that is important. The motivation to see the importance of finishing a vocational training for their life. It is difficult to motivate them really. After their non-linear life course and difficulties to go another three or four years again in order to complete a vocational training without huge merit.” (Implementer, AIZ, Basel-City)

The following second quote from an implementer in Geneva emphasizes the difficulty to motivate YAS and attributes it to past experienced scholastic setbacks:

“And often they are not motivated because they are not into school. So naturally, they do not want to go back. There is a whole work around this to make them understand the importance of education.” (Implementer, OCE, Genève)

If at the beginning of this process, the YAS and the social worker agree on the assessment of his or her ‘problems’ and on which aspects of his or her life he or she should be working on. At this stage of the process, the YAS has some agency because he or she can choose from different measures. The precondition, however, is that the YAS is compliant and that there is an agreement regarding the best course of action. Conflicts can arise if there is no compliance, or over time if the YAS does not improve according to the plan during the integration measure, or if the YAS decides to quit the measure because he or she did not find it helpful.

6) “Social assistance needs to review the individual willingness to cooperate”

If the individualized integration plan does not evolve accordingly or if there is no compliance from the beginning, the role of social assistance is to control the YAS and to induce cooperation and compliant behaviour. In those

cases, social assistance becomes an ambiguous context because on the one hand, the YAS needs to show a certain degree of compliance in order to get the financial support and on the other hand, the YAS do not want to waste their time in a programme they find unhelpful or even stressful. These YAS fall under the category of 'uncooperative', as this passage illustrates:

“And then it depends very much on the capacity of the client to cooperate and also on their willingness to cooperate. This is something we verify. And we ask: Is the client at all capable of cooperating? [...] And if not, well then, we address the subject of work and the client needs to go out there and look for a job.” (Implementer, Social service, Basel-City)

This can lead to tensions between social assistance and providers of integration. The latter promote in general a free adherence procedure with YAS because they know that in order to work with them, there needs to be a certain level of cooperation and motivation. Otherwise, the trajectory and life situation of the YAS will not improve and the integration measure will not get the graduation scores it needs to justify its existence and secure a long-term contract with cantonal agencies. During fieldwork, an example of a YAS who had been more or less constrained to participate in an integration measure was cited by a provider of integration. According to the provider of integration, the social worker of a municipal CAS constrained this particular YAS (with threats of sanctions) to participate at MoveOn because the social worker found that there was a lack of basic social competence and the YAS in question needed to learn these skills in order to be ready for VET. The conflict arose because the YAS in question did not want to 'go back to school' and would have preferred to look for a job on the regular labour market. The result is that the YAS in question complied with the expectations of the social worker because he or she threatened to sanction the YAS. The implementer from MoveOn explained that these situations occur frequently and that they represent a burden for their work with YAS because without free adherence from the beginning, the probability of another orchestrated setback in the life of the YAS is likely. In this example, the professional tried to coerce the YAS to participate in a prequalifying measure. The overall cantonal strategy is 'education first'. YAS should find an apprenticeship or in the case of Geneva, participate in a prequalifying measure to learn necessary social skills. However, if the YAS does not cooperate, the YAS still has to demonstrate his or

her willingness to reduce or alleviate completely his or her indigence. The course of action in the context of social assistance can be either the long-term approach of 'education first' or a short-term approach characterized by 'job first'. As we already have discussed, individual features like age, behaviour, and past setbacks determine which way to go and there is considerable discretionary power for social workers regarding that matter. The following interview passage demonstrates how social assistance is not considered a voluntary counselling centre.

“And what he is able to do, well he is obligated to do it. We are talking about social assistance and not about a voluntary counselling centre. However, it is not a constraining context either. It is a duty context. The people who come here have duties. The duties are individual because not every human being is equal. Not every human being has the same backpack.” (Implementer, Social service, Basel-City)

As we have seen, the concrete 'duties' the YAS must perform vary greatly and depend on various factors like the concrete attitude of the social worker towards the 'education first' alignment, or past failures of the YAS: How much time has the social worker already assigned the YAS to a specific measure that did not work out? The more a social worker has already done, the more the YAS will not benefit from new measures and will have to live on a reduced subsistence level and look for a regular paid job without a VET. This logic is congruent with the principle of subsidiarity within the social assistance context as well as the moral value of reinforcing the work ethics, which both tend to suggest that social assistance – especially in the case of young people – should be limited in time.

Although many implementers speak of resource-orientated support, the reality, if we follow the discursive patterns found in the data, is much more ambiguous. They affirm that at the beginning of the support it is important to speak of the strengths of the YAS. A few implementers even talked about how YAS gained valuable experiences during phases where they were homeless and out of 'the system', affirming that these experiences would make them more resilient than others. However, if we look at what they suggest concretely to the YAS and what should be the individual focus of the help plan for the coming month to work on, then the picture changes: The YAS have to acknowledge their various deficiencies regarding school achievements or

work-related skills. They have to acknowledge, for instance, that they have a problem with punctuality or hygiene and the integration measure in which they are to participate will focus on these aspects. During these measures, the capacity of the YAS to improve their lack of skills will be periodically reviewed, and the implementers will decide if the YAS evolves in the right direction. This makes sense if we take a systemic perspective: YAS need to eliminate their problematic behaviours and features in order to have a chance at an apprenticeship. Social policies, as I discussed in the theoretical section, normatively separate the unproductive and unemployable citizens from the productive and employable ones. Only the latter can legitimately benefit from social assistance in a moral sense and the others will repeatedly and ceremoniously be reminded of their deviancy.

Some implementers recognize the limits and potential harm of this alignment and affirm that it is short-sighted because not all YAS have the capacity to adapt to the requirements of the labour market. They take a critical stand against this individual approach as it would benefit first and foremost those YAS who are still resilient and have not yet experienced too many setbacks. This following interview segment illustrates this point of view:

“Concerning integration measures, the common denominator of all measures is acting on an individual level, irrespective of the assigning institution, Hospice Général, employment office, or disability insurance. You will not find a measure, which acts upon the labour market. [...] This is pure individualism.” (Provider of integration, Trajet, Geneva)

7) “Every YAS is treated equally”

This moral separation of deserving and undeserving poor within welfare regimes is embedded in the broader normative structure of a given society and thus, moral values like gender relations, age, work ethics, and ethnicity or territoriality become prevalent. Interestingly, most of the interviewed implementers do not directly acknowledge the importance of such values and norms. Rather, they affirm persistently that all YAS benefit equally from the same approach and support – independently of their gender, migration background, or other norms that might affect the scope of action of the YAS when it comes to the access to an apprenticeship.

“It does not matter if it is a young woman or a young man that comes to us. Both are challenged to start their professional careers

in a given occupational field, are they not? We want to meet them equally. Of course, there are differences regarding fields of interests, but this is not in relation to gender. This depends on the particular human and which way he or she wants to go.” (Provider of integration, Job Factory, Basel-City)

Another interview passage illustrates that even though the implementers proclaim an equal treatment, there still is a criterion that is important and is used to orientate the concrete guidance of the YAS. The most important criterion is the individual degree of autonomy. As the aim of the current social policies is to enhance the number of YAS who transition successfully from school to work via VET, the guidance for those YAS who present adequate behaviour and voluntarily align with the course of action are deemed ‘autonomous’ and will not need close accompaniment. They will ‘autonomously’ make the required steps to find an apprenticeship. However, for the other YAS who present certain problems like having a child, school deficiencies, or lack of social competences, the accompaniment (in other words, the control) needs to be closer.

“For us, it is the degree of autonomy of the young person that counts: Therefore, if he is autonomous, then the accompaniment framework or the follow-up are different than when he is not autonomous.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

The degree of autonomy is furthermore assessed with reference to a representation of what is considered a model employee. The goal is to shape the YAS, to change their deficient characteristics into desirable ones, and to alter their undesirable behaviours according to what experts think the labour market needs. The integration plan and the activation measures are instruments to transform the YAS into an exploitable and skilled work force. This is what ‘autonomy’ relates to: presenting features that will make one exploitable economically and thus independent (or autonomous) from social assistance. Migration background or gender, in this perspective, are reduced to undesirable features or additional disadvantages that are only taken into account in relation to the desired outcome, that is, finding and keeping an apprenticeship. During an interview with one implementer, this nuance became apparent. First, the implementer affirms that there is no discrimination regarding migration background or gender because every YAS is treated equally and has the right to the same support. However, the implementer goes

on to explain, for instance, how it is normal that, because of the fact that no woman can work on a construction site due to the discriminatory conduct of the construction workers and employers, the implementer will suggest other vocational fields for her.

“No, no, she is not going to go there. But even if she goes, the employer will not accept her because he prefers a strong boy who can shift things. That is the trade of construction in general. Because they talk differently. There is a language. And the language of construction will not soften up just because there is a girl on the site.” (Implementer, Cap Formation, Geneva)

Although this is not a quote that every implementer or provider of integration would agree with, it illustrates an important observation. Within the current socio-political alignment, the focus lies on the economic value of the YAS and their individual achievements within their transition from school to work. In other words, the socio-political alignment can be described as outcome orientated. Only the result of finding an apprenticeship and keeping it is pertinent. Pointing out or addressing in any way certain impediments within the apprenticeship market due to ascribed statuses like being male or female or having a migration background is interpreted as ‘creating inequality’. The personal aspirations or individual struggles of the YAS are secondary concerns. In the rhetoric of the implementer, they appear as individual features one has to deal with. Consequently, such an alignment of social policies ignores structural disadvantages and discriminations that stem from ascribed statuses and in doing so, reproduces them because the burden is left to the individual to handle them. Concretely, if we take the example outlined in the previous quote, ‘the girl’ will have to adapt her choices of apprenticeships according to what employers have pre-defined as suitable for ‘girls’. The role of coaches or educators is not to widen the scope of possibilities for the YAS. On the contrary, their role is to make sure that the YAS will adapt their choices to what is expected of them.

The following example illustrates how the current segmentation practices and corresponding narratives reinforce asymmetric power relations between young men and young women. In Basel-City, the integration programme AMIE famously targets young mothers without vocational training. The starting point of this programme is the assessment that there are structural obstacles for these young mothers to reconcile professional aspirations

and childcare. Many of the participants have also experienced domestic violence in past relationships. Most of them are now single parents and need to deal with multiple challenges: healing from past violence, housing and mental health issues, finding an apprenticeship, and precarious financial situations with accumulated debts. Interviews with participants showed, on the one hand, that AMIE can be a safe space for these young women, where they could find companionship with other young women dealing with similar life trajectories. Furthermore, they benefit from close guidance from professionals who dedicate themselves to work on their issues – e.g., accessing external childcare services. On the other hand, the framework remains the same as any other integration programme as it is achievement and outcome orientated. The aim of the programme is that young mothers find an apprenticeship after a year, that they work on their deficiencies and enhance their individual responsibility to find solutions for the hardship and the lack of VET. If these young mothers do not succeed, the failure will be attributed to them – not to their particularly disadvantageous trajectory or to the discriminatory mechanism within the labour market and VET system.

In the perspective of ‘education first’, childcare is de facto another obstacle that young mothers need to deal with. The work of taking care of a child is not acknowledged as being part of the productive economy and thus, it does not change but rather reinforces a hardship. Much like the examples shown in the theoretical section (e.g., the negative, welfare-dependant figure of the African American mother in the US context in the 1970s), the ‘education first’ policy creates an ambiguous figure of the single-parenting young mother without vocational training. Based on my field research, the ambiguities of this figure became discursively apparent. On the one hand, these young mothers are constructed as ‘more resilient’ and ‘well-behaved’ than their counterparts ‘the young boys/men’ because the implementers attribute to them a particular capability to endure or wait out a situation and to be more perseverant. This discursive pattern could be found repeatedly in both cantons and can be illustrated by this quote:

“Young women or women in general are much more studious than young men and less rebellious. They are much more well-behaved, and they have maybe a greater ability take it upon themselves compared to men. Consequently, they are better at school and those who are on social assistance, they never miss an appointment,

and the administrative procedures is also well done normally.”
(Implementer, Accroche, Geneva)

On the other hand, beyond this gendered perspective of young women being more ‘studious’ than young men, some implementers are very critical of the choices of these young mothers – condemning them morally, for instance, if they get pregnant during an apprenticeship or before finding one.

“So, I had a participant once. She completed the training to become a nursing assistant and at the end, she was one of the best in her class. [...] But then she got pregnant. And this is also a solution, but I was very disappointed.” (Provider of integration, AMIE, Basel-City)

This provider of integration repeatedly criticized the individual choice of programme participants to get pregnant during the interview because it directly contradicts the ‘education first’ alignment and slows down the process of integrating the young mothers in a sustainable way into the labour market. As long as the young mothers are compliant from the beginning, do not slip up, and stay on the right track (like not getting pregnant again, for instance) then the provider of integration will gladly support them. However, if they do slip up, they will bear the consequences of their ‘individual choices.’ Along the same lines, the provider of integration goes on to affirm that the young mothers are still adolescents and do not have the characteristics of ‘typical mothers,’ who have experience and a certain emotional maturity. In the following section the provider of integration says that this stereotype can be detrimental for young mothers because sometimes employers will think of them as mature, which they are not, according to this statement:

“They often fight with the stereotype of the experienced mature mother. That image will be imposed on them. But they are closer to the adolescent than to this image of a mother that is reliable. And that is sometimes the crux of the matter because an employer will think he’s employing a reliable and mature apprentice.” (Provider of integration, AMIE, Basel-City)

This discourse creates a highly ambiguous context for young mothers without vocational training who are experiencing financial hardship. On the one hand, specific programmes like AMIE can offer concrete support and help attenuate the burden of having childcare duties and seeking vocational training at the same time. It provides support regarding challenges

like organizing a place in a day nursery, refresher courses for school, or job application training. The professionals of such programmes act also as a link to other institutions, for instance, when they accompany the young mothers to appointments at social services to negotiate specific issues with social workers like budget adjustments or the course of action in terms of integration. AMIE can also have the function of creating a safe space, where young mothers who have experienced domestic violence from their ex-partners (or current partners) can support each other. On the other hand, if one takes a closer look at the narratives that are being pushed, it becomes apparent that it is on no account a stigma-free experience for the participants. These YAS are being stigmatized for not having made good choices in the past, which are directly linked to their status as mothers. As employment and individual self-sufficiency are the main mode for societal participation, having a child at a young age without the necessary financial means is considered harmful. The intersection of being young, female, mother, and with past setbacks regarding the VET system creates a specific vulnerability because these YAS have to cope with both the expectations of being a good mother and becoming employable at the same time. The cantonal 'education first' strategy applies to all young people, regardless of gender. Being young and having a child is from a systemic point of view an impediment as it adds another obstacle to a successful transition towards economic independence. This particular obstacle is attributed to women – not to men. Being a mother and fulfilling the duties of motherhood does not change the status of 'unemployed', 'without vocational training', and therefore 'dependent'. There is no accreditation of this labour and therefore, it is considered an additional burden. Even though this particular programme helps young women to reconcile their 'motherhood duties' with the requirement of finding a full-time apprenticeship and keeping it for three years, it is important to highlight the fact that it affirms the dominant moral value of gender relations. Orloff (1993:308, 2010:253) speaks of "implicit male standard" when analysing these discriminatory policies and stresses the need to take into consideration gender differences in order to analyse the access of the population to citizenship rights and social policies in a nuanced manner.

Several implementers and providers of integration in Basel-City and in Geneva used an intersectional and paternalistic narrative targeting, constructing, and thus problematizing this social group. It entailed, for instance, the specific 'lesson' that these young mothers have to learn not to get pregnant again in order to avoid jeopardizing their employability. In any other

context, imposing such a 'lesson' would be morally questionable. However, in a welfare context, where a risk of 'dependency' is at stake, it is considered educational and part of becoming a responsible adult because it enhances the chances of achieving the goal of finding and keeping an apprenticeship and becoming self-sufficient.

