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School-to-work transitions in times of crisis: the case of Spanish youth without qualifications

Francesca Salvà-Mut, Caterina Thomás-Vanrell and Elena Quintana-Murci

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the school-to-work transitions of Spanish youth. Herein, we study the pathways followed during a 10-year period by young people who dropped out of school without achieving any qualifications and who did not achieve any at a later date. This is a population aged 26–28 years old with an educational level of ISCED 0–1. The study adopts a plurimethodological approach that includes an initial qualitative phase whose main instrument was the biographical interview and a second phase with a quantitative focus in which data were collected using a questionnaire. The results show the effect of dropping out of education without qualifications on the pathways of the youths as well as their greater vulnerability in the current period of economic crisis, which results in a high percentage of the population that has no employment, education or training. This effect is even greater among women. This study highlights the difficulties associated to returning to education, the reproduction of educational exclusion in the population that did not obtain the diploma corresponding to compulsory secondary education, and a lack of public policies to support this specific population.

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Transition; youth work; NEET; lifelong learning; schooling

Introduction

This paper aims to provide new insights into the effect of drop out on the school-to-work transitions of young people without qualifications in times of crisis. To this end, we analyse the employment, education and training pathways of a group of young people aged 26–28 years old who dropped out of the educational system without the ‘Graduate of Compulsory Secondary Education’ (GCSE) qualification and who still had not obtained it 10 years later.¹

One in four Spanish youths drops out of compulsory secondary education without obtaining the diploma, and very few of them obtain it subsequently (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008; García et al. 2013; Salvà-Mut 2013). Despite the serious nature of these and other data regarding school dropout in Spain, there is a dearth of research on employment, educational and training pathways.

In developed societies, worsening labour conditions in an increasing number of jobs is having a strong effect on school-to-work transitions. Research on this issue has revealed the features of this process in the new social and labour context, amongst which it is worth noting:

- Lengthening: Motivated, above all, by the characteristics of the job market and the generalised lengthening of schooling (Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998; Du Bois-Reymond and López Blasco 2004; Furlong, Cartmel, and Biggart 2006; Bradley and Devadason 2008).
- Complexity: Transitions have ceased to be linear and involve comings and goings between diverse situations of employment, unemployment, and education and training (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). School-to-work transitions are becoming heterogeneous, non-linear and unpredictable (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Grossetti 2006; Bradley and Devadason 2008).
- Precariousness: Youth transition processes are marked by the flexibility and precariousness of jobs and salaries (Bradley and Van Hoof 2005) and are more vulnerable to loss of jobs, worse labour conditions and ruptures (Macdonald 1994; Fenton and Dermott 2006).
- Individualisation: Transitions are complex and heterogeneous and are articulated in an individualised way based on the interaction of multiple factors (Jones 1995, 2002; Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). Even so, structural factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity (Bradley and Van Hoof 2005; Fenton and Dermott 2006) and institutional factors such as the social and labour policies in each country (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005; Quintini and Martín 2006) continue to have a fundamental importance. It is worth noting that this individualisation process does not entail the disappearance of social inequalities; individual choices continue to be influenced by structural and contextual factors (Du Bois-Reymond and López Blasco 2004; Ianelli and Smith 2008; Furlong 2009).

Standing (2011) affirms that an emergent class is growing 'the *precariat*' characterised by heterogeneity and conformed for people of all ages, educational levels, sex and origin. The author remarks the situation in Spain, and especially how affects to young people, situation that involves not only to have an insecure or temporary job but also to be in status that does not provide sense to professional identity career.

Although precarity is a global phenomenon, we observe that depending on the country, precarity affects certain groups more than others. In a recent study, Cairns, Growiec, and de Almeida Alves (2014) describe the situation of high-educated youth in Portugal being the collective more affected by austerity policies and precariousness. Besides, in Spain, youths with low educational level are those with higher levels of insecurity and vulnerability. In this sense, the OECD (2014) affirms that 'Spanish Labour Market performance both in terms of quality and quantity is lower than the average of OECD because the current high risk of unemployment'; unemployment affects especially youth and low-skilled people.

