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Working poor down over the decade

The number of people classified as working poor in Switzerland decreased from five per cent to 4.4 per cent.

The poverty line is defined as around SFr 2,200 net income a month for a single person and SFr 4,650 for a couple with two children.

People aged 30-39 had the highest rate - 5.8% - while 2.8% of people aged 50-59 were considered working poor.

Almost 10% of single parents fell into the category, as did 18% of couples with three or more children.

Only 3.3% of Swiss nationals were considered working poor, while 7.9% of non-Swiss citizens fit the definition. *from swissinfo*

Selling the idea of fair trade

Fair trade is a growing business, and one which has caught the Swiss imagination: they are the world champions in the consumption of fair trade products.

The fair trade movement aims to help small producers in developing countries to achieve economic self-sufficiency, giving them better market access and cutting down the number of middlemen.

In Switzerland, the first shop dealing in fair trade goods opened in December 1974 in Lausanne. Today there are roughly 300 "world shops" nationwide, staffed to a large extent by volunteers, and fair trade products are also on sale in 2,500 supermarkets.

The "world shops" sell a range of food items - including coffee, tea, chocolate, dried fruit and rice - as well as textiles, craft goods and some cosmetic products. But they also want to raise awareness within Switzerland of

the inequalities of international trade, and give consumers a chance to demonstrate solidarity with producers in the developing world.

The Swiss Max Havelaar Foundation has a different role. The Max Havelaar label on an item certifies that it has been produced and marketed in accordance with the fair trade standards guaranteed by the international Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO). One of its great successes has been to introduce fair trade goods to the major retail chains, Coop and Migros.

from swissinfo

Swiss teenagers face steep learning curve

Two thirds of Swiss school leavers opt for apprenticeships, but a high proportion of school leavers face delays in finding the ideal apprenticeship as a result of their social background and economic problems.

Migrants and girls are particularly disadvantaged, according to the first ever Switzerland-wide research into the transition from school to work.

The Transition from Education to Employment (TREE) study is an interdisciplinary project which has been running since 2000. The lack of apprenticeship places and the difficulties faced by foreigners in particular have been the subject of much recent media and political debate.

Researchers were surprised to find just how many school leavers were suffering delays during this important transition period. In the first year around a quarter had to find intermediate solutions, such as doing work experience or a language course, when they did not find their ideal training place.

Skills were found to be less important than type of school or social background. The researchers found that social origin was much more important in Switzer-

land than in other countries, and migrants were particularly affected. Bright students with good grades but a foreign name and/or darker skin had more problems finding an apprenticeship than Swiss youngsters with less good grades. Girls, too, often faced delays.

The study is unique in that it follows up Pisa - only Canada and Australia are carrying out similar initiatives. It is nationwide and follows students from all school tracks. Results are being made available to the wider scientific community as well as to teachers and to political decision makers.

The next follow up study is planned for this year.

Apprenticeships and schools

Students in apprenticeships are normally hired and employed/trained by a company, while spending 1-2 days a week in vocational college. The mix of school and practical training is claimed to be one of the most important advantages of this dual system.

Students have a choice of about 300 recognised apprenticeship categories. Apprentices who pass the final exam at the end of their basic training are awarded a federal diploma which is recognised throughout the country. Generally, the programmes followed and the grades obtained on lower secondary level serve as selection criteria.

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