5.3.1 Concluding remarks

A distrusting human image of YAS

Congruent with the moral value of the work ethics, the human image of the market participants (in the present case, the YAS) tends to be rather negative and distrusting. A majority of the discursive patterns found within the data build on the basic moral assumption that if one provides too much state support to YAS, they will be discouraged from seeking productive work, or in other words, gainful employment (Narrative 1). This builds on the idea that without financial incentives, YAS will always choose welfare over productive work. Consequently, the moral argument is that social assistance is inherently harmful (Narrative 2) because the YAS did not 'work' for the financial support they receive, and the danger is that this will produce new generations of state dependent and non-working or unproductive young individuals. This relates to what Hirschman (1991: 1-10) described as 'reactionary rhetoric.' Albert Hirschman maps the diffuse and treacherous world of reactionary rhetoric in which conservative public figures, thinkers, and polemicists have been arguing against progressive agendas and reforms for the past two hundred years. Hirschman draws his examples from three successive waves of reactive thought that arose in response to the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, to democratization and the drive toward universal suffrage in the nineteenth century, and to the welfare state in our own century. In each case he identifies three principal arguments invariably used: (1) described as the 'reactionary rhetoric,' which emerges programatically as a push back after historic phases of social rights advancements in Europe. The thesis of these agents of 'reactionary rhetoric' is that permitting too much access to social rights would have the perverse effect of achieving the exact opposite of their intentions, namely, producing long-term welfare dependency and with that isolation and exclusion. Interestingly, such discursive patterns emerge from the data: Providing too much social assistance would lead to the perverse effect that YAS will adapt to the benefits and never be motivated to participate in productive work.

In this vein, social policies within the realm of ‘activation’ are only deemed effective if they promote labour market participation, while also containing costs in an efficient manner. This is how they can be discursively legitimized. This in turn has led to a hierarchization and a repositioning of the YAS within the cantonal welfare and transition regime according to their individual state of employability or non-employability and their educational trajectory (Narrative 3).

The ‘shamelessness’ of YAS

Moreover, a fourth emerging narrative demonstrated that some implementers and providers of integration regret the shamelessness of YAS when it comes to their entitlements to social assistance. This corresponds with the afore-mentioned hierarchization because within the realm of ‘activation policies’, only the ‘active’ welfare beneficiaries – the ones with a professional project, who participate at an integration measure, and accept the blame for their individual hardship – are morally desirable. Following this argument, ‘passive’ beneficiaries without professional perspectives and who are only ‘passively’ claiming benefits are considered to have failed to prevent their own hardships and must thus be reminded individually of their shortcomings. Thus, shame is a necessary part of activation policies, as you need to remind the inactive beneficiaries of the deviancy of their ‘passivity’. Whether shame and stigmatization are consciously produced or not by professionals is another matter – it stems from the fact that within the design of activation policies, the ‘passive beneficiary claimants’ are deemed lesser than the active ones. This brings us back to what Lessenich (2009) describes in his conception of the welfare state as a stratified social space of recognition and non-recognition. The morally-approved model figure of recognition is a Swiss working citizen, whereas the negative model figure of recognition would be the foreign non-working non-citizen – the latter being discursively constructed as a figure that could potentially threaten the social order. One must note at this point that it is only a minority of the interviewed implementers and providers of integration who spoke in those terms of the YAS. However, the fact that such discourse is present within the data in both cantons as a pattern is not a coincidence and is directly related to discursive adjustments towards a more ‘active’ alignment of social policies – especially in the case of young people as they have not yet been ‘productive’ members of society.

An 'individualized' help plan for every YAS

According to the emerging narratives, the role of social policies with respect to YAS is initiating an individualized help plan (Narrative 5) tailored to the deficiencies of the youngsters and inducing their cooperation (Narrative 6). Again, we can highlight the rather neo-liberal discourse construing YAS as deficient economic subjects. The implementers and providers of integration speak of performance-based evaluation tools, which should be used to identify the individual shortcomings of the YAS and to determine the next "integration steps." Handler and Hasenfeld (1991:20) argue that policy makers and implementers use what they call "myths" and "ceremonies" in order to justify their course of action. Looking at the emerging discursive patterns, we find some indications corresponding with this statement. Applied on the subject at hand, the myth would be that preventing youth unemployment is a matter of implementing tailor-made integration plans, which will eliminate individual deficiencies and reinforce the work ethics of the youngsters. The ceremony would be to focus on those YAS who comply with the expectations of the regime and have ultimately found an apprenticeship thanks to these individualized help plans. However, the reality remains more ambivalent and two findings support this. First, the analysis of the statistics on social assistance in Chapter 2 confirmed the tendency amongst young adults to accumulate multiple problems and to remain for a longer period of time on social assistance. Consequently, even though there is a better coordination between welfare organization within cantons and individualized help plans are being implemented, there still seems to be a growing percentage of YAS with mental health issues and without immediate professional projects. Second, a minority of implementers (especially those found within the canton of Geneva) takes a critical standpoint with respect to these narratives, arguing that there is no immediate solution for every YAS, and the regime should rather aim at giving the YAS a break from their stressful educational trajectories characterized by multiple setbacks. This points to the fact that also amongst administrative experts there are those who perceive the limits of the current 'education first' alignment in terms of successful youth unemployment prevention.

Reproducing structural disadvantages

One of the most striking observations throughout the data can be described as economization of 'the social'. The active turn (Hansen 2019) of the welfare state has left its mark in Switzerland and most of the emerging nar-

ratives within the investigated cantons tend to relate to terms and procedures that are close to a neo-liberal understanding of the social phenomena at hand, namely the exclusion of a part of the youth of the school-to-work transition. The analysis tends to confirm the observation that the initial concern of providing social rights based on a social understanding of reciprocity has given way to a more individualized, contractual, and market-based rearrangement of social policies, which puts the responsibility for alleviating a concrete hardship rather one-sidedly on the shoulders of the ones experiencing the hardship.

This points to the seventh and last emerging narrative, the affirmation that every YAS is treated equally. Activation policies, as we have seen, tend to disregard structural causes of poverty and exclusion, and focus rather on the individual features of their subjects (Krenn 2012; Nadai 2009; Stelzer-Orthofer and Weidenholzer 2011; Wyss 2007). The present findings tend to confirm this observation – at least regarding gender relations. Indeed, examples have shown that the predominance of reinforcing the work ethics of every YAS in the same way (principle of ‘equal treatment’) contributes to the accentuation of structural disadvantages connected to the ascribed status of being a young mother. Having a child does not exempt a young parent from being available for active labour market measures in the same way as it used to. Interestingly, even within specialized integration programmes like AMIE, created explicitly to alleviate specific vulnerabilities of young unemployed mothers, moral narratives emerge confronting these YAS with their ‘bad decisions’ of getting pregnant because it represents an impediment for finding and keeping an apprenticeship. This example illustrates how deeply rooted such moral concepts are in Swiss social policy: reinforcing work ethics to make welfare beneficiaries ‘accept their past failures’ and enhance their ‘individual responsibility’ to prove welfare worthiness – especially in the case of young adults. Furthermore, the results point to a moral connection between work and family ethics. In other words, there are imageries of what a model working family should be within welfare and transition regimes guiding the policies and their implementation. Aspects of such a model family found within the data are for instance that there is a right time to have children and that it is conditional upon having enough income and that there should be more than one parent. The moral responsibility for assuring that these aspects are honoured lies with the mothers and they tend to be blamed when they do not abide by the rules.

A tendency for neo-liberal and paternalistic discourses

Another common and encompassing feature that surfaces regularly is the predominance of a neo-liberal worldview (individualizing trajectories, ignoring structural disadvantages, etc.) in combination with paternalistic legitimation strategies. Other scholars have discussed the ‘top down’ characteristics of activation policies in general. They affirm for instance that the welfare-activation nexus can reinforce paternalistic views “envisaging welfare beneficiaries as obedient subjects” (Galster et al. 2009:646). Furthermore, the willingness to reduce costs and make welfare policies ‘more dissuasive’ favours quick-fix remedies and not the long-term professional integration of YAS. This is most likely to affect the most disadvantaged YAS because quick-fix remedies coincide with less time available for the professionals and a consequent risk of cream skimming and selective practice at the local level (Bonvin 2008). The present analysis tends to confirm this and suggests that neo-liberal and paternalistic views intertwine to orientate the categorization of YAS regarding the implementation of a concrete and individual integration plan.

However, paternalistic justification patterns can be used to legitimate long-term approaches as well as short-term ones. Indeed, as the analysis has demonstrated, both the conflicting strategies of ‘education first’ (long-term approach) and the traditional logic of social assistance (short-term approach) are present within the data and both can be legitimized using paternalistic views. On the one hand, some implementers legitimize the ‘education first’ strategy by emphasizing that YAS have not yet understood how the system works, that they need time, and that their intervention will help them understand this and change their behaviour accordingly. On the other hand, some implementers (and providers of integration) argue that this course of action is ‘too social’ and that the YAS need to ‘wake up’, which could be achieved by the YAS experiencing unemployment and this in turn would make them more ‘responsible’. In both cases, the burden for being on the wrong track is attributed to the YAS by discursively referencing their youth, irresponsibility, and juvenile immaturity.

If we consider the analytical understanding of social policies as vectors of moral values, one needs to point out the relevance of all activities which are designed to reinforce the ‘work ethics’ of the YAS. This issue seems particularly important morally when dealing with youngsters. They install an ambiguous context for the YAS. Welfare policies continuously create inclusion and exclusion because they position their subjects according to the new dogma

of labour market participation for all and at any price. Thus, the criteria of employability, scholastic skills, social competences, and a set of behavioural imageries of what is considered a model adult and responsible employee are in the focus of any activation measure.

The following chapter deals with the perception of the YAS themselves. In a similar way, the emerging patterns from the conducted interviews will be presented and put in relation with the perception of the implementers.

6 The perspective of the YAS

The previous subchapter dealt with the perspective of the implementers and providers of integration – how they interpret and classify the current socio-political alignment of their canton and how they deal discursively with the YAS as a socio-political challenge. After a detailed, comparative exposition of the administrative evolution within the cantons of Basel-City and Geneva and the discussion of the current alignment ‘education first’, the emerging patterns brought to light different narratives. At this stage, I want to highlight two of them – as they are particularly interesting in relation to the lived experience of the YAS.

First, the analysis showed that the welfare dependency axiom is very much present and recurrent within the data and extends in some form through all the encounters of my field research. The axiom specifies that the more a person benefits from social assistance, the more the benefits will deter motivation to seek employment and, thus, become independent from welfare. The axiom is strengthened through a paternalistic narrative that stipulates that YAS are still young and irresponsible, have not yet understood how the ‘adult’ world functions, and, thus, need firm guidance towards vocational training to prevent long-term welfare dependency. In other words, due to their age and naiveté, they are at high risk of falling into the ‘dependency trap’. Second, the analysis demonstrated that the current socio-political alignment can reinforce specific stigmatization by ignoring and thus reproducing dominant norms like gender relation, work ethics, ethnicity, and age-related representations. This matter has been illustrated with the example of young single mothers, who need to answer to both expectations, being a responsible mother and acquiring the skills to become a model employee.

The following analysis focuses on the opinions of the YAS and how they judge the current support system. All the YAS encountered have a considerable amount of experience within the respective cantonal welfare regimes. Their stories and affirmations act like a mirror to the socio-political alignment of the cantons and reflect the discussed ambiguities, as they have to go through the corresponding welfare regimes of Basel-City and Geneva. In the following, the analysis draws on the emerging discursive patterns observed in both cases. In the same manner as the previous chapter, recurrent narratives found in the interviews with YAS will be presented and reflected, using the analytical understanding of social policies that convey moral values (see

Chapter 3). First, a description of the sample will follow, after which two portraits of interviewed YAS (one in Basel and one in Geneva) will be presented in order to illustrate typical aspects of biographies of YAS as well as their heterogeneity. Third, I will discuss five recurrent discursive patterns that emerged from the data and illustrate them by presenting suitable quotes from the YAS. Again, the aim is to bring patterns to light by choosing the most appropriate quotes for an analytical purpose.

6.1 The YAS – a heterogeneous social group

The YAS are a heterogeneous group of people. The young people I encountered are between nineteen and twenty-eight years of age, five men and three women. The three women are also mothers and take care of their children as single parents. All eight YAS receive social assistance and six of them are currently in an integration programme. At the time of the encounter, the two YAS who did not participate in an integration programme lived in Basel-City. I conducted another three interviews with YAS attending the programme AMIE in Basel-City. The three remaining YAS encountered in Geneva are all part of an integration programme called MoveOn which focuses on regaining autonomy in daily life and working on “basic social competences” as the director of this programme calls it. Half of the YAS have debts between 2,500 and 10,000 Swiss francs. Most of them have had trouble in the past finding and keeping suitable accommodation and all of them have complicated or broken relationships with their parents. Half of the YAS have migration backgrounds and came to Switzerland as children via family reunion.²⁶

We can illustrate this more precisely by taking a closer look at two of the YAS I encountered in Geneva and Basel. The first is a young person identifying as male who I encountered during a visit at the integration programme MoveOn in Geneva. The second one is a young person identifying as female who I encountered during a visit at the integration programme AMIE in Basel-City.

Portrait of a YAS in Geneva (MoveOn3)

This first YAS example (referred to in the quotes used as MoveOn3) is twenty-three years old and is currently participating in the integration measure MoveOn in Geneva. He has a migration background and came to Geneva as a teenager from Latin America where his mother lives. He says that

26 For a detailed overview of the encountered YAS see Appendix 2.

this phase was very difficult as he could not catch up at school with the other students and did not acquire the grades he needed. He describes his mother as “complicated” and says he needed to be independent from her. He filed an application for financial support at Point Jeunes when he turned eighteen and left home. He goes on to describe the beginning at Point Jeunes as very stressful as he needed to prove his eligibility for financial support by disclosing his personal and financial situation – handing in all the necessary administrative documents to the assigned social worker. During this period, before his application was accepted, he was staying with friends or living in the streets and sleeping in hallways. Finally, after a month, his application was approved, and he managed to find a little studio with the help of the social worker. Due to recurrent late appearances to the monthly appointments at Point Jeunes, his benefits were reduced and then cut entirely for three months. During this period, he started to use a credit card in order to survive, which led to debts of several thousand Swiss francs. After this experience, he was advised to contact Cap Formation, which focused on helping him find vocational training. He managed to find apprenticeships on two occasions, but both ended badly after a few months, again, due to recurrent late appearances. After this, both professionals at Cap Formation (a job coach and a social worker from Point Jeunes) advised him to join the programme MoveOn in order to learn how to be punctual. He says that he did not want to participate at the beginning but that he eventually found it helpful to be in this structure. He says he suffers from depression and has trouble getting up in the morning and that his goal is to find an apprenticeship and no longer be dependent on social assistance.

Portrait of a YAS in Basel-City (AMIE1)

The second YAS was, at the time of the encounter, completing the one-year integration programme AMIE (referred to in the quotes used as AMIE1), which specializes in helping young mothers to find an apprenticeship. She has dual Swiss and Spanish citizenship. She came to Switzerland three years ago with her first-born child during her second pregnancy. She affirms that she had no perspectives anymore in Spain. Her relationship to her boyfriend was “broken”, she was unemployed, and she had dropped out of her training as an office assistant. She came back to Basel to live with her mother and file an application for social assistance, as she had no financial means to support herself and no professional perspectives. She affirms that the relationship with her mother is “very bad” due to the “reverse relationship” they lead – the

mother, behaving in the role of the child and her being forced into the role of the mother. The mother herself is also a beneficiary of social assistance and, as the apartment was too small upon the arrival of her second child, they had to move into temporary accommodation provided by social assistance. The father has no interest in having a relationship with his children. He pays alimony. However, the monthly payments do not cover daily expenses. She has health issues (back problems, paralysis) and has to deal with pain on a daily basis. Her application for disability annuity has been rejected. She has been a social assistance beneficiary for three years and affirms that the most stressful situations were the uncertainty regarding the application phase, which lasted three months, and her precarious housing situation. She affirms that social assistance helps compared to Spain, where there is no support. However, being a beneficiary of social assistance is “humiliating”. She also has debts of approximately 4,000 Swiss francs.