EUROSTAT (2015) data (based on LFS, 2014) illustrate this particular worrying: youth unemployment rate stood at 53.8%, and involuntary part-time work rate stood at 42%. The OECD (2015a) alerts about the situation of 'neither in employment nor in any education nor training' (NEETs) in Spain, whose percentage is 25.79% and the majority (19%) are 'forced NEETs' so it is impossible for them to get a job.

The difficulties that young people with a low education level have to face in this context are increasing due to the inadequacy of educational and training systems and the lack of policies that promote positive transitions (Walther and Stauber 2002; Hango and De Broucker 2007; Kuehn et al. 2009; Quintini and Manfredi 2009; Berzin 2010).

Spanish research in this field is also scarce, with the additional problem of using data that were collected prior to the crisis. Indeed, the most recent studies available (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008; García et al. 2013) are based on data taken from the Survey on School-Training Transition and Work Placement (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2007) and focused on the population under 25 years who left the educational system in 2000–2001. The survey was conducted in 2005 with a longitudinal approach based on a retrospective analysis of the employment, education and training pathways followed over a four-year period.

Owing to these studies, we know that youths who drop out of the Spanish educational system without qualifications represent approximately a quarter of the total population concerned and that this is a group with a predominance of men (65.4% men and 34.6% women) and with parents with a low education level (only 6.3% received higher education; Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008). These data confirm the close relationship between drop out before finishing compulsory secondary education, parents' education level and family income (Waisgrais and Calero 2008; IVIE 2013).

The research of Albert, Davia, and Toharia (2008) reveals that 68.9% of youth did not follow education or training activities at any time during the period analysed. At the other extreme, a small group that represents 3.8% returned and persevered in the educational system throughout the four years. The others include those who participated for part of the time but gave up before the end of the four years (14.1%) and those who followed a pattern of reconnection but with continuing comings and goings (13.2%). The most typical path was entering Adult Secondary Education (ASE)² either directly or after a year outside the educational system (5.7%), which they accessed directly from a Social Guarantee Program³ (2.3%); it was also usual, once they had passed the admission tests, for them to take an Intermediate Vocational Education and Training Course (2%) (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008).

It is worth noting that the greatest percentage of reconnection with the educational system occurs within the year following drop-out and decreases progressively over the years.

The research of García et al. (2013), related to the academic achievement of youths returning to education, concludes that one-third do not obtain any qualifications, another third end up with the Secondary Education Graduate Diploma, and the remaining third receive a post-compulsory secondary education qualification. A little over one-third of young people without qualifications (35.9%) get some training outside the educational system, primarily training courses for unemployed people. These trainings are a complement to formal education rather than a substitute thereof (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008).

Four years after dropping out, the employment rate was 72% and was practically identical in three groups, 14.7% were unemployed or inactive, and 13.3% were taking post-compulsory secondary studies. Women showed a greater vulnerability: 41% followed a pathway with a predominance of exclusion from work, whereas amongst the men, this happened in 21% of cases. Regarding employment pathways, four modalities were observed (García et al. 2013):

- Labourer (59%): remaining in jobs who were low-skilled or unskilled but who were consistent and significant.⁴
- Erratic (27%): combining situations of occupation, searching for employment or inactivity.
- Impasse and chronic unemployment (12%): the dominant situation was unemployment.
- Low consistency (2%): alternation between situations of unemployment and part-time jobs (fewer than 20 hours a week for over half the time considered). Youth who simultaneously combined some type of training with employment and those who were not actively looking for a job were excluded.