In a life course perspective, the intensity and nuances of the blows the YAS have suffered vary but at the same time, they can all be related to uncertainties in the spheres of ‘family/social environment’, ‘housing’, ‘school and education’, ‘financial situation’, and ‘past experiences with the educational and welfare regime’. These findings are in line with previous research on youth vulnerability in Europe. As Ranci (2010:17) puts it: “What they have in common is that their position within the main systems of social integration (work, family, and the welfare system) is characterized by uncertainty.”

However, as these two portraits of my sample show, the category of YAS remains very heterogenous and thus difficult to grasp for the cantonal administration. This explains partially the multitude of initiatives, programmes, and strategic reorientations as well as the need for coordination in both cantons in the last twenty years (see historic evolution of both administrations in Chapter 5.1). YAS are constructed as a social group due to the socio-political challenge they pose for cities and cantons. Beyond the commonalities of living through financial hardships and having no immediate educational perspectives there are as many unique life trajectories as there are YAS. A 24-year-old male YAS with a drug addiction, debts and in a precarious housing situation has very different issues to deal with compared to an 18-year-old female YAS with two children who suffered domestic violence. Despite these differences, they are all faced with a constraining educational and welfare regime expecting a change in their behaviours and their life trajectories. Both the 24-year-old

YAS and the 18-year-old YAS regardless of their differences are pressured to get out of welfare and present realistic professional plans. Thus, the combination of having a heterogeneous sample and a similar context of welfare expectations (social assistance) provide the possibility for generating several nuanced insights: First, the analysis can show to what extent the perception of social assistance and the cantonal transition regimes differ depending on socioeconomic characteristics like gender or specific life trajectories of YAS (like having accumulated debts for instance). Second, it makes the commonalities (recurrent patterns and narratives) found throughout the data even more grounded as they encompass the heterogeneity of YAS.

6.2 Discursive patterns and narratives

In the same way that the implementers have their unique view on the current socio-political alignment within their territory, the YAS have a singular perspective on the cantonal welfare regimes. They have lived and are still living through the welfare and transition system. At the moment of the encounter, they still are confronted with the various institutions of the welfare regime. The following discursive patterns and narratives have been distilled from the data via an in-depth coding procedure. Again, the basis for the analysis incorporates both cases, which means all encountered youngsters represent one data sample. The focus lays on the recurrent patterns found repeatedly within the data sample and how they relate to each other to form narratives. Compared to the previous analysis (implementers and providers of integration), there is an implicit analytical level. With the problem-centred interviews the YAS have narrated their stories in relation to their own problematization: being young, receiving social assistance, and having no vocational training.

6.2.1 *Dealing with the ambiguous context of social assistance*

The first narrative that emerges from the data is directly linked to the current alignment of cantonal social policies towards YAS. It addresses the ambiguous context of the social assistance. The YAS perceive social services – the offices in charge of implementing social assistance and case management vocational training – and their counsellors and social workers as a pragmatic means to securing their livelihood. For them, it is a last resort. Most of them have considerable debts because they have tried to find other solutions before thinking about applying for social assistance. They have no income and have lost the financial support of their parents. Other institutions, such as

integration programmes like MoveOn in Geneva, are in charge of improving the employability of the YAS and/or helping them to find an apprenticeship. Morally, both the financial support and the counselling services are undesirable and reflect their previous failures in life. For example, all YAS criticize the administrative procedures during the admission to social assistance because they are tiring and stigmatizing. The YAS need to disclose their financial and personal situation in order to pass the means test of the social services. However, the YAS legitimize the constraints of social assistance as if there were some kind of a natural order that should not be questioned. In their view, it is normal to link the support to certain conditions and for social services to control every expense or even sanction undesired behaviour not be in line with their expectations. The following passage illustrates this, as the YAS explains how it is reasonable to demand self-improvement and that financial support can never be free of charge. The second part of the quote describes the same matter in other words. It is 'normal' that social assistance puts pressure on you. You cannot live off the state without giving something back – even when, objectively speaking, you do not have the necessary requirements regarding employability nor the opportunities to find an apprenticeship.

“People say: ‘Well, social assistance has to pay.’ But this is not self-evident. I think it is nice that they help. Even if they control. They pay for everything. It is normal for them to pressure us. You cannot just live off the state.” (AMIE 1, Basel-City)

Furthermore, social assistance is also clearly something that is undesirable and shameful. This pattern can be retraced in every interview conducted. The YAS know precisely what is expected of them and they affirm that their 'failure' to support themselves is their own fault. In most cases, they align themselves with the normative idea that their life trajectory is morally deviant, and they are to blame for this outcome. The next passage illustrates this aspect. On the one hand, they back up the system by saying it is just or rational, and on the other hand, they describe how the very same system is stigmatizing and makes them feel ashamed. This YAS describes his bad feelings when he goes to an appointment at the social service and how it is not right that other people work for him:

“I do not feel well when I walk into social assistance. I am sitting next to people I do not know. And then they tell me what they do. People are going to work and this and that... well... and I do not

feel well regarding this support. Other people who go and work for me. It does not feel right.... And I try to get out of there as quickly as possible.” (SH1, Basel-City)

This pattern reflects the discussed narrative of work ethics. Social policies need to make sure that the ‘unproductive’ citizens do not choose welfare over productive activity. Furthermore, the interviewed YAS are aware of their moral illegitimacy. To be a beneficiary of social assistance at a young age is unethical. They may be aware of other groups of people, like old age pensioners, for instance, who deserve support more than they do because they have already contributed to the productive society. They know that receiving welfare benefits is morally in contradiction with becoming an adult. During the interviews, most of the YAS did not articulate a sentiment of fundamental injustice regarding the activities and the constraints of social assistance. They consider it a morally legitimate order. Stigmatization fulfils the duty of symbolically reminding YAS of their unproductivity, and the compliant behaviour of the YAS could be interpreted as a means to have access to the much-needed financial support. It is a survival strategy. One could argue that it is a trade-off: stigmatization and taking the blame for the deviant trajectory against receiving the means for livelihood, housing, and maybe a professional perspective. YAS do not contest the ambiguity of social assistance. They know that a contestation of the procedures and behavioural expectations could be detrimental to their basic needs.

Another interview passage illustrates the same pattern and points to another understanding that is recurrent in most of the encounters with YAS: the principle of reciprocity. YAS understand that social assistance is a relative social right. The condition for the support one gets is adhering to a certain compliant behaviour. YAS understand the *quid pro quo* principle and as this YAS says, it is logical. No one can live off the state and not work for it. Interestingly, the ambiguity of this context becomes apparent: This YAS agrees morally that there has to be some form of reciprocity for the support he gets, and he agrees that it is social assistance which can one-sidedly define and impose under what circumstances “things have to get done”. However, beyond this rationale, the precarious position in which the YAS finds himself also becomes apparent. The counsellor imposes the ‘choices’ for the YAS and he has to comply. The fact that the YAS describes it as “something I like” should be interpreted as an incorporation of the moral code of the current system,

rather than an actual consensus with the action of the counsellor because, as I have mentioned, the YAS would be financially sanctioned.

“Well, I think there is a certain logic in it. For instance, I understand the logic behind the financial help because we do in fact receive money, in quotes, for nothing. So, you do have to get things done for it; it is just logical. So, for instance, if my counsellor imposes something that I like and I do not do it and then she does not give me money, I think this is logical. Otherwise, no... I did not... well... They did not impose things no. Well, there is a regulation one has to respect and otherwise, if you do not get things done, you do not get the support. But otherwise, no.” (MoveOn 1)

This does not mean that the trajectory of YAS within the welfare regime in both cantons runs smoothly all the time. According to some statements, YAS do not always comply and accept the assessments and the guidance of their counsellors. Two YAS repeatedly articulated fundamental feelings of unjust treatment. They experienced a lot of setbacks and breaks with social assistance and integration programmes in the past, which still resonate now. The following passage illustrates this matter as one of the YAS describes a conflict between counsellors and social workers with both the integration programme Jobfactory and the social assistance:

“Well, that is just how it is. There was nothing to do about it. Of course, the social service backed up Jobfactory. They were like: ‘No, no, I believe them. You just have to adapt.’ And for me it was clear that everyone was against me, Jobfactory and social assistance. And this, despite the fact every adolescent says the same as me. This is my experience. That is how it was. So, after that I had three months a sanction of 75 francs. I remember that because that is when I quit Jobfactory. I told them they can take 100 francs away; I do not care. The main thing is to be out of there.” (SH2, Basel-City)

In this quote, the YAS describes his frustration with both the counsellors from the integration programme he attended at the time and the social worker from social assistance. He goes on to depict how these programmes were never useful for him and how everyone he met there was on drugs and did not have the right mindset like he has. He describes furthermore that they did not have a good work ethic like he did. He quit several integration programmes

after a few weeks. All of these programmes, like Jobfactory, aimed at enhancing the employability of their participants by simulating ideal-typical work environments and combining working sessions with job application training. Interestingly, the self-perception of this YAS in comparison to his peers, is that he is better and more advanced in terms of work ethics. He repeatedly felt the need to put them down and separate himself rhetorically from them but at the same time, he refers to them when he needs to address the unjust treatment at Jobfactory. Regarding the latter, the other participants are allies in the contestation of procedures and constraints, which the YAS does not agree with. However, he cannot identify or associate completely with his peers because he would put himself on the same level as they are, which appears to be unbearable and stigmatizing. Such an identification would reflect features he does not want to be associated with, like being unemployable, lazy, a profiteer, not a team player, not flexible, unpunctual, or slouchy, etc. He knows exactly how the system works and what he needs to represent in order to have a chance to make it – hence the need for delimitation from his peers. The rich knowledge of the intricacies of the welfare system and of the do's and don'ts are helpful to have an agency, to manoeuvre within the system, and to manage the reactions of the counsellors and social workers. As the following section demonstrates, the consequence for stopping all these programmes the YAS attended is first and foremost financial sanctioning and secondly, a change of strategy, namely, that he is not allowed to get support and counselling for a vocational training. Instead, he now has to focus on finding a temporary job opportunity in order to alleviate his welfare dependency.

“In the past, I had loads of opportunities to participate at programmes with the AIZ. I don't remember what they were called and most of the time I usually quit after a short period of time because I did not like it. So now, I don't do that anymore. If I ask the social assistance now and request: ‘Yes, I really would like to enrol for a job’, they don't believe me anymore and they will tell me to go look for some temporary job and look for myself. But I also understand and that's the reason why at the present I do not get support from social assistance. But this is due to the fault of my own. It was clear that this would happen.” (SH2, Basel-City)

In this example, even though this particular YAS is very critical of the procedures and regulations of social assistance and its collaboration

with integration programmes, he still concedes that he should have seen it coming and that the outcome is his own fault. This judgment is interesting because, despite the contestation and agency in aborting unsuitable integration programmes and accepting financial sanctioning, the precarious trajectory he experiences remains burdensome. There is a lot of regret in his tale. He should have anticipated the outcome and if he had acted in a more compliant manner during critical phases, maybe he would not have found himself in this precarious situation, where he needs to deal alone with unemployment, additional setbacks, barred perspectives, and reduced support from social assistance. He puts the blame on himself because he had the knowledge about the system and still did not follow through to the end of the programmes he attended.

6.2.2 Separating the deserving from the undeserving YAS

The activation principles of social assistance and the ambiguous strategy of the 'education first' alignment raise the question of which YAS have access to which kind of support. It seems that the practice of social assistance in both cantons separates them accordingly. I demonstrated how new institutions were created (AIZ in Basel-City and SRP in Geneva) in order to implement a segmentation practice, using the level of employability of the YAS to classify them. This puts the YAS in competition with one another as the analysis of the data suggests. As a consequence, YAS separate themselves in their narratives and reproduce the categories of deserving and undeserving YAS. Throughout the interviews there were various moments where they felt the need to separate themselves from other YAS who were not as deserving as they were. As it is a constraining context and the agency is limited, it might be helpful to position oneself as 'better' or 'more independent' than others in order to appear more in line with what social assistance values. One strategy, when confronted with their own deficiencies, is to distinguish themselves from other 'profiteer' YAS. This feeds directly into the dominant narrative of 'work ethics'. The quote below demonstrates this point of view. According to the YAS, there are those who really need social assistance and then there are the others - implying that there are profiteers who ask for help when in fact they are too lazy to go to work or find an apprenticeship. In so doing, the YAS themselves become agents of the narrative and reproduce and reaffirm the lesser moral worth of the 'poor' compared to those who are willing to be productive and find paid work.

“Well, there are people who really need the support. I definitely need it. [...] However, you have to see why you are here. If you are here just to take advantage. Well... each to their own. For me, it is only support until I find an apprenticeship after which I will not be here any longer. I do not know... At any rate, it is demeaning to be here.” (MoveOn 1, Geneva)

In order to be strategically better placed within the system, YAS need to show that their work ethics, e.g., their health, punctuality, appearance, willingness to work, etc., are much better than others. And they also need to make sure that the social worker or any other professionals know that they are aware of their deviancy and that they are not supposed to benefit from social assistance. This can be observed in both cantons. A young mother receiving social assistance and participating in an integration measure in Basel-City describes her astonishment at how the other participants are not behaving as they should and how they are being unserious about life in general. She uses these observations later in the conversation in order to legitimize the constraining context of social assistance, saying that they have no choice but to be more controlling with people like that.

“Regarding my age and my life situation, I am actually much more advanced. When I am looking at the other women here at AMIE. They all go partying every weekend and they make nonsense, well, I do not know... They behave like clowns. I am never sure if it is my personality or I do not know what it is. [...] I mean, I heard many negative things about social assistance. [...] I do not even know what these people do to run into so much trouble with social assistance.” (AMIE 3, Basel-City)

An interesting finding regarding the young mothers I encountered while attending the integration programme AMIE is their reluctance to criticize the alignment of the welfare system. They seem to be, in general, more compliant and less critical. A possible explanation for this observation could be that they feel more obliged to defend the system because they simply cannot afford to be overly critical. The value of social assistance from a financial point of view is immeasurable. They cannot survive without it. A financial sanctioning would be devastating, as they have no flexibility due to their childcare obligations. In addition to this pragmatic survival argument, I showed how the intersection of being young, a mother, and a welfare beneficiary creates a specific

stigma. One could well imagine how such a context could limit the agency of those young mothers. In contrast, the two young male YAS without children and without migration backgrounds I encountered seem to have enhanced agency and can more easily deal with a reduced budget due to misconduct. A further striking similarity has to be noted, when comparing young mothers and young male YAS with migration backgrounds. Both categories seem to be less critical of the cantonal welfare regime. All the YAS with migration backgrounds I interviewed came to Switzerland at a young age via family reunion and affirm that they experienced setbacks during their scholastic careers predominantly because of language deficiencies and barriers. They share features like scholastic setbacks, debts, and splits within their families. The intersection of coming from ‘somewhere else’ and being in need of support creates a unique perspective. Their judgment of the cantonal welfare regime is always in relation to the support they would have gotten in their ‘home country’. Any comment on the support they get is contextualized with what would happen if they still lived ‘there’ and not ‘here’.

“So, I’m going to be honest with you. Because I come from Greece. In Greece, if you have no education and if you have a mental disorder and all that, you are in big trouble. Here things are different. [...] Here, I feel like the social aspects are more developed and I feel like I have a chance and I am happy about it. I am happy that there is a grid that supports me like for instance institutions like Hospice Général and MoveOn.” (MoveOn 2, Geneva)

Consequently, the constraining aspects of the support are less relevant. As long as there is some kind of support and some prospects for the future, YAS with migration backgrounds will comply with the professionals. From the perspective of YAS with migration backgrounds, contesting the welfare regime and being too critical could even be interpreted as being ungrateful. This corresponds with the statements made in the theoretical section: The affiliation to a nationality is conditional to an immediate feeling of belonging to the community and it necessitates a loyalty towards a shared culture (Lessenich 2012). In other words, by contesting the welfare regime and being too critical, YAS with migration backgrounds would risk excluding themselves from the ‘shared culture’. The fear of being excluded from the same community that ‘gave them a chance’ alters the perspective on the cantonal welfare regime.

Nada (2019:328) demonstrated similar results for another social policy context –unemployment insurance. Adolescents and young adults with migration backgrounds completing a motivational semester (SEMO) had a different take on the programme compared to those with a Swiss passport. The contrast of war and different power relations (gender, women’s rights) influences the lived experience. They were less critical of the constraining rules in comparison to their Swiss counterparts and presented more compliant behaviour, for instance, more easily adopting the institutional rhetoric of the programme.

As we have seen in the theoretical section, social policies are always linked to territorial concerns. Social policies are used as instruments to conduct internal border controls. Such practices leave traces behind and affect individuals claiming social benefits. The fear of being perceived as disloyal might be directly linked to exclusionary social policies and discourses. In Switzerland for instance, social services are legally obliged to alert cantonal migration offices if a migrant individual applies for social assistance. These individuals are from then on at risk of losing their permit status. Even though in my study the YAS have double nationality and are not directly concerned by this matter, they are cautious not to make a faux pas within the system.

Conversely, the two YAS without migration backgrounds I encountered do not hold back with their criticisms towards the welfare regime. Interestingly, they both use the ‘migrant’ as a negative welfare dependency figure to justify and illustrate the unfair treatment they had to endure. In doing so, they create a discriminating narrative that links the deservingness of welfare to the Swiss nationality. The following interview passage demonstrates this matter. This YAS narrates how he feels trapped and without any scope of action within the constraining context of social assistance. However, in his tale, it is not the constraining aspects that are the major source of outrage, rather, it is the fact that he is Swiss and that he should be treated better because of his nationality and the other ‘migrants’ should get less access.

“Well, I must say, I did expect that as a Swiss national I would not have to deal with... well... I mean this whole journey... [...]. Basically, I am a prisoner again. It sounds stupid but I am a prisoner of a system, where I have to deliver, do stuff, and shut my mouth. I should have liked as a Swiss national... I went there from the beginning and I asked if they could just pay for an apartment [...]. They do not trust people and when it comes to other people, well then, they hand out I don’t know how... right and left I hear people say

they give to people that are not from here. I know it's hard. I have a lot of foreign friends... and for them they are handing out money a little bit easier and I have to play retarded." (SH2, Basel-City)

This can be interpreted as a reflection of the current discursive alignment towards YAS. YAS know the system very well and the data shows that as a welfare beneficiary with a migration background you want to be cautious to not be overly critical and to comply with the expectations of the system. Whereas as a Swiss national there is a sense of entitlement qua national identity.

6.2.3 Comparing oneself to other young adults who succeeded

YAS compare their life trajectory to other young people. As Becquet (2012) emphasizes, the comparison to peers is an important frame of reference and can be a source of stress for the YAS as this reference can be a constant reminder of their past failures and insufficiencies. This pattern can be observed throughout the data. When asked how his relationship is with other friends of his age who are not beneficiaries of social assistance this YAS speaks of a mishap that weighs him down. The work others are doing is morally legitimate in his eyes, whereas his 'work' has no value because it is not in accordance with what society considers to be valuable work. He ends his statement with the affirmation that it is his fault and that he should have worked harder to achieve his goals.

"To a certain extent it is a misfortune. It is weighs on me. Because the older I get, the more I see people that were at school with me, and at that point, I was already older than them. And now they are in college or wherever. They have already reached their goals or will soon have their VET certificate. They are already living their lives in a way. Working and everything. Well... I also worked but that's not the same thing. They really got their VET certificate, and they work on the job they have learned. Or they changed their subject area, but I don't know.... It's very heavy. It's hard to see them, to tell myself I should have worked earlier, I should have started to study earlier and do everything I'm supposed to do. It was harder for me." (MoveOn 3, Geneva)

This quote is very illuminating because it brings to light several aspects regarding the symbolic power and stigmatization of social policies and more

specifically social assistance. Being excluded from the institutionalized VET path represents a source of vulnerability for YAS. It positions the YAS symbolically at the margin of the society and the YAS know this. Furthermore, YAS lay the burden for being behind and excluded from this path on themselves. This reflects again the moral expectations of the work ethics, which stipulate, amongst other things, that YAS are individually responsible for their distress. The intervention of social assistance starts at this point – diagnosing the deficiencies of the YAS regarding their employability, examining their past failures with the aim to reinforce their individual accountability. The detrimental effect of this discursive power becomes apparent as the comparison with others creates a constant and active auto-exclusion narrative. The next interview passage goes in the same direction, as this particular YAS specifies how being exposed all the time and towards different offices and professional counsellors is stigmatizing. This interview segment is particularly interesting because it starts with a bonding moment between the interviewee and me. The YAS projects a peer moment into the interview, making it seem as if we are having a simple conversation as young people together. He goes on to explain that he knows how awfully stigmatizing it is, having to apply for social assistance and that I as a researcher know it also on some level. However, “our” peers cannot understand it because they would only see the material aspect of it. Consequently, there is no point in engaging in a conversation with peers about social assistance because they would never understand how it feels due to their lack of experience with the welfare and educational regime.

“You know how it is do you? Maybe... We are young, aren't we? Sure, and they don't understand this. That's clear. It's like I told you: It's a mess. I would have never imagined that you need to be present at so many places and everywhere you need to show your underpants. If I tell this to my friends, they do not understand this. Maybe he will understand what is social assistance and he will say: 'Ah ok, he's on welfare, so they pay him an apartment, that's cool.' But it's not always like it seems. Often, it's much more complicated than this. And I do not speak about it often.” (SH1, Basel-City)

6.2.4 Counsellors are allies in dealing with social workers

As has already been mentioned, throughout the interviews it became apparent that there is a great deal of knowledge regarding the cantonal tran-

sition regimes, the involved actors, and what purpose or mission they have. The YAS know all the structures out there, their rules, and the consequences of behaviours that are not approved. They can build on their experiences with the structures and act accordingly. Regarding Basel-City, they know, for instance, that Gap is the structure where you can get help in order to find an apprenticeship and that there is free admission and no fear of penalization if you have a good relationship with the counsellor. Social assistance, on the contrary (the securing livelihood and AIZ sections), is perceived as more threatening and ambiguous because they are in charge of financial support. One YAS describes the first three months during the application procedure as difficult because social assistance decided at first not to financially support him due to the financial situation of his mother who should be responsible in that matter. Even though this was later revised, he learned that you need to come prepared when you have appointments with social assistance and with all the necessary documents to legitimize your request. Gap on the other hand is where you can get the real support:

“Yes, I still have fond memories towards Gap [...] whenever I had a problem, I told it to this woman and [...] and she really cared. It was not just empty words. This really was the only place that was ok. I had a lot to do with these so-called social people. But this woman really understood it and helped me at the beginning to structure my days. [...] And this... you cannot explain this to social services. They don't care.” (SH1, Basel-City)

The previous analysis regarding the perspective of the implementers showed that there is an ideological split between certain integration professionals (job coaches, for instance) and the more ‘social’ professionals (social workers, educators). The former group stipulating that the social workers were being too ‘social’ and thus harming the YAS because it would delay their entry in an apprenticeship. In this example, it is the other way around: The interviewed YAS perceives the professionals from Gap as the real support, helping him to structure his day. The YAS explains how he could be vulnerable in her presence. In contrast, the ‘so-called social’ professionals from social assistance are seen in a more controlling and threatening light because they are the ones that decide upon the level of material support. The next interview passage shows that these professionals can even become allies in dealing emotionally with the injustices of the social assistance. This occurs in both

regional cases. Throughout my field work, professionals of integration from different offices expressed criticisms regarding the restrictive alignment of social assistance towards YAS. One could argue that in order to be a real ally with YAS and pushing the 'education first' agenda, it makes sense for the professionals of integration to show solidarity with YAS. On the one hand, they can work without the worry of being perceived as stigmatizing. On the other hand, this enhanced discretionary power can also mean that they have more impact on the decision-making process of the YAS.

“And then the woman from Gap said that it is not unusual, and it happens a lot, that even though you should have access to welfare benefits, you don't get it. My mother should also be able to benefit from social – even though she is working. It's not that simple. There are people who get support just like that, well... I don't know... and I am Swiss. I don't get it.” (SH1, Basel-City)

6.2.5 The responsabilization of the YAS

This knowledge of the inner workings of the cantonal welfare regimes does not automatically mean that the YAS blame the various institutions for their distress. YAS often voluntarily align with the narrative of 'work ethics' and affirm that they need to do more and prove themselves in order to go further and find an apprenticeship. At the same time, as they perceive their deviant life trajectory as individual failure and their status as a beneficiary of social assistance as shameful, they legitimize even those sanctions that threaten their livelihood. This fits the narrative of the current socio-political alignment. There is no scenario where social assistance, other offices of the educational system, the economy, or the parents have any kind of joint responsibility. In this sense, the support of social assistance is not a fundamental social right they deserve but rather a shameful charity. Furthermore, the burden of acknowledging the responsibility for their own distress leads normatively to another burden: the necessity to self-improve. This next passage provides a demonstration. The YAS explains how he had opportunities but because of his failures (“being late to appointments”), there were consequences that led to the current situation. According to the YAS, the responsibility lies only with him. The fact that the social service decided to sanction him financially and that this led to the use of a credit card and debts is not taken into account by the YAS.

“Yes, I had opportunities and I had failures. Two opportunities. Therefore, there were consequences to those failures. There were consequences for being late to appointments. [...] I was late for school. I was late for the appointments at the social assistance. Therefore, I did not get the support I needed to secure my livelihood. I started to use a credit card I had because I used to work and then from then on everything went crazy. [...] I was repeatedly late for the appointments at the social assistance. Therefore, I did not respect the procedures. I should have done the things I am supposed to do. That was it. However, I did not do them. Therefore, it was really on my part, it was my own fault.” (MoveOn 1, Geneva)

Interestingly, this corresponds with the analysis regarding the paternalistic aspects of the current socio-political alignment detailed in the previous chapters. Various cantonal reports and implementers in both cantons speak of an educational and preventive task when it comes to YAS. YAS need to learn how the adult world works and what it takes to make it in this world – currently, finding and continuing vocational training. Some may need more time than others, but all need to question their past choices that led to failures and be responsible about it. It is framed as an educational and necessary symbolic passage from adolescence to adulthood and is strategically embedded in the ‘education first’ discourse. In the aforementioned quote, the YAS in question reflects this paternalistic narrative and addresses the issue of responsibility like a symbolic act of redemption after a self-inflicted auto-exclusion: “I was late for the appointments; therefore, I did not get the support.”

In order to cope with the requirements of the welfare and transition regime, YAS have to present a certain degree of compliant behaviour and as such reproduce the expectations in line with the reinforcement of the ‘work ethic’. They have to know the rules and act accordingly. They have to collaborate with the administrative requirements. Additionally, they have to accept that their failures are due to their own misbehaviour and lack of responsibility. Finally, they have to demonstrate the will of self-improvement in order to avoid sanctions and get access to proper support. In this sense, aligning with the narrative of ‘work ethics’ can be interpreted as a survival strategy that can be described as a latent resource as well as a constant source of stress due to ongoing stigmatization and psychological auto-exclusion mechanisms. On the one hand, knowing the narrative, acquiring the administrative language, presenting oneself as willing to learn the missing social and professional

skills, engaging in a self-improvement process, and affirming that you alone are responsible for the past failures are required in order to get the support and recognition of the institutions and their social workers. On the other hand, this alignment creates a structural realm of vulnerability, as YAS need to identify with a normative order that systematically and repeatedly constructs them as morally deviant and insufficient. This ambiguity can be illustrated with the following passage. If YAS do not comply with the assessment of the social workers and the expected behaviour, there are material consequences. If the YAS want to continue to receive financial support and remain in the 'system' then they have to enter an integration measure or have some sort of professional project.

“At first, it was the financial situation that counted and then we talked about what I was going to do because the goal is not to receive social assistance benefits and get money. You have to be professional about it. [...] Then, I could have gotten in a preparatory year at a restaurant, but I was too late with my application and there was a hesitation on my part. Then, a year ago, my counsellor at the social assistance suggested I participate in Move On. However, it was rather forced. She told me if I don't go to MoveOn then the support here is over.” (MoveOn 2, Geneva)

In the same way as the in previous interview passage, this YAS tends to blame himself for his predicament. The missed opportunity of getting in a preparatory year at a restaurant resonates even today and acts as a symbolic reminder of his failures. Another interesting aspect of this interview passage is the much-discussed equation: being responsible equals not receiving social assistance. The YAS describes this with the passage “you have to be professional about it”. In other words, receiving social assistance is unprofessional and thus not acceptable. Consequently, in this view, getting out of social assistance and finding the way into a VET and the labour market is a matter of individual professional attitude. However, the ambiguous and constraining context of social assistance – especially for YAS – as well as the lack of agency becomes clear, when the counsellor threatens to end the financial support if the YAS does not comply with the plan of joining MoveOn. Remaining 'passive' within the realm of activation policies – especially for young beneficiaries – is not considered an option as the legitimation for receiving the financial support is an active contribution.

Differences within the YAS and across cantons

This analytical section has focused mainly on the recurrent patterns found within all conducted interviews. However, the multi-level perspective and the heterogeneity of the sample has also allowed discussing certain nuances. The most important points in this respect are summarized hereunder.

First, the analysis demonstrates that the intensity of compliant narratives of YAS, like feeling responsible for 'failures' or affirming it is 'normal' that social assistance applies constraining procedures, decreases depending on the duration of social assistance support and numbers of setbacks the YAS have already experienced within the educational and welfare system. Indeed, comparing the YAS with each other, the more YAS are young (eighteen to twenty years of age) and have not yet experienced abandonments of programmes and/or apprenticeships, the more their narrative will match the ones of the implementers and providers of integration. In other words, they will affirm more easily that the current hardship is their own fault and that they need to be more 'autonomous' or 'reliable' and in general work on their 'deficiencies'. Conversely, the more YAS are older (twenty-one to twenty-five years of age) and have abandoned several integration programmes and/or apprenticeships, the more their view of social assistance becomes more critical. They will affirm that the social assistance does not trust them and 'blacklists' them as not worthy for trying out another integration programme (see Chapter 6.2.1). One explanation for this observation could be that YAS realize after certain setbacks that the 'compliance strategy' does not work and the frustration of not finding a way out of welfare triggers more refusal towards the administrative narratives. These differences regarding compliant behaviours and critical stances of YAS mirror the indications found earlier when contrasting the 'education first' alignments of the two cantons (see Chapter 5.2.2). Those indications showed that for both cantons the concept of 'education first' for all YAS – even for the ones who are older and/or have had recurrent failed transitions – is primarily used programmatically and should not have to be applied in every situation. In this sense, 'education first' appears to be a relative concept depending on individual behaviour and concrete circumstances. However, it is important to note that these indications are based on the study of administrative documents and discourse of implementers, providers of integration, and YAS. An in-depth analysis of the concrete implementation of the 'education first' alignment at the frontline would require further qualitative, street-level research.