The economic crisis, which began in 2008, had a negative effect on youth's employment, especially those with a low educational level (García-Montalvo and Peiró 2011; Camacho et al. 2012; OECD 2013). Two situations clearly illustrate this effect:

- (1) The unemployment rate of Spanish youth between 25 and 29 years with a low education level has shot up from 14.6% (2007) to 52.1% (2012), and the growth of unemployment rate of this age group as a whole has increased from 9.2% to 32.2% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE] 2014).
- (2) The percentage of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion among the group of people with an ISCED 0–1 stood in 2011 at 34%, as opposed to 27% for the general population (Consejo Económico y Social 2013).

Furthermore, the economic recession has produced a rise in participation in education. According to the OECD data (2015b), it is expected to increase young people to stay in the educational system in the coming years (6.4 years). Although Spain has the highest early school-leaving rate (refers to the percentage for the age group 18–24 that have not completed upper secondary education and are not in education and training) in Europe, since the beginning of the crisis it has been reduced from 31.9% in 2008 to 24.9% in 2012 (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2014).

The low demand for people with no qualifications (García-Montalvo and Peiró 2011) is closely related to these people's specific difficulties to access to education (Dale 2010; Bélanger 2011), which hinder and, in part, render this demand invisible. Standing out among the numerous obstacles to re-entering education and training and to persevering therein is the lack of adequate guidance and support services, training that is too rigid, and the decrease in public services of guidance, training and social and professional insertion for the population with the greatest difficulties (Salvà-Mut, Quintana-Murci, and Desmarais 2014).

This paper illustrates the effect of drop out before finishing compulsory secondary education on school-to-work transition within the framework of a strong economic crisis. The questions we aim to answer are: What is the socio-demographic profile of young people who drop out of school without qualifications? What is the situation of this population group 10 years later? What are the education and employment pathways they have followed? How do they perceive their current situation?

Methodology and sample

The research is conducted using a biographical approach; an analysis is conducted of a biographical stretch, the interpretation of which requires consideration of both the youth's personal biography (past, present and future) and the structural context.

The period studied is of approximately 10 years, which covers the span from the year the participant finished compulsory education (2000–2001) to the time the information was gathered (2010–2012). This period is characterised, on a biographical level, by the transition into adulthood and, on a contextual level, by a shift from a time of economic growth and an increase in public policies to another time period characterised by a strong economic crisis, cutbacks in public policies and a general crisis in the European social model.

The research is structured into two phases, using a mixed methodology. In the first phase, we prioritise a qualitative, or interpretative, methodology based on a biographical approach, following the contributions of Bertaux (1997) and Desmarais (2009). The information-gathering instruments are the biographical interview, the socio-demographic profile and a biographical calendar. The calendar collects the situation of the people interviewed on a monthly basis, covering different spheres of their life (Longo 2011), enabling us to obtain systematic information concerning the youth pathways throughout the 10 years analysed. The sample of youths without qualifications is made up of 9nine subjects (6 men and 3 women) with an education level of ISCED 0–1 and aged 26–27 years at the time of research. Access to the informants was obtained through several information sources (educational centres, youth and employment services, and specific projects for young people with a low education level) due to the obstacles to access to the specific sample and the difficulty of, once found, getting them to participate in the research. These difficulties were even greater among women.

In the second phase, we used a quantitative methodology, and gathered information using a questionnaire completed through a personal interview. The questionnaire was drawn up and validated by the research team. For its design, the researchers reviewed questionnaires used in related national and international studies. Before using it, a pilot test was conducted among 30 students at the University of the Balearic Islands. After modifications, the questionnaire was stabilised.

The quantitative sample was divided into two groups based on the participants' education level (ISCED 0–1 and ISCED 2–6) to gain a deeper understanding of the population without qualifications compared to the group with secondary or higher education. Thus, the sample is made up of 65 subjects with ISCED 0–1 (26 women, 39 men) and 515 subjects with ISCED 2–6 (280 women and 235 men).