Second, an interesting nuance emerges between the two cantons and the respective roles of their vocational training structures (Gap in Basel and Cap Formation in Geneva). In Basel-City, it seems that YAS are much more critical of the social assistance compared to the counsellors of Gap (see for instance Chapter 6.4.2). Arguably, this is because these counsellors are more independent from social assistance. There are very few formal admission requirements and there is a free adherence practice in place – meaning that the duration of support within Gap is without time limitation (until YAS have found an employment) and that YAS are generally free to define the pace of the support. In contrast, YAS in Geneva do not seem to make the same distinction between social assistance and Cap Formation. One reason for this nuance could be that Cap Formation is built as an interinstitutional structure and is not perceived by YAS as ‘outside’ of social assistance. Consequently, in Geneva, the vocational training counsellors of Cap Formation do not seem to have the same ally status as in Basel-City. The jurisdiction between social assistance and Cap Formation in Geneva is not delimited in the same way as in Basel-City. Consequently, one can assume that YAS have experienced more common social assistance logics (like a reduced financial support due to behavioural sanctioning) with Cap Formation compared to Gap, which would explain the more critical stance towards Cap Formation. Due to the relatively limited sample size of YAS, this indication should be treated with care and further research would be needed to gain more insight on that matter. However, it does strengthen the argument that the context of social assistance is inherently more linked with constraint, sanctioning, and stigmatization for YAS than other structures of the welfare and/or educational regime. The findings demonstrate that implementers within the social assistance context in both cantons tend to understand their own structure as harmful in a long-term perspective. Therefore, it is no surprise that YAS regard counsellors outside of social assistance with free adherence procedures and without sanctioning mechanisms as more trustworthy.

Comparing the two cantons in this matter, one can conclude that Basel-City employs the strategy of separating and delimiting the roles of their structures more clearly with the benefit of creating trustworthiness for one structure (Gap) and scepticism for the other (social assistance), whereas Geneva prefers creating interinstitutional and interdepartmental structures like Cap Formation in order to enhance efficient administrative procedures and professional collaborations within the regime.

7 Conclusion

Following the normative pathway of activation policies (Hansen 2019) and social investment strategies (Morel et al. 2012), Swiss cantonal administrations regarding social assistance, unemployment, and vocational training have introduced new agencies in order to push forward the so-called 'education first' alignment. This strategy aims at accompanying young adults without vocational training and receiving social assistance (YAS) towards the completion of an apprenticeship and a sustainable labour market integration.

Previous research had already discussed the ambiguities of activation policies due to an ideological programme that individualizes hardships and disregards structural causes of poverty as well as the limited access to the Swiss labour market for people with 'multiple problems' (Bonvin 2008; Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016; Drilling 2004; Nadai 2009; Pisoni 2018a). The present contribution adds another piece to this research by focusing primarily on the socio-political alignment of these policies and their moral underpinning. This research sheds light on what Hansen (2019:9) identifies as one of the main drivers of the active turn of social policies: ideas and morality. An important aspect that has been missing up to now within critical research on Swiss social policies.

The focus has been on reconstructing discourses on social policy implementation within two exemplary regional cases as well as contrasting different perspectives across levels of analysis (cantonal administration, integration programmes, and YAS). I focused on YAS because, as has been argued, young people are considered a laboratory for 'active' integration measures. In other words, reinforcing the work ethics of young uneducated individuals has become a primary concern for cantonal welfare and transition regimes in recent years. Using this focus and building on a relatively small but diverse data sample (different integration programmes and target groups, administrative experts from cantonal offices, YAS with double nationalities), I was also able to show how focusing analytically on the work ethics as a moral value allows indirectly to disclose narratives related to other issues like gender relations and migration background. Examples include implementers dismissing actions of young mothers as 'immature' (for getting pregnant) because they represent an impediment for finding and keeping an apprenticeship or YAS with double nationalities having a different perspective on the welfare regime

than Swiss YAS with one passport and thus presenting a tendency to comply more with the work ethics expectations of the implementers.

While narratives related to reinforcing the work ethics of the YAS are present within the data, the multi-level approach to the analysis disclosed a plurality of discursive patterns. Results show that both the administrative experts (implementers and providers of integration) and the YAS themselves tend to align with the narrative of work ethics but not in the same manner.

A majority of implementers recognize social assistance, especially during the phase of intake, as a symbolic moment where YAS should question their 'choices' and be reorientated towards the 'right' path. This has been predominantly found within the canton of Geneva. For the canton of Basel-City, similar patterns have been retraced. Social assistance implementers speak of 'teaching' YAS how the system works in order to prevent the transformation of receiving material support from social assistance into a 'life plan'. Another convergence between the cases is the focus on the individual deficiencies of the YAS. The assessment in preparation of a help plan has apparently gained in importance. According to most of the implementers in both cantons, there is a need for more tailor-made measures in order to enhance the skill level of the YAS.

The analysis of the perspective of the YAS showed that one coping strategy within the welfare context is to agree with the assessments of social workers and implementers and go along with the integration plan to avoid penalizations and hopefully rediscover a path towards an apprenticeship later on. The analysis showed moreover, that YAS know a great deal about the workings of the various welfare and transition organizations. They can use this knowledge to behave accordingly in order to get the financial support they need.

Furthermore, certain emerging narratives indicate that YAS incorporate their understanding of social assistance as shameful and capture it as synonymous with an unwanted dependency. This is congruent with the recurrent statements of the implementers, saying that YAS should not perceive social assistance for too long or they will get too accustomed to it. This creates a normative system that puts YAS in competition to one another. In all of the encounters they tried discursively to distance themselves from other YAS not behaving according to what is valuable to the eyes of the implementers. These findings correspond closely with the moral underpinnings of a work ethics

that stipulates that failure for not being on the right track towards productive work is an individual issue.

This concluding chapter seeks to reflect these discursive patterns and narratives on social assistance and youth unemployment on a broader scale. Even though the analysis builds on data collected in two cantons and is thus not representative for the rest of cantonal discourses in Switzerland, it confirms to a certain degree the previously discussed activation and social investment trends observed in European welfare states. Studies pointing towards similar practices regarding welfare conditionality have been published for the canton of Vaud (Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016; Perriard 2017) and given the recent retrenchment reforms within cantonal welfare regimes and the SKOS-guidelines, one can assume that other cantons follow similar discourses on segmentation and implementation practices regarding YAS in order to be as economically efficient as possible. However, further social policy research is needed to provide empirical data on that matter. Furthermore, the results also show the tensions between professionals within the two cantons as well as the nuances within the collected YAS data. First, I will discuss the four hypotheses (see Chapter 3.5), which have guided the conducted analysis. I will also debate the sample limitations and scientific relevance of the results. Second, I will put forward arguments regarding the significance for the socio-political discourse on social assistance and its role within the Swiss welfare state. I argue that the current discourses in this policy field contribute to cement the ideation of the alleged ‘welfare dependency trap’, which pops up as an intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic narrative throughout the data. Finally, as poverty alleviation and specifically social assistance are major occupational fields for social work professionals, I will discuss their roles and positions within such an alignment of social policies.

7.1 The ambiguities of the cantonal socio-political alignment

To systematically analyse the reinforcement of the work ethics within social policies addressed towards YAS, this chapter discusses the four hypotheses formulated earlier (see Chapter 3.5). The chosen methodological approach allows both analysing the commonalities (recurrent patterns) as well as the discursive differences and nuances on different levels (multi-level approach). The discussion of the hypotheses is thus organized in two steps: 1) focusing on the commonalities beyond cantonal borders and 2) focusing on differences across cantons, offices, and YAS. Indeed, results show that

there are tendencies towards isomorphic institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), meaning that narratives seem to converge in the field of social assistance, as well as tendencies pointing to discursive tensions between professionals (social workers, counsellors and educators), offices, and YAS.

H1: The current socio-political alignment pushes an intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic discourse with the goal of transforming the YAS into a future skilled work force.

1) Commonalities across cantonal borders

Chapter 5 demonstrated how the narrative of “no young person should be left without vocational opportunities and receive social assistance” as a main topic emerged and established itself as a strategic pillar in both cases. The ‘education first’ strategy has been identified as a programmatic groundwork to restructure the cantonal administrations and reorientate the course of action regarding YAS.

In addition, social assistance tends to push for a neo-liberal and paternalistic segmentation of YAS. The goal is to determine which YAS have the potential to be reintegrated into the VET system and which ones need preparatory measures in order to achieve this later on. The aim is to transform economically deficient YAS into individuals with the potential to be part of a much-needed skilled work force. Both professional skills and social skills are needed in that respect, as YAS are being judged deficient not only from a professional point of view (low school achievements, for instance) but also in ‘social’ terms (not behaving in a socially and professionally desirable manner).

For YAS deemed ‘uncooperative’, the case studies disclosed that the logic of social investment and activation can be exclusive. Based on various statements of implementers in both cantons, one can assume that frontline workers in charge of the appreciation of a case weigh the risk of such an investment and if the deficiencies and the attitude of the YAS do not add up, the ‘education first’ approach makes way for a more traditional one, which is to reorientate the YAS to direct labour market integration as quickly as possible. If the risk of ‘relapse’ is too great, then the frontline worker will choose not to assign the YAS into an integration programme. There are also strategical risks to take into account: the institutions of the transition regimes need successful redemption statistics in order to legitimate their course of action.

Moreover, the research showed for both cantons the presence of a moral discourse regarding the ‘dependency risk’ of the YAS group. These

young adults are still considered too young and inexperienced and to not yet have 'found their way' into the 'adult world'. Within this narrative, youth representations are used to justify the need for educational and coercive measures like cutting the subsistence level. Results point to the fact that the intake procedure is used symbolically to relativize social assistance as a social right in both cantons. Here the analysis showed a convergence between the perspectives of the implementers and the YAS. Discursive patterns in both groups disclosed the argument, that being young and receiving social assistance is morally illegitimate. In other words, social assistance is inherently amoral and shameful – especially for individuals like the YAS. The analysis showed furthermore that the YAS reflect this narrative themselves, for instance by confirming their unease at being labelled 'welfare beneficiary' or by affirming their shame regarding the fact that others, deemed more productive, are paying for them. Further emerging discursive patterns showed that YAS consider the current alignment of the cantons as 'natural'. The requirement to give something back, the reciprocity, is considered normal – even though it is applied in an ambiguous coercive context with the constant threat of being reprimanded.

2) Differences across cantonal borders, offices, professionals, and YAS

In Basel-City, there seems to be an ideological division between providers of integration and the employment office on the one side and the social assistance and vocational training structures on the other. The latter affirm consistently that every YAS should be completing a VET independently of his/her life trajectory ('education first'). The former criticizes this approach as illusionary and elitist (see Chapter 5.2.3). In the canton of Geneva, the implementers use the 'education first' narrative predominantly in a programmatic manner to legitimate politically the activities of the welfare and transition regime – saying that this should ideally be the plan for preventing youth unemployment. This does not mean, however, that every YAS is or should be systematically redirected towards a long-term accompaniment for VET. Thus, the comparison of the two cantons showed that, in Geneva, there is not a clear-cut ideological divide between providers of integration as I have found in Basel-City. Rather, the institutional grid seems to be more complex and denser with multiple and sometimes contradicting narratives on what the right course of action should be. Furthermore, while indications for intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic discourse have been found in both cantons, Geneva seems to invest more in overcoming

this course of action. This is not least visible in the fact that associations like Accroche and FASe acknowledge the difficulties of YAS with multiple problems to cope with the current transition regime. In their perspective, the traditional logic of the system and the associated 'education first' strategy (meaning finding an apprenticeship at any cost) is too high a threshold for some YAS.

Some implementers and providers of integration within both cases took a critical stance towards the current evolution of the welfare and transition regime. Notably in Geneva, where various representatives (Accroche, FASe, and Trajets) deplored the fact that they are perceived as a threat by society. In Basel-City, similar skepticism has been mostly articulated by actors outside of the social assistance regime like Gap, AMIE, and Jobfactory, who blame (to a certain degree) the principle of subsidiarity within the social assistance regime because it problematizes the YAS and structurally constructs them as economically deviant.

Regarding YAS, even though they tend to align themselves with the intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic diagnoses of the implementers, the more a YAS has experienced setbacks within the cantonal welfare and transition regime, the more a YAS will take a critical stance towards this discourse. However, the agency for such a critical stance is not the same for YAS with childcare duties and with a migration background.

To sum up, there is a lot of evidence regarding the presence of intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic discourse within the data. It is for instance evident that perceiving social assistance for a longer period of time is considered harmful or that the notion of 'individual responsibility' is one of the core values guiding social policy discourse in the case of YAS. However, there is a great deal of variance regarding how such neo-liberal and paternalistic discourses are articulated. The afore-mentioned construction of YAS as a potential threat to the social order is such an example: Most implementers agree that every YAS should complete a VET as a means for social and economic participation. They do not agree, however, on what to do when YAS do not present the required features for finding and keeping an apprenticeship. Some providers of integration deplore the fact that YAS become a 'problem' and are perceived as a threat but at the same time, the same professionals affirm that these YAS have not yet learned the right lessons and should be more responsible - neglecting the structural aspect of their vulnerable life trajectories.

H2: The current socio-political alignment individualizes vulnerable trajectories of YAS.

1) Commonalities across cantonal borders

Discursive patterns and narratives pointed to the necessity of ‘diagnosing’ the YAS during the application process of social assistance with respect to their missing skills and individual deficiencies. This is recurrent in both cantons. Furthermore, these implementers and providers of integration affirmed repeatedly that the YAS need to take responsibility for their actions and acknowledge their past failures that led to the deemed deviant trajectory – for instance falling short of scholastic achievements, abandonment of apprenticeships, being repeatedly late for appointments, or clashes with family members. As some implementers affirm, the role of the welfare regime is to question the ‘choices’ of the YAS that led to the current situation. Results showed moreover that YAS tend to adhere to this perspective and view themselves as responsible for their past failures. They review their barred professional perspectives on an individual level. They believe that they deserve to be in this specific context, where they are confronted with their individual shortcomings. This could be interpreted as a coping strategy of the YAS: complying with the expectations in order to have access to much-needed material support. A recent study analysed for Great Britain the effects of welfare conditionality and concludes that such an ambivalent welfare context can initiate what they call “negative behaviour changes” such as “counterproductive compliance” (Dwyer 2018:17). This counterproductive compliance occurs specifically in contexts where benefit sanctions are being threatened. Thus, the recurrent patterns and narratives found throughout the data tend to confirm this hypothesis and they show how individualizing life trajectories specifically regarding the professional and social shortcomings pushes YAS into such counterproductive compliance. Therefore, if we assume that such discourses affect the segmentation practice of social assistance, inequalities within YAS should be reinforced as the ones with deemed multiple problems and setbacks will not benefit long-term support in the same way as other YAS with a deemed less problematic life trajectory.

2) Differences across cantonal borders, offices, professionals, and YAS

Although this hypothesis tends to be confirmed by the data, there are nuances, especially across cantonal offices and professionals that need to be pointed out. Implementers in both cantons argue that YAS have not yet

understood what it means to be responsible, to learn what it takes to enter the adult world. In doing so, they participate in the creation of young adults who are legally adult but still stuck in a juvenile world, synonymous with irresponsible and recalcitrant behaviour. In this perspective, these implementers argue that there is a need of state intervention on an individual level because neither the school nor the parents nor the upstream bridging measures have brought the desired outcome so far, that is, producing young employable adults. However, the narratives regarding what kind of individual help plan should be implemented for YAS differ. A first narrative, found overwhelmingly in the group of implementers in Geneva and backed also by some implementers and providers of integration in Basel-City, builds on the belief that some young people 'just need more time' than others to adapt to the expectations. The concrete appreciation of the right, individually adapted measure can still vary. It can mean that the frontline worker should induce an integration measure or not – but the help plan will always be discursively legitimated with the assessment that you cannot push YAS and that some young people need more time than others do. The other side of the 'paternalistic coin' is paradoxically the argument that you need to intervene sooner rather than later before YAS become accustomed to the living situation on social assistance. There is not a clear-cut division between implementers and providers of integration. What the analysis shows however, is that within both cantons and throughout the offices and professionals, there is no consensus regarding what should ideally be done in the case of YAS with multiple problems: They agree that there should be a tailor-made, individualized help plan, but not on whether there is a need for immediate action due to the 'danger' of long-term welfare dependency or whether YAS should have time to develop their own professional project.

The commonality of both sides ('give YAS more time' versus 'there is no time to lose') is the paternalistic assumption that they have not yet understood what it means to be a responsible adult and that they are thus not able to make the 'right' choices at the moment. Consequently, there is a need for an educational and individualized intervention. These elements are used as a tool to shape the individual help plan of each YAS. This also coincides with what the data showed concerning the ceremonial obligation of YAS to acknowledge their own failures and 'own up' to their mistakes. This is the moral basis for the implementers and providers of integration to assure them their support in return.

However, the results for evaluating this hypothesis 2 are not clear-cut. Some implementers and providers of integration have explicitly criticized the current regime for its incapacity to create real opportunities for YAS and thus called the vulnerabilities created by the focus on individual deficiencies. Some have even argued that there is a need to create measures ‘outside’ of the ‘education first’ strategy with its tailor-made interventions in order to give the YAS a break from stigmatization (notably in Geneva with the creation of Scène Active). Others (representative of MoveOn for instance) deplore the paternalistic attitude of the social services arguing that the state would provide a subsistence level but use ‘his stick’ to punish the YAS if they should step out of line, which would create a climate of untrustworthiness. In Basel-City, the implementer of AMIE cited explicitly the collective experience of the programme as a major advantage for the YAS as – without it – they would have to face the challenges of finding an apprenticeship within a competitive labour market by themselves.

To sum up, the current alignment of social policies addressed to YAS in both cantons tend to individualize vulnerable trajectories. This builds on the belief that for every YAS – independently of their concrete life trajectory and current resources – there is a tailor-made plan that can be envisioned and implemented, which would ultimately lead to a VET and a sustainable labour market integration. However, along the same lines as for hypothesis 1, the narratives explaining how such individualized help plans should be implemented differ. Some argue that YAS ‘just need time’ and that you cannot pressure them into getting active. Others argue that leaving them in social assistance is too costly and dangerous because they would get accustomed to a ‘welfare life style’.

H3: The current socio-political alignment creates structural vulnerabilities for YAS, due to the hierarchization of support, which depends on their ‘employability’.

1) Commonalities across cantonal borders

The analysis suggests that both cantonal welfare and transition regimes are stratified, in the sense that specific subgroups of YAS are treated differently than others regarding the access to integration measures and the level of material support. This finding is indirectly linked to hypothesis 2, which stipulates that current social policies addressed at YAS should individualize their interventions. As argued before, this favours a discourse, which focuses

on the less 'damaged' YAS because positive results can be expected more quickly (and consequently this approach favours cream-skimming practices). Rather than enabling specific subgroups of YAS due to their relative 'weaker' socioeconomic position within the system, their disadvantages can thus be reinforced. Indications of an intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic alignment point to multiplication of structural disadvantages. Examples include implementers dismissing specific imageries of gender relations as a relevant factor when dealing in their daily work with YAS in Geneva or young mothers in Basel who are put under pressure because of their 'bad choices' to get pregnant.

In both cases, there are discursive patterns pointing to the presumption of an 'equal treatment of all YAS' when dealing with their professional perspectives. This credo suggests that social phenomena like gender relations and motherhood or migration backgrounds do not matter as long as the socio-political alignment and the concrete support of YAS is the same for everyone. In reality, such an alignment hierarchizes the YAS according to a specific representation of what is supposed to be a model employee. Being young, having school deficiencies because of a migration background, or having a child are constructed as hindering factors added on top of other factors. In this vein, they are considered as obstacles, which need to be dealt with individually. Furthermore, some discursive patterns construct such disadvantages as past failures or as bad choices the YAS have made. In other words, being a responsible adult citizen and model employee means prioritizing 'being employable' and 'being financially independent' before choosing to have children, for instance.

Another factor, which supports this hypothesis, is that in all the encounters with YAS there was a definite need to emphasize that they are different than other YAS, that they are more responsible or autonomous than others, or that in their cases, it is justifiable to be eligible and that it would not be for a long time. There was a constant need to separate the worthy YAS from others who would try to take advantage of the material support one can get via social assistance. This reflects the premise of the current alignment and the perspective of the implementers and providers of integration.

2) Differences across cantonal borders, offices, professionals and YAS

In general, there is an agreement amongst offices and professionals that every YAS should get an individual help plan (hypothesis 2) and should be treated equally within the welfare and transition regime. However, there

are nuances regarding the moral underpinnings of that matter. They are linked with the urgency of preventing welfare dependency. Some feel more strongly about the inherent danger of perceiving social assistance for too long and some professionals do not. While providers of integration tend to typically accentuate the need to work and not be on welfare, either finding an apprenticeship or if this is not possible an unqualified job, social assistance implementers will be more ambiguous about this topic. Some will for instance strongly argue that social assistance is inherently damaging for YAS and affirm that they will not learn the 'right' moral lessons, that is, living independently from state support. The notion of prevention becomes a rather double-edged one with this perspective. On the one hand, the implementer still sees the current welfare regime as a suitable tool for preventing long-term youth unemployment and as a way of offering educational perspectives to YAS. On the other hand, receiving social benefits in itself must be prevented, as the mere fact of receiving social assistance will produce a systemic dependency and additionally convey the wrong educational message to YAS.

Consequently, this creates a highly competitive context, a vulnerable matrix, in which YAS struggle for recognition. They have to present themselves as closely as possible to the image of a model employee with impeccable work ethics and if their life trajectory suggests otherwise, they have to own up to their past failures. Every YAS needs to compete with the others and one strategy is to present oneself as 'more independent' or 'more responsible' than other YAS and to shield oneself from potential judgments and benefit sanctions.

Finally, the perspectives of the YAS indicate that the concrete trajectory and socioeconomic background greatly influences the degree of agency a YAS has when facing this competitive context. Young mothers and YAS with migration backgrounds have less agency and are thus less critical of the welfare regime, because the consequences of losing the much-needed support are too great. The conducted interviews suggest that the material aspect of social assistance is primordial for these YAS, because there are other mouths to feed. Regarding YAS with dual nationalities, the analysis suggests that they are less critical compared to Swiss nationals because it would be morally inappropriate to be too critical towards their 'host' country who gave them a second chance. Conversely, the two male YAS without migration backgrounds did not hold back with their criticisms – affirming that the welfare regime is too generous with the support of 'foreigners'.

Consequently, the identified discursive patterns and narratives tend to confirm this hypothesis. The premise of 'equal treatment for all' favours a programmatic, which ignores structural disadvantages. Notably, these disadvantages are mirrored by a more compliant discourse of YAS with migration background and young women with childcare responsibilities. However, the moral underpinnings of this premise are more nuanced as there are differing narratives amongst professionals justifying it.

H4: The current socio-political alignment reduces social assistance to an ambivalent financial support.

1) Commonalities across cantonal borders

In both cases the cantonal welfare regimes addressed the new emerging social problem of young people without educational perspectives and experiencing financial hardships with a programmatic shift, which I described as 'education first'. This led to a restructuring of internal competences within the cantons, with the vocational training departments having a more extensive role in tracking the youngsters with scholastic difficulties and accompanying them in their endeavour to transition from school to work. New integration programmes with an accent on 'social skills' have emerged. They are framed as 'preparatory' and aim at tackling the growing number of YAS with multiple problems.

One of the consequences of this strategic shift, which can be observed in both cases – the canton of Geneva being more expansive in terms of 'preparatory' measures in comparison to Basel-City – is a polarization within the welfare regime. Since the 'education first' shift, the integration measures (for instance MoveOn in Geneva or AMIE in Basel) are outsourced and formalized with external organizations and the individual case managements of the integration process has been taken over by the vocational training departments. The concrete case management and the responsibility for finding a solution for YAS according to the 'education first' strategy (which means finding a VET) has been delegated to the professionals of vocational training (Gap in Basel-City and Cap Formation in Geneva). In several interviews, these implementers affirmed that they are the competent professionals to accompany YAS towards a VET integration and not the social workers of social assistance who are considered to be in charge of the material and the 'social' issues (housing and family situations, for instance). However, it remains a rather diffuse and unappreciated task. Several implementers have called out the social workers

of social assistance for being 'too social'. Therefore, these social workers find themselves in an ambiguous position within both the cantonal transition regime and as regarding YAS.

2) Differences across cantonal borders, offices, professionals and YAS

The first ambiguity arises because of an accentuated hierarchization within the cantonal transition regime. On the one hand, nearly all the implementers affirmed the need for more collaboration and cooperation of all the involved actors. On the other hand, when it comes to the competences of the various actors and professionals, the job coaches, and other professionals of integration have repeatedly affirmed in both cantons that they should be in charge of accompanying YAS (not social assistance) and that there is a need of delimitation of two different professions. The second ambiguity arises regarding the YAS, because social assistance decides upon the level and the conditions or requirements for material support. Consequently, social assistance has been reduced to an ambiguous material support because frontline workers need to make sure that the intake procedure is done correctly. This means that all YAS get the financial support they deserve (higher level for those who are on the VET track) or that the parents, if they can, pay for the livelihood of their adult children, making sure in that way that the YAS do not even enter the realm of social assistance.

Consequently, the analysed data suggests that social assistance is internally oftentimes not considered qualified for providing the right accompaniment for YAS and at the same time, based on the radical interpretation of the subsidiarity principle, professionals have to make sure that there are not too many YAS applying for material support in the first place. In such a context, the YAS as a subgroup of young adults receiving social assistance should have to deal with particularly ambiguous financial support of the social services in charge because they represent all unwanted socioeconomic features. This ambiguity should be even more accentuated due to the fact that there seems to be no consensus on which actor or professional should be mainly in charge of YAS.

Sample limitations and scientific relevance

A concluding note on sample limitations is important. While in the analysis of the meso level (cantonal administration) the collected qualitative material (interviews with implementers and providers of integration, analysis of documents) has been based on a relatively dense and rich data material, which accounts for the empirical evidence, the collected data on the micro

level (YAS) is less saturated. The difficulties encountered during field work in this respect have been discussed in Chapter 4.4. They are mainly due to the challenge of accessing vulnerable individuals in qualitative research.

Specifically, the encompassing narratives found within all eight interviews with YAS must be valued with caution as it is likely that more variability and nuances could be disclosed with a broader sample of YAS. This regards notably the evidence of compliant discourse with implementers and providers of integration and the analysis regarding the auto-exclusion mechanisms of YAS. One can assume that there can be other survival mechanism within welfare and transition regimes that could be uncovered with a broader sample of YAS.

Previous scholars have argued about the difficulties of activation and social investment policies to reach the most disadvantaged beneficiaries and about their potential to exclude and stigmatize them (Bonoli 2013, 2020; Dahmen et al. 2017; Kevins et al. 2020). Focusing on discourses and using a specific analytical lens (work ethics), I was able to show, despite the sample limitations, that there is a complex and nuanced ongoing shift within social policies addressed at YAS, which builds, amongst other things, on a social investment strategy ('education first') with the aim of preventing welfare dependency and is guided by intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic narratives. In doing so, I was able to deepen the academic understanding regarding the moral foundations of activation and social investment policies. Building on qualitative data collected within cantonal administrations and with YAS themselves, I demonstrated the presence of narratives linked with a specific moral value of reinforcing the work ethics amongst the 'problematic youth'.

Even though the results can hardly be generalized due to sample limitations and the Swiss federalist political system, this research demonstrated the presence of narratives, which disclosed on what moral grounds the access to social assistance is continuously negotiated and renegotiated for YAS. Such research becomes increasingly relevant as the social assistance practice becomes more and more contractualized (see Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016). Furthermore, the detailed analysis of discourses on work ethics enriches the European critical social policy literature on welfare conditionality (see for instance Dwyer 2018). This publication shows that the morality and legitimization discourse matters greatly if one is to understand current trends in social policy reforms. The access to state support for YAS in those two cantons is for instance conditional upon the diagnoses of professionals regarding the

individual social and professional competences of YAS and also upon a certain degree of compliant behaviour of the YAS. Analysing such ascriptions of professionals (implementers and providers of integration) as well as how YAS deal with them is relevant because they disclose what is morally expected of youngsters within welfare and educational regimes. The recurrent presence of discourses on how YAS should not stay too long in social assistance and how they should acknowledge their past failures demonstrates moreover the importance of understanding social policies as reinforcement activities of individual responsibility (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991). In this vein, this research demonstrates that, to a certain extent, social policies function as programmatic instruments for conveying symbolic messages to all members of society regarding what constitutes productive work.

The focus of the analysis remained on a discursive level, which is why further research is needed to disclose to what extent such discourses are translated concretely into practice by frontline workers. As we know from street-level theory (Lipsky 2010), social workers and other types of frontline workers have considerable discretion in judging what the individual help plan for beneficiaries of social assistance should be. Such research could also deepen our understanding of the ambiguous effects on young beneficiaries of social services.

From a methodological point of view, I used qualitative data generation and analytical techniques (reconstructing narratives through coding procedures) to disclose discursive justification patterns at the intersection of policy formulation and implementation. One of the benefits of focusing mainly on the moral value of work ethics in combination with age is that this allowed indirectly to generate insights regarding other related social norms like gender-relations or migration background hidden within the data. Implementers talking during interviews about how 'equality of treatment' is and should be the prime concern in dealing with YAS while at the same time explaining how young mothers are problematic because of their pregnancy or because they cannot work on a construction site are such examples. In doing so, I was able to bring to light how social policies construct subgroups of YAS differently. Furthermore, due to my diverse, though limited, sample, I was also able to show how these subgroups perceive those policies differently. Interestingly, the results are similar to those of previous qualitative research in a related social work field (motivational semester for unemployed adolescents). Nada (2019:328) demonstrated how adolescents and young adults with migration

backgrounds present more compliant behaviour when completing a motivational semester (SEMO) compared to those with a Swiss passport.

7.2 Relativizing social assistance as a social right

The generated insights can be further discussed with respect to the socio-political role of social assistance within the Swiss welfare regime. I argue that the current development of social policies addressed at YAS and particularly the interpretation of the subsidiarity principle contribute to relativizing the social rights of YAS.

As Chapter 2 has shown, social assistance in Switzerland is a fragmented policy regime, designed and implemented at several state levels. The cantons are in charge of legislation but the umbrella association SKOS/CSIAS has an important normative role to play due to the acknowledged authority of their norms, which every canton refers to at some point during its implementation of social assistance. Some principles stated within these norms are always present in some form in the social assistance discourse and practice.

Various implementers mentioned for instance that there is a specific legal framework that cannot be changed. One of the most pertinent normative aspects in this respect is the principle of subsidiarity, which incorporates the obligation for every beneficiary of social assistance to make all possible individual efforts to alleviate their concrete hardship. In the case of YAS, this means also that their parents need to be held to their legal responsibility to financially support their children until they have completed an initial education, if they have the means to do it. Material support is only granted if there are no possibilities for the YAS him- or herself to alleviate a given hardship and if his or her parents are not available for financial support. This legal framework in itself requires a professional assessment of deservingness before a social assistance case can be created. Consequently, frontline workers in charge of this first assessment have considerable discretionary powers. Once financial deservingness is established, they can still decide that the youngster does not deserve the support of social assistance and that he or she should reattempt another reconciliation with its parents or legal guardians. Based on the conducted analysis, I argue that the socio-political trend regarding this matter is relativizing social assistance as a much-needed social right for YAS. Various findings point to this interpretation.

First, there are indications that implementers have an ambiguous discourse on how to deal with the issue of subsidiarity and the access to support

in a fundamental manner. On the one hand, most of them align with the 'education first' strategy (long-term accompaniment of YAS towards vocational training), which would suggest an expansive strategy allowing every YAS to enter the regime independent of the reasons for hardship and the individual resources of the YAS. On the other hand, some implementers deplore the fact that youngsters take up social assistance in the first place. They interpret the mere fact of asking for material support and counsel – even though hardship has objectively been established – as a sign of de-responsabilization of the youth.