This sample is statistically representative of the 13,348 people on the census in Palma de Mallorca born between 1983 and 1984 and stratified according to gender and level of vulnerability of the neighbourhood. The margin of error for the entire sample is 3.98%, estimated to have a confidence level of 95% under the least favourable conditions of $p = q = 0.5$. The sample is highly representative in terms of the education level and activity of Spanish youth aged 15–29 years, according to the data of the Labour Force Survey.

The fieldwork was carried out in an urban setting (Palma de Mallorca⁵), and the population under study are young people aged 26–28 years. Information collection in the first phase occurred from March 2010 to February 2011 and in the second phase from April 2011 to June 2012 (Table 1).

The qualitative data are processed using the content analysis method, which enables the internal structure of the information to be unravelled by including criteria of objectivity, systematicity, manifest content and generalisability (Krippendorff 1997). After the transcription of the interviews, we first proceeded with the analysis of each of them, arranging them into units of meaning or issues. In the second phase, and in agreement with the

Table 1. Questionnaire structure.

Dimensions	Variables
Socio-demographic characteristics	Gender Birthplace Cohabitation model Motherhood/Fatherhood Origin family profile Education level
Education	School biography Perception as a student Main activity Job characteristics (employed) Employment search (unemployed)
Current situation	Reason last job ended Education/Training Time use Income
Employment	First job Employment/unemployment situations
Physical/psychological well-being	Illnesses/addictions Health perception Decisive events in personal biography Current situation assessment

Source: Bertrand 2005; INE 2007; López, Gil, et al. 2008; United States Department of Labor (1997); European Commission (2014); Statistics Canada (sf). Own elaboration.

theoretical framework of reference, issues were divided into categories and sub-categories. Subsequently, we proceeded to code the data with the help of the software programme ATLAS-TI. Once this phase was finished, the results were systematised and purged.

The quantitative data analysis is based on univariate, bivariate and a regression model analysis. The descriptive statistics comparing the tendencies of centrality and dispersion of the reference population with ISCED 0–1 level of studies with respect to the population with a higher level of studies (ISCED 2–6) are presented. In parallel, a bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the existence of a statistically significant association between some of the variables studied through Pearson's non-parametric chi-squared test⁶ and thereby to reject the independence hypothesis with a confidence interval of 95%. To determine the results of statistical association, we calculated the likelihood of obtaining an observed value χ^2 less than 0.05 between the two qualitative variables of interest. The education level variable was considered a dependent variable, and the variables corresponding to the participants' socio-demographic characteristics, current situation, degree of satisfaction and assessment of the current situation were independent variables.

Finally, we construct a stepwise binary logistic regression model (by the forward conditional method) to analyse the socio-demographic influences for young people who dropped out before obtaining a compulsory secondary level of education, compared with those who obtained a compulsory secondary level or higher. The dependent variable differentiates the studied population by their studies level (ISCED 0–1 vs. ISCED 2–6). The covariates predictors were selected by theoretical criteria (some of the socio-demographic factors considered in the study) and from the results of the analysis of bivariate association. The model has been established for maximum likelihood. The considered independent variables are the birthplace, having children or not, the gender and the qualifications of the fathers and mothers. However, the variables for the birthplace and educational level

of the father were removed to achieve better model fit results. The statistical analysis of the data, the recoding and treatment of the variables, and the tabulation of the results were conducted using the software programme StataC.11 and SPSS.22.

Results

The results are presented in relation to each of the four questions that represent the main goals of our research, which are presented in the beginning of this manuscript.