Following this discourse, one can assume, in practice, that the first encounter with a professional can both result in a long-term accompaniment and in a symbolic moment of stigmatization – depicting the youngster as an irresponsible young person who did not deal with his or her hardship accordingly. This discursive polarization regarding the access to support for young people relativizes social assistance as a social right, because it puts youngsters in a competitive situation where they individually must prove their deservingness to the frontline workers without knowing whether or not support will be granted. This inevitably leads to arbitrary decisions of who gets what kind of support (or not) and under what kind of circumstances, because it depends to a certain degree on how YAS present themselves to the professionals (work ethics, motivation, admitting mistakes, etc.).

Second, the data indicates another discursive polarization regarding the professional take on what needs to be done with YAS. Two conflicting narratives emerged within the data on this matter. The first is the belief that experiencing unemployment and precariousness could be educational for YAS and would lead to an 'awakening', meaning YAS would finally realize that they need to adapt to the requirements of the productive adult world. Such adaptation includes having appropriate work ethics or owning up to past professional and educational mistakes. This coincides with the interpretation of social assistance as inherently harmful for YAS because they might not learn the right lessons for the future. A second narrative regarding this matter takes the opposite stance. According to this perspective, YAS need time to heal from their experiences and pressuring them into an integration programme or leaving them without much-needed financial support will only lead to more exclusion and future social costs for the canton. In this view, YAS need time and shelter from the pressure and stigmatization induced by the activation and social investment policies.

One can assume that such a discursive polarization affects the concrete frontline work with YAS and could lead to a very heterogeneous practice. As such, this would counter-balance recent efforts of the cantons to coordinate and centralize the involved actors, offices, and departments in order to produce a more coherent action in dealing with YAS. Indeed, there seems to be an ideological divide between the more traditional 'social' integration professionals (social workers and educators) and the newer, more specialized 'work' integration professionals (job coaches, case managers), when it comes to the strategic take on how to deal with YAS.

Focusing on the legal context of the social assistance, I argue that the principle of subsidiarity should not be interpreted ideologically, as some of the implementers tend to do, but rather in a more pragmatic manner. One cannot simply overturn the verification process during intake phase. One of the basic principles of social assistance is the understanding that it only takes over a case if there are no other upstream means available. However, one could interpret subsidiarity with respect to matters of systemic coherence and social justice – or, in other words, as a procedure, which makes sure that the right institution deals with the matter at hand. If in doubt whether a reconciliation with the parents or legal guardians should be reattempted and forced upon the YAS, the guiding principles could be the statements of the YAS during the first encounter at social services.

The data suggests, however, that the principle of subsidiarity is used ideologically to cement the role of social assistance as a bridging solution and that the primary goal is to close every case as fast as possible, or regarding the YAS to not even open one or to hand over the responsibility to another unit within the canton. Such an interpretation relativizes social assistance as a horizontal social right for every individual experiencing hardship and counteracts overall the effectiveness of strategical long-term approaches like the 'education first' alignment.

As the analysis has shown, the combination of technocratic tangible principles like subsidiarity and the moral interpretation that a young person receiving social assistance in order to meet the needs of daily life are recurrent discursive patterns within social policy discourse. Such discourse produces and reproduces the narrative of 'welfare dependency'. In this vein, YAS are constructed as the embodiment of an erroneous trajectory that needs to be altered.

At the core of this perspective is the belief that too much welfare will eventually harm YAS and impede their social participation. Furthermore, this belief is morally linked to the fact that they are still young, as in contrast to older age groups. The retraced narratives point towards an understanding that the intersection of the qualities of being 'young' and 'unproductive' informs the urge to avoid welfare as it would make them 'dependent' and even more 'irresponsible'. Beyond this paternalistic perspective, there is a neo-liberal narrative supporting this belief, since integrating every young person into the labour market contributes toward financing the cantonal welfare regimes.

In this perspective, the intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic rationalities act as a programme in order to shape the realities of the YAS and most importantly their behaviours. They have to 'learn' the moral lesson that receiving social assistance is not part of adult life. It is a moral failure to ask for help. The economic argument adds further pressure, since YAS need to understand that it is costly for the general population to support them and that it is only 'natural' that such support has to be linked with some form of coerciveness.

One aspect that was the most illuminating was the narrative "YAS should feel ashamed for receiving social assistance" (Chapter 5.3, Narrative 4). Even though this is not shared by all implementers and is even contested at times, its presence within the data demonstrates that there is to a certain degree an underlying belief that stigmatization is needed for educational purposes when implementing social policies. Otherwise, it would become normal or 'natural' to claim welfare benefits. In this perspective, the intervention of the implementers and frontline workers are needed as a reminder of the intended trajectory and of the individual deviancies of YAS. While research on poverty and social exclusion stresses the structural causes for intergenerational transmission (Schuwey and Knöpfel 2014), certain implementers within the policy field of youth transition policies suggest it is an educational and individual problem. In other words, the YAS just need to 'learn' not to make the same mistakes as their parents if they do not want to end up in the same position.

Such a moral interpretation of welfare dependency underpinned with ideations of individual responsibility and social justice translates into youth transition regimes, where youngsters are faced with reduced material support, enforced control, and surveillance practices, and even more requirements to work individually on supposedly objective labour market skills (teamwork,

being punctual, etc.). It does not take into consideration real opportunities for a YAS with multiple problems to re-enter an apprenticeship, which would need to integrate the employer's perspective on the matter. Other scholars have shown for the canton of Vaud how implementers and frontline workers view the labour market with a mixture of objective characteristics and subjective reinterpretations of what constitutes a competitive firm and what a YAS still needs to do individually in order to enter it (Bonvin and Rosenstein 2016:51). The present results have the same tenor and emphasize the moral underpinning within the discourse on such practices.

Another matter, linked to the moral idea that a youngster receiving social assistance would learn the 'wrong' lesson, is the emerging pattern of "treating every YAS equally" (Chapter 5.3, Narrative 7). The analysis of data suggests that there are no exceptions regarding the welfare dependency axiom when it comes to young people. It applies to every young person. Discursively, the narrative is legitimized via references to social justice, in the sense that everyone is entitled to the same ambiguous support – independently of background or individual life trajectory. However, it means also that the afore-mentioned individual responsibility to learn from past mistakes, accept the judgments of the frontline workers, and perform compliant behaviour will be applied equally to each YAS.

I have discussed how such an interpretation of 'equality' can contribute to reinforcing structural disadvantages – for instance, with the example of young mothers participating in a specific integration programme. The conducted interviews within AMIE demonstrated how activating young mothers without vocational training is "saturated with moral issues" (Hansen 2019:4). Notably, the fact that they are mothers at a young age (and thus defying the normative pathway to be financially independent before having children) is very much questioned by the professionals and constructed as an irresponsible act, which leads inevitably to 'welfare dependency'.

This illustrates how the moral foundation of social policies evolves around the question of what constitutes productive work and what it means to be a responsible, productive member of society (Handler and Hasenfeld 1991). The 'education first' alignment can be interpreted as a new social investment paradigm as it forces state actors to coordinate their actions, which can translate to more educational possibilities for some youngsters experiencing problems in their transitions from school to work. However, it struggles in providing solutions for the phenomenon of YAS with multiple problems

and this is ideologically linked with conceptions of what is considered productive work. Taking the example of young mothers on social assistance and without vocational training, the question of welfare dependency would not occur if taking care of a child would be categorized morally as 'productive work'. These YAS would not be considered part of the activation jurisdiction or subjects one needs to invest in order to gain a return on investment later on. If we took this argument even further and imagined that claiming social assistance as a social right due to objective and proven hardship constitutes a moral value in itself (enhancing solidarity within a community) and not a dependency risk, these moral debates would occur even less frequently or they would shift in the sense that there would be no need to separate worthy from unworthy subgroups of 'poor'. The mere fact that there are young people who do not present the features for entering the productive world of paid work would not constitute a social problem.

The example of Scène Active provides a good example of a step in this direction: disentangling social policies from the notion of 'productive work' and taking as starting point the vulnerabilities and aspirations of the youngsters. Interestingly, the discursive legitimation for this particular programme is the welfare and transition regime itself – arguing that these youngsters have had to deal with enough breaks and setbacks within the regime and need a resting period in order to rebuild their self-esteem. I argue that such attempts could guide other cantonal activities when dealing with YAS with multiple problems, as they contribute to deconstruct the welfare dependency axiom by providing activities outside of the nexus productive/unproductive work.

7.3 The role of social work

The discipline of social work is heavily involved in the field of poverty alleviation. Social workers are involved in the formulation of integration policies as well as their implementation at street level. The results discussed here point to ambiguities and a plurality of sometimes contradictory discourses, which one must assume translate into ambiguous and contradictory practices at the frontline. Additionally, the reconstruction of the historic evolution of the two cantonal administrations disclosed a complex grid of actors and regulations at different administrative levels, evolving continuously. With the evolution of the programmatic credo 'education first', new work fields have emerged for the social work professionals: foundations and associations

financing and building their own integration programmes as well as associations like Accroche in Geneva with strategic coordination tasks.

For the discipline of social work and its professionals, this means, on the one hand, that new opportunities arise in order to contribute to an effective youth unemployment prevention. On the other hand, it also means that the discipline of social work becomes itself a major part of a regime promoting and reproducing exclusionary narratives and practices.

Lorenz (2016) pointed out that with the current neo-liberal alignment of social policies, the analytical and methodological achievements of social work are being relativized. The origins of social work are linked to policies that recognize the necessity of social reconstruction and cohesion. Social work constantly needs to be able to raise the 'social question' as its core mandate is to ensure social rights and promote inclusion and equality. Historically, social work has evolved around the publicly debated question of how social solidarity should be defined and enhanced. In this sense, I argue that the discipline of social work should participate in public discourse on social justice at every state level. Social workers have a unique perspective on ongoing social policy discourses and frameworks as they are charged with their translation into frontline work. The discipline of social work should hold policy-makers accountable, particularly such conflicting narratives as the 'education first' alignment, which claims that for every YAS there is an individualized help plan, which will inevitably lead him or her closer to a VET.

However, within a regime that pushes a discourse based on individual autonomy, responsibility, and activation, the scope for 'raising the social question' seems rather limited. In such contexts, overcoming vulnerabilities and hardship becomes an individual matter and its relevance in public debates is relativized. Lorenz (2016:13) mentions one way for social workers to defy this development. Social workers should treat their various interventions in relation to public issues and re-position the discipline of social work in a critical way towards this neo-liberal turn.

The neo-liberal orientation leaves its mark on professionals. Bonvin and Rosenstein (2016:53) argue, for instance, that despite the formal openness of the integration programme FORJAD, access is restricted because of factors like lack of resources and concerns of efficiency. In such contexts, professionals act as filters (sometimes even more strictly than employers themselves would) rather than facilitators for all young people and the plurality of their needs and aspirations. Within such alignments, social policies add another factor of

stress to the lives of YAS rather than providing opportunities and future prospects. The presented research demonstrated for two other cantons (Basel-City and Geneva) that moral values like reinforcing work ethics to prevent welfare dependency are very much present in today's Swiss welfare policy. One could say that they are laying the moral groundwork for the implementation at the frontline.

Beyond this critical standpoint, this research has also shown that there are social work professionals who are opposed to such interpretations of social policy. They actively try to oppose and change them. This matter points to a future internal discursive struggle in the field of social work. Based on the emerging narratives found within the collected data, one can say that there are currently two standpoints.

The first one englobes professionals of social work and administrative experts who believe that every governmental activity concerning youth unemployment should be invested in preventing the phenomenon from occurring in the first place. This translates into measures and programmes that focus on the deficiencies of the youngsters to enhance their individual skills. The focus on the individual adaptability of young individuals is considered forced, as the changing requirements of the VET and labour market cannot be influenced. This perspective is embedded in a market economy with its premise that every able body should participate in paid work. Opposed to this standpoint is the perspective of those professionals in the field of social work who believe that youth unemployment in the context of the current requirements of the labour market is structurally inevitable. In this vein, the current 'education first' alignment can provide opportunities for some youngsters. However, it does not provide opportunities for all, especially not for youngsters with multiple problems. This discourse points to the necessity of finding other solutions to enhance social participation beyond the labour market.

One of the major results was to show the intricate binary between the encompassing narratives that exist within the administrations of Basel-City and Geneva as well as the plurality and at-times contradictory discourse regarding what 'we' should do with the 'problematic youth'. This points to the necessity for further research both on a discursive level and in practice. It is crucial to generate more knowledge on a broader level and insights as to whether other cantons present the same tendencies and discursive tensions when confronted with YAS. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the concrete implementation of the 'education first' alignment at the frontline should be

conducted. This would allow us to gain more insights on the concrete effects on YAS and their coping strategies, the effects on their life course and could generate crucial data that displays the handling of such group at the front-line. This would require further qualitative, street-level research in the field of social assistance.

Another matter, which would require more scholarly attention in general, is the intergenerational transmission of poverty caused by the reproduction of structural disadvantages. This is especially valuable in the Swiss context due to the dominance of neo-liberal and paternalistic political rationalities, which put an accent on the 'individual responsibility' in dealing with financial hardships and failed transitions into the labour market.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Corpus of Administrative reports and studies

Canton Basel-City

- Schürmann, Rolf, and Benedikt Arnold. 2006a. Wachstum der Sozialhilfequote – Perspektiven zur beruflichen und sozialen Integration mit Fokus auf junge Erwachsene. Bericht an den Regierungsrat des Kantons Basel-Stadt. Wirtschafts- und Sozialdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt.
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- Arnold, Benedikt. 2019. Gap – Case Management Berufsbildung. Ausführungskonzept. Erziehungsdirektion des Kantons Basel-Stadt.

Canton of Geneva

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9.2 Socioeconomic life situation of the YAS

This figure shows the socioeconomic life situation of the YAS encountered. At the time of the encounter, they had all no employment (with the exception of one YAS) and not yet completed a vocational training. Nearly all of them have completed preparatory measures or even started an apprenticeship in the past. Half of the encountered YAS have a migration background and did not complete their school education in Switzerland (dual citizenship). Five out of eight YAS have health issues, which are not acknowledge by the disability insurance and half of them had debts up to 10,000 Swiss francs. Most of them have 'broken' or 'complicated' relationships with their legal parents.