Socio-demographic characteristics

The youth population with no qualifications (ISCED 0–1) has socio-demographic characteristics that differentiate it from the population with a higher education level (ISCED 2–6). According to the quantitative data analysis, these characteristics are the following:

- (1) A predominance of men (60% vs. 45.6% in the other levels of studies) over women. Being a man is positively related to having no qualifications, whereas the relationship for women is negative. For the population with ISCED 2–6, the distribution according to gender is reversed;
- (2) A greater percentage of people born in other countries (26.2% vs. 15.3%), with an important weight of people born in Africa (15.4% vs. 2.1%);
- (3) A predominance of youth with mothers without qualifications or with only primary education (52.3% vs. 37.7%). None of their mothers had a university education (0% vs. 11.84%). Our analysis reveals a significant negative relationship between having no qualifications and having a mother with secondary or higher education (ISCED 3–6);
- (4) A greater weight of the population with children, especially in the case of women. Motherhood affects 23.1% of women without qualifications as opposed to 10.5% of women with a higher level of education. Among men without qualifications, fatherhood is found in 10.8% as opposed to 4.3% who have a higher level of education. We found a statistically significant positive relationship between having no qualifications and having children. The same relation was observed between having children and being a woman, independent of education level;
- (5) School biographies characterised by a greater presence of repeated courses and by the heterogeneous nature of situations during the period of compulsory education in Spain (6 to 16 years), notably the fact that 21.5% of young people without qualifications arrived between 2002 and 2009, primarily from countries outside the European Union, and received their basic schooling in their country of origin;
- (6) A rate of independent living similar to the group with a higher education level (approximately 60% in both) but with significant differences in models of independent living, revealing the fact that having no qualifications has a positive relationship with the cohabitation model of a couple with children and a negative one with living alone.

The results of the regression model show that we can create our model by the considered predictors. All variables contribute significantly to explain the qualifications of young people (the significance of regression coefficients is below 0.05 in all cases), except predictors corresponding to the birthplace of young people and the fathers studies level, both have been removed from the model. The overall percentage of the

model is 89.7%. Thus, the probability for young people with children not having achieved any qualifications (ISCED 0–1) is 3528 times greater than for those youth without babies. Furthermore, the probability of youth whose mothers have a level of education ISCED 0–1 who do not have any qualification is 3383 times higher than among those youth whose mothers have a level of education ISCED 2–6. Likewise, the probability of youth boys to have ISCED 0–1 level of studies is 2391 times greater compared to girls.

As a consequence, the results from the model explain the risk of not having any qualification related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. The variables that contribute to improve the model by the forward conditional method are showed at the Table 2 and the frequencies in Table 3. The first variable that contributes to improve significantly the global adjustment is the fact of having or not babies, the second is the level of studies of the mother, and the third step includes the gender (the measure is not very decisive).

Current situation

Youths' situation, samples of both qualitative and quantitative, is characterised by low participation in employment, education, and training as well as by precariousness and insufficient income, which lead to situations of poverty and render living independently difficult.

In the data in the quantitative sample, significant differences in employment can be observed according to gender. Approximately, one in two men and one in four women without qualifications are employed. With respect to the population with a higher level of education, the employment rate is lower for both sexes in the group without qualifications, revealing a difference of –21.5 points for men and –47.6 points for women. The unemployment ratio (the percentage of the unemployed population in relation to the total population) is double that of men with a higher level of education, whereas for women, it is nearly three times higher.

Our analysis reveals that having no qualifications has a statistically significant negative relationship with having a job and has a statistically significant positive relationship with being unemployed and with being NEET.

Domestic and care work are the main activities for more than 1 in 10 women without qualifications. This activity is much less frequent in more highly educated women and is not found to be the case for any men. In terms of participation in education of young people without qualifications, this situation only occurs in three cases as the main activity,

Table 2. Influences of socio-demographic attributes for young people by their studies level: ISCED 0–1 (1) vs. ISCED 2–6 (0)^a.

Predictors of drop-out before obtaining a secondary level of education	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	df	Sig. (<i>p</i>)	Exp. (<i>B</i>)
Have children: no (0), yes (1)	1261	0337	13,968	1	0000	3528
Gender: man (0), woman (1)	0872	0353	6105	1	0013	2391
Educational level of the mother: ISCED 0–1 (1), ISCED 2–6 (0)	1219	0357	11,627	1	0001	3383
Constant	–2882	0349	68,171	1	0000	0056

Notes: –2 Log likelihood = 263,857, sample cases/included in analysis = 580/446, overall percentage = 89.7%.

B = individual regression coefficients; SE = the standard error of the individual regression coefficients; Wald's χ^2 = chi-squared statistic used for testing statistical significance of regression coefficients; df = degrees of freedom; Sig. (*p*) = significance of regression coefficients at 0.5 and below. Cox and Snell R^2 = 0070; Nagelkerke R^2 = 0144.

^aResults of binary logistic regression (variables in the equation in third step, estimation and significance of the coefficients).

Table 3. Frequencies of the variables included in the model.

Independent variables	
<i>Have children</i>	
No	83.1%
Yes	16.9%
<i>Gender</i>	
Man	47.2%
Woman	52.8%
<i>Educational level of the mother</i>	
ISCED 0–1	49.4%
ISCED 2–6	50.6%
<i>Dependent variable</i>	
ISCED 0–1	11.6%
ISCED 2–6	88.4%

and in no case when unemployment or housework and care of children or other people are the main activity.

As shown in Table 4, unemployment affects 35.9% of men and 61.5% of women without qualifications. Considering the time spent seeking a job at the time the data were collected, long or very long unemployment affects 45.2% of unemployed youth without qualifications and 21.8% of those who have a higher level of education. Conversely, in the sample with a higher level of education, job-seeking periods of less than six months are more frequent (46.5% vs. 35.5% in the group with no qualifications).

In the unemployed group ISCED 0–1, approximately one in three receives unemployment benefits, and one in four receives some type of social aid, benefit or welfare. The monthly mean unemployment benefits is 585 €, and the mean income from social welfare is €267.60. There is no case in which unemployment benefits are received along with social welfare. The rest of the group, which represents more than one in three people, does not receive unemployment benefits or social welfare.⁷

A lack of economic autonomy due to insufficient income is also frequent among the employed population owing to the growing precariousness of employment.

We founded different employment situations regarding to the quantitative sample, corresponding in half of the cases in men and women to permanent jobs (non-civil servants). In the other half, there is a predominance of a working population with temporary contracts, but there are also people who are self-employed and those who work in the informal economy. Five of the six women who have a job work in the service industry (low-skilled, white collar jobs), and one is a riding instructor (a highly skilled, white collar job). The men have a broader range of jobs, although there is a predominance of skilled and unskilled blue collar jobs. Half of the women work full-time, and the other half works part-time because they have not found a full-time job. Among the men, 9 out of 10 have a full-time

Table 4. Main activity.

Main activity	ISCED 0–1			ISCED 2–6		
	Global	Men	Women	Global	Men	Women
Employment	40%	51.3%	23.1%	71.7%	72.8%	70.7%
Education	4.6%	7.7%	0.0%	7.0%	9.8%	4.6%
Unemployment	46.2%	35.9%	61.5%	19.0%	17.0%	20.7%
Housework, care of children and other people	4.6%	0.0%	11.5%	1.8%	0.0%	3.2%
Permanent disability to work	3.1%	2.6%	3.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Others	1.5%	2.6%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

job, and those who work part-time also do so because they have not found a full-time job. Having a second job is unusual. Regarding salaries, the mean is 635 € per month, far below the mean wage in the group with higher levels of education, which is 1223.30€.

A lack of economic autonomy leads to situations of tremendous vulnerability, which are found to be particularly intense among people who live independently from their parents and do not have a job. In the group of unemployed people who live independently (19), approximately half (9) of them receive unemployment benefits, and three (with children) receive some type of social welfare. The remaining seven do not have any income. Amongst those who do not have any income, there is one case of a single-parent family with a woman as the head of the family, and there are frequent cases in which the partner is unemployed.