9.3 Overview of the expert interviews

In the canton of Basel-City, the social service regime is segmented in two sections: securing livelihood (Existenzsicherung) and professional integration (Arbeitsintegrationszentrum, AIZ). Both are relevant for YAS. In the securing livelihood section there is a "young adults" team in charge of the 18- to 25-year-old beneficiaries. Whenever there is a need for a measure regarding VET they work with the other departments and units together. The institution Gap is in charge of the implementation of case management

Table 15 Socioeconomic overview of the conducted PCI with YAS in Basel-City and Geneva

YAS	Residency	Age/ Gender	Education	Employ- ment	Housing situation	Health issues	Welfare since	Depts	Social environment
AMIE1 (BC)	Dual citizenship	24/f	Compulsory school	no	Four room apartment with two kids and new partner	Paralysis	Three years	4,000.–	Friends within AMIE, difficult relationships with mother and ex- partner
AMIE2 (BC)	Dual citizenship	28/f	Compulsory school	Part-time in retail	Single parent (two kids); three room apartment	Suffered domestic violence	Two years	Yes (sum unknown)	Family is in Germany. Not many friends; violent ex-partner
AMIE3 (BC)	CH	22/f	Compulsory school	No	Single parent (one kid); two room apartment	No	One year	No	Not many friends. Difficult relationship with parents and ex- partner
SH1 (BC)	CH	20/m	Compulsory school (dropped out of VET)	No	Supervised housing (used to be homeless)	No; drug issues in the past	Two years	2,500.–	Good relationship with two sisters and many friends. Broken relationship with mother
SH2 (BC)	CH	21/m	Compulsory school/pre- vocational training	No	Single person; three room apartment	No	Four years	No	No contact to biological family. Affirms 'I have many friends'.
MoveOn1 (GE)	Dual citizenship	27/m	Dropped out of university (higher education certifi- cate not acknow- ledged in CH) and training in Geneva	No	Single person (lives in hotel)	Depression and anxiety (mental health issue); DI application in progress	One year	No	Good relationship with aunt and uncle

Continuation of table 15 on the following page

Continuation of table 15

YAS	Residency	Age/ Gender	Education	Employ- ment	Housing situation	Health issues	Welfare since	Depts	Social environment
<i>MoveOn2 (GE)</i>	CH	19/m	Compulsory school	No	Three room apartment with his father	No	One and a half years	No	Ok-relationship with father, aunt, and uncle. Had many friends in the past. Today affirms: 'I am a loner'.
<i>MoveOn3 (GE)</i>	Dual citizenship	23/m	Compulsory school	No	Single person; one room apartment	Mental health issues (did not apply for DI)	Five years	10,000.–	Not many friends. Bad relationship with mother (is also beneficiary of social assistance

vocational training. The name “Gap” refers symbolically to the gap between where the YAS stand in life and where they need to be.

In the canton of Geneva, the social assistance department (Hospice Général) has created a specialized unit Point Jeunes, which a specific mandate towards young adults experiencing financial hardships. The institution is designed specifically for the YAS. They collaborate very closely with Geneva’s counterpart to Gap: Cap Formation and with the municipal social services, the CAS (social assistance centres) (see also Bochsler 2020:481).

All the institutions have been carefully selected using grounded theory procedures (see Chapter 4). Most of the encountered ‘implementer’ and ‘providers of integration’ combine expert knowledge regarding the socio-politic alignment of their cantons and street-level experience as some of them have counselled YAS on a daily basis. The following table lists all the institutions, their affiliation within the cantonal administration, their mission (type of institution) and the position of the interviewed expert within the institution.

Table 16 Overview of the expert interviews

Expert interviews Basel-City			
Name of Institution	Department	Type of Institution	Position of interviewee
Social Assistance (Sozialhilfe)	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Cantonal administration	Head of office
Social assistance/division integration (Integration)	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Specialized unit within the social service of Basel-City	Head of division
Professional Integration (Arbeitsintegrationszentrum AIZ)	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Specialized unit within the cantonal administration	Head of unit
Gap Case Management vocational training	Dep. of Education	Cantonal administration	Head of office
Office for Economy and Labour/Employment service	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Cantonal administration	Head of service
Overall – cooperative for integrative working Jobfactory	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Association, specialized in school-to-work integration	Deputy head of office
	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Social firm, specialized in school-to-work integration	Head of office
AMIE – Career start for young mothers	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Association, specialized in school-to-work integration for young mothers	Head of office

Expert interviews Geneva

Name of Institution	Department	Type of Institution	Position of interviewee
Point Jeunes	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Specialized unit within the social assistance	Head of unit
Employment office (Office cantonal de l'emploi, OCE)	Dep. for Economic and Social Affaires	Division for labour market measures	Head of division
Cap Formation	Dep. for public education, vocational training and youth	Specialized unit within the vocational training office	Deputy Head of office
Accroche (Scène Active)	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Association, coordinating the cantonal activities for the YAS	Director
Qualif	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Foundation, promotes professional integration of YAS	Director
FASe (Fondation genevoise pour l'animation socio-culturelle)	External stakeholder	Foundation, Coordinating the activities of the mobile outreach social work	Director
Trajets	External stakeholder	Association, promotes civic, professional and social integration	Director
MoveOn (Trajets)	External stakeholder and provider of integration	Atelier and integration programme for YAS with a focus on social competences	Head of programme

9.4 Description of the 'providers of integration'

In both cantons, in the past twenty-five years an incalculable number of associations, NGOs, and social companies have emerged providing offers for vulnerable unemployed groups of people. There are no statistics to provide an overview of the number and specializations of these institutions. However, one can identify three main topics or strategic goals that these integration measures will solely or in combination with one another refer to (Adam et al. 2016). A first important focus is on school deficiencies and the offers of scholastic refresher courses. A second feature of those measures are job application skills and working skills in general. These two focuses are the more traditional measures that directly aim to push for educational and labour market integration. Finally, yet equally important because they respond to the new challenge of YAS with multiple problems, new integration measures have emerged with the focus on "social competences" or "social skills". As

we have seen, professionals of integration affirm that there is a lack of social competences within the group of YAS and the numbers of those seems to be growing. YAS with low self-esteem, often in combination with mental health issues that are not acknowledged by disability insurance – present what these professionals call a lack of “social skills”. These measures aim at enhancing behavioural competences qualified as primordial in a work context. Their perspective on the subject of the YAS is valuable as they are shaping their daily realities and implementing the mandate of the cantons to change the behaviours and skill levels of the YAS. The following list gives an overview of all the providers of integration taken into account during fieldwork. The short descriptions of the organizations focus on their missions and specializations.

In the canton of Basel-City, I have conducted three expert interviews with providers of integration. Three of the five encountered YAS in Basel were completing a one-year integration programme at AMIE. In the canton of Geneva, I have conducted three expert interviews with providers of integration. The three encountered YAS in Geneva were completing a one-year integration programme at MoveOn.

Table 17 Description of the integration programmes

Basel	Institution	Description
	AMIE	AMIE – career start for young mothers (AMIE Berufseinstieg für junge Mütter) was founded in 2007 by the trade association in Basel-City. Since 2014, AMIE is an independent association. The initiative for this integration programme was the specific vulnerability of young mothers without vocational training. It is a one-year programme. The programme combines courses on educational issues regarding motherhood, job application skills, personal development and empowerment, social competences, and refresher courses (mathematics and German). Nearly all the participants are beneficiaries of social assistance.
	Jobfactory	Jobfactory was founded in 2000. Their aim is to prevent youth unemployment and accompany youngsters towards vocational training. It consists of the social firm, called Jobfactory Basel AG, and the foundation Job Training. The programme for young adults is built according to the dual VET system. There is no fixed time limit. Due to the intensity of the programme, there are very few YAS within Jobfactory. Most youngsters have completed (or dropped out) of a motivational semester without finding an apprenticeship. Within the programme ‘job training’, the young adults have access to individual coaching (social and professional competences), refresher courses, and internships in various occupational fields (packaging, bicycle mechanic, computer science, etc.)

Overall Overall is a foundation and social firm. Similarly to Jobfactory, they propose ‘integration work places’ within their own business operations. One of their most important partners next to employment office is the AIZ (specialized unit for work integration within the social assistance). Their goal is the promotion of professional integration. The youngsters work in different branches like gastronomy, housekeeping, building operations, and administration. The ultimate goal is that the participant may find an apprenticeship or a job on the regular labour market.

Geneva Institution Description

Qualif Qualif (abbreviation for ‘qualification’) is a private foundation. It is entirely financed via donations and a private fund. It was founded in 2014. It was initiated by private individuals, actors who remained anonymous. Their focus are young adults (eighteen to twenty-five years of age) with multiple problems, specifically YAS but also young adults who for various reasons are neither in the VET system nor receiving social assistance anymore. They work closely with FASe, the mobile outreach social work institution, together. They specialize in long-term accompaniment. Their integration philosophy is based on free adherence and self-determination. Their action is focused on the needs of the young adults. The professional designation of the collaborators is ‘job coach’. Their ultimate goal is VET or labour market integration.

MoveOn (Trajets) MoveOn is part the association Trajets and was founded in 2011. It is a one-year integration programme organized as an atelier (between fifteen and twenty participants). Their philosophy is based on free adherence. However, once the youngsters enter the programme, punctuality is requested. They focus explicitly on YAS with multiple problems and without immediate professional perspectives or VET openings. The aim is to promote social competences within a professional context and rebuild the self-confidence of the YAS in order to envision a possible VET application. MoveOn works very closely with the various municipal social services. All the participants are beneficiaries of social assistance. It is a full-time programme, and the activities include creating an individual portfolio for developing competencies, preparing lunch for the group, and acquiring work related skills like ‘working as a team’.

Scène Active (Accroche) Scène Active has been founded in 2015. It is part of the association Accroche. Every year, forty young adults (between seventeen and twenty-five years old) participate over a school year. The programme offers full-time accompaniment. The aim of the programme is to create a theatre play and to perform it at the end of the year. The programme offers full-time accompaniment and explicitly focuses on young people without professional prospects and without the necessary skills to enter ‘classical’ integration measures within the cantonal transition regime (for instance, motivational semester). It is built as a low-threshold programme based on free adherence. Similarly to MoveOn, the focus lays on rebuilding self-confidence and motivating the youngsters to build their own professional project. Scène active is organized in different ateliers on subjects like photography, filming, acting, costume and accessory production, scenography, and cooking.

9.5 Interview grid of the semi-structured expert interviews

At the start of the interviews, I regularly introduced the subject of the dissertation. Making transparent that the starting point of the research project is the socio-political shift in the field of youth unemployment characterized by the credo 'education first'. The semi-structured interviews were segmented into five parts. Part one incorporates questions regarding the historic evolution of the youth cantonal policies leading to the current situation. Part two discusses the current alignment within the canton and deepens the topic of reforms and strategic changes that led to the current situation. Part three discusses the subjects of concrete cantonal measures, their scope and goals, as well as their legitimacy. The fourth part delves into the subject of discourse and confronts the interviewee with his or her image and representations of youth unemployment and the YAS in particular. Finally, the interview concludes with questions about the socio-economic life situations and trajectories of the YAS.

Part 1 Questions regarding the current socio-political alignment

- › Where do you see the biggest socio-political challenges regarding young adults without vocational training? Which of these challenges is directly related to the context of social assistance?
- › How did these challenges evolve over the last fifteen years?
- › Scientists, experts, and politicians speak of an ongoing structural change of the labour market: How is the situation in Basel-City?

Part 2 Questions regarding the strategic alignment

- › Since 2001, the canton Basel-City pursues explicitly a strategy of "poverty prevention" when it comes to youth unemployment. At its core is the principle of case management. How successful was that strategy?
- › Some are happy when young adults do not even apply for social assistance because of principles like subsidiarity. Others see the social assistance as a stakeholder in a coherent and permeable system, which puts the accent on education before work. Can you comment on this discursive tension? Where would you position yourself?
- › In 2005, an internal study on youth unemployment in Basel-City concluded that only 20 percent of all the YAS are "able to work". Still, the current position within the cantonal administration is that every intervention should ultimately result in labour market integration. Why is this the focus, when in reality these young adults cannot make it?

- › What would you do differently within the cantonal administration? What reform or strategy would you push?

Part 3 Questions regarding the measures

- › The canton Basel-City has a panoply of programmes and measures with a specific focus on young adults without a job and without vocational perspectives. Do you think there are enough measures? Are we doing the right thing strategically? And if not, what types of measures would you recommend?
- › What has changed over the past ten to fifteen years within your canton? How did the structure of the administration (jurisdictions, organizations etc.) change? Which measures or programmes have been tried out and were abandoned later on?
- › There are many actors who are involved in this policy field: schools, vocational training, employment office, job centre, disability insurance, and social assistance to name some of them. Your canton did create an administrative commission charged with the burden to manoeuvre strategically the canton and assure a functioning arrangement between the actors. How does that work?

Part 4 Questions regarding the discursive alignment

- › Why are young adults without a VET and receiving social assistance a problem for society? What is special about them if you compare the youngsters with other groups receiving social assistance like older individuals or single parents or long-term beneficiaries?
- › What would you say are the most dominant discourses regarding youth unemployment and the YAS specifically within your canton? And what is the strategic plan to alter the situation?
- › Could you depict an ideal-typical integration plan from the point of view of your institution for a YAS?
- › What about those young adults with very limited skills and without a realistic chance of labour market integration?

Part 5 Questions regarding the life course of YAS

- › What experiences of exclusion do young adults receiving social assistance endure according to you? Which experiences are particularly problematic and scarring?

- › To use the social category of “young adults” can be potentially problematic because of the heterogeneity of life courses and life situations of the youngsters. Where do you see commonalities and differences within this social group – especially regarding their needs to find a VET and enter the labour market later on? (maybe mention directly: gender, school deficiencies, other structural obstacles like family rupture or migration background.)

9.6 Interview grid of the problem-centred interviews (YAS)

The problem-centred interviews have been conducted either within structures of integration programmes (AMIE in Basel and MoveOn in Geneva), in cafés or at my office at the school of social work of the University of Applied Sciences in Basel and MuttENZ. At the beginning of each interview, the context of the project and the main goals of the projects have been made transparent. The conception of governmental action as problematizing activity has been systematically named. The collected data has been anonymized according to the data protection requirements. The duration of the interview varied between forty-five minutes and one hour. I’ve also disclosed the methodology of PCI, which is above all to capture the point of view, the stories and the lived experiences of the participants. As the method of PCI requires a dynamic and flexible handling of the direction of the interview, not all the interviews did follow the same patterns. However, the following interview grid has been used as a guide for all the encounters.

Part 1 Question regarding life course and social assistance application

- › Do you remember the first encounter with social assistance? What was the reason for the application and how did it go?
- › If incidents like VET dropouts, death, addiction are named: How did you experience these incidents?

Part 2 Questions regarding the context of social assistance

- › How do you manage the current situation? Would you say you are content with the current situation? Is the social assistance/Point Jeunes helping you?
- › How would you judge the social accompaniment you have received so far by social assistance?

- › If you were in charge of helping young adults to find their way, would you do the same or would you change anything within the system?

Part 3 Questions regarding the integration requirements

- › (If the YAS is participating in an integration programme). You are currently part of MoveOn/AMIE: Since when are you part of it and how long can you stay here?
- › Did you decide to come here? Did someone (parent or social worker/ job coach) point this programme out to you? Was there any constraint?
- › What is/are your current perspectives or projects? Do you fix your goals or does your social worker?
Do you think these goals are realistic? Is it a good thing?

Part 4 Questions regarding the specific vulnerability of being young and experiencing hardships

- › Overall, would you say you are content with your life? What goes through your mind when you think of your friends or other young people with the same age as you?
- › How important is autonomy or independence for you? What does that mean to you?
- › If you project yourself into the future: what gives you courage and what scares you?
- › If you think of social assistance: Is there something that scares you or gives you courage?

Part 5 Socio-economic questions regarding the current life situation

- › Are you currently pursuing paid work? Have you been employed in the past?
- › Do you have vocational training or other kind of education?
- › Please, describe your housing situation?
- › Do you have health issues?
- › Please, describe your social environment (family, friends etc.)?
- › Do you have debts?
- › Age, apartment, children
- › Did your parents receive social assistance in the past or are they currently beneficiaries?
- › Since when do you receive social assistance benefits?

▶ *The present research deals with the policies directed at young adults on social assistance without vocational training (YAS). Drawing on data collected within cantonal administrations and providers of integration (Basel-City and Geneva) as well as interviews with YAS, the publication analysis cantonal social policies and their moral underpinnings. In Switzerland, there is an ongoing strategical shift in the field of youth policies that emphasizes educational integration as a first and primary integration step. This policy shift has implications for the strategical scope of the cantons. The focus on ‘education first’ as a guideline dictates an approach, which follows an intertwined neo-liberal and paternalistic discourse: On the one hand, social policies are designed as investment to avoid a long-term labour market exclusion of the YAS. On the other hand, these policies are legitimized via narratives that construct the YAS as irresponsible and dependent – not yet ready to enter adulthood. In doing so, social policies create and reproduce structural vulnerabilities related to dominant moral values like reinforcing the work ethics of young welfare beneficiaries.*

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