Amongst those who are not living independently (41.5%), we find a wide range of situations. Commonly found were the desire to start living independently rather than with their parents and the impossibility of being able to do so due to income inexistence, insufficiency and/or instability. In the biographical interviews, participants were found to return to their family home because of a lack of income. This return is always experienced negatively and is worse when there are children involved:

Valeria⁸ (26, domestic and care work): ... Find a job. I want my own house and to take my kids out alone ... I need a stable home ... I want them to have their own house ... and in Granma's home this is impossible ...

Employment and training pathways

Pathways analysis reflects the strong effect of the economic crisis and the lack of policies that enable participation in employment, education, and training for young men and women without qualifications.

The results reflect the heterogeneous nature of employment pathways and we found two different categories: (1) strong relationship with employment; (2) weak or inexistent relationship with employment with a clear predominance of the first group.

Diverse situations are observed for young people (ISCED 0–1 group) with pathways characterised by a strong relationship with employment. Whilst some, from the start, went through periods of employment combined with other periods of unemployment and experienced changes in occupation, others had linear pathways and kept the same job, even in the same company, throughout the period. In accordance with the data from the quantitative sample, the most common employment situation is not having been unemployed (30.8%), followed by having experienced one situation of unemployment (27.7%), two situations (18.5%) and even three (10.8%). The rest (12.3%) have had between 4 and 15 periods of unemployment.

In this group, an easy transition into employment predominates, as is reflected in the age at first job and in its characteristics. Two out of three youngsters start their first job⁹ before they are 18, and no more than 5% do so at over 20 years. The most common age of incorporation is 16 years, which is the legal age at which it is possible to get a job according to Spanish legislation, although one in six actually began to work before they reach this age. Eight in 10 young people stay in their first job for six months or more; they stay most commonly for six to twelve months (26.7%), although

periods of 13–24 months (16.7%) and of over two years (23.3%) are also frequent. Another characteristic of this first job is the predominance of working weeks of over 30 hours (67.9%), followed by between 20 and 30 hours (17.9%).

These characteristics of the relationship with employment during the period studied contrast with the 40% employment rate at the time the data were collected. This is the product of the destruction of employment and of the low levels of recruitment derived from the effect of the crisis, as is reflected in the amount of time spent in the current jobs. According to these data, the most common situation among those who have a job is to have spent more than five years in it (34.6%) followed by jobs of between two and five years (30.8%).

The group characterised by a weak or in-existent relationship with employment is made up of six people in the quantitative sample. Out of these, five (four men and one woman) have never had a job, and one had one significant job over the whole period.

The biographical interviews enabled us to gain in-depth information on the situation of some of the people who comprised this group: women who had become mothers under the age of 18. The three women were married and/or had their first child at 17, and they all have two children. Their whole pathway is marked by tasks related to caring for family and a weak relationship with employment; they were always subordinate to family needs. All of them have a partner and a difficult relationship with their partner for different reasons. They need to find a job to get an income, and they are training and actively seeking employment through a specialised organisation.

The analysis of the educational and training pathways shows a low participation in the education and training of the population without qualifications and enables us to document the obstacles to this.

Related to quantitative sample, a reduced number of youth – 35.4% – have been participated in education and training during last year. In this group, the most common situation is participation in informal courses that are either totally or partially funded by the company where they work (11), followed by informal training courses aimed at improving professional qualifications and/or the chance of finding a job (8) and, lastly, by formal education and training courses (4). In this last group, some took courses of ASE Intermediate Vocational Training. The 33.7% of young people interviewed (ISCED 0–1) who has participated in any kind of education and training considered it useful, and the purposes thereof are related to employment or to personal interests.

The pathways analysis from biographical interviews provides evidence of the difficult relationship that the group has with education and training. Their statements reflect the obstacles encountered and the failure of policies that promote educational inclusion for those who have been excluded from initial education and training:

(Margarida, 27, domestic and care work): I was in ... doing the exam, for the short-list. And they said no because there were a lot of people, and there were a lot of people that were left out. I asked him if it was because of the exam, and he told me no, that it was because there were a lot of people on the dole, and a lot of people enrolled, and that there were so many people that I had been left out, that I would have to wait until June.

Out of the nine youth in the qualitative sample, all but one followed some type of education and/or training activity during the period studied. In this group, in the 120 calendar

months studied, half of them received education and/or training during a period oscillating between 30 and 60 months, and the other half during a time of less than 30 months.

In all cases, the education and/or training is coherent with the personal pathway of the people engaged in it. It is possible to distinguish between two types of education and/or training depending on the main aim, whether it be social and labour insertion or vocational training. The first group is basically conformed for youth at risk and they are following specific training courses addressed to this target group. In this situation, we find two young immigrants who were schooled in their country of origin and who are learning Spanish, a young man who became unemployed due to his drug addiction period and follows education and training activities as part of his therapy, and three young women who participate in an employment and training project for women with children after a rupture of their relationship with their partner. In all cases, the positive effect of their activities at the time of the interview is notable¹⁰:

(Manuel, 26, unemployed and studying): ... and ... at the same time I started to study, I liked being the activities coordinator and ... I tried to get what the activities coordinator training is and I get it in ... that year, between 2009 and I, I got it until they gave me the qualification in 2010, at the beginning of 2010, because of the practices and all that.

(Diana, 27, domestic and care work): ... from there I learnt to talk a little. Because I didn't speak at all. I was closed up at home for like a year. Here in Spain, I didn't go out; I didn't do anything'

The course I was in, the first course I'd done, the Spanish one ... they also took me to [name of the centre] to do the cookery course because since I arrived here I've only liked making Spanish food; I love cooking. And I'm always talking to the boss who's there – 'Can you take me somewhere where there are cookery courses?' or something like that. And she took me there.

In the second group, the main aim is to obtain vocational training related to a more or less stable professional project. It is worth noting, as a common element, the failure of guidance, training, and employment services to accompany these young people in their decision-making process. The case of Charly clearly reflects this situation:

Charly (26, working as tattooist) explains how after dropping school, began working in different jobs (construction and fish delivery) and after being unemployed a couple of months he finally choose his own career project, be a tattooist. Charly dedicated two years to know and learn about the profession and a friend teaches him, also he takes a two-year long amateur drawing course to improve his training.

In both groups, as well as in the aforementioned training courses, they also attempt to get the 'GCSE' qualification. The most common pattern is attempting to do these studies 9 or 10 years after leaving school. The difficulties that led to their dropping out, the long period that elapsed since then, and the lack of specific mechanisms to help people without qualifications return to education caused them enormous hardship:

(Margalida, 27, domestic and care work): ... because, I tell you, to clean or to do a course, they ask me for the secondary education graduate certificate. But the thing is, I can't buy any books. Tomeu (26, unemployed): I began the third of ESO¹¹ at [name of centre], but because of a lack of agreement with ... with teachers, with one in particular, who I wasn't the only one to have problems with that teacher ... it went pretty badly for me. I began third again at [name of another centre]; I began, and because of a lack of money for school materials, well, I dropped out altogether.

Table 5. Degree of satisfaction and assessment.

	ISCED 0–1		ISCED 2–6	
	Not at all or slightly satisfied	Very or extremely satisfied	Not at all or slightly satisfied	Very or extremely satisfied
Job situation	52.3%	21.5%	23.9%	43.3%
Academic situation	66.2%	10.8%	22.1%	44.1%
Family situation	10.8%	72.3%	4.9%	84.9%
Friends situation	7.7%	75.4%	2.5%	86.4%
Partner situation	18.5%	52.3%	10.5%	68.5%
Overall personal situation	6.2%	69.2%	4.9%	75.0%
	Disagree or strongly disagree	Agree or strongly agree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Agree or strongly agree
My personal situation has improved from 10 years ago	30.8%	41.5%	6.2%	70.8%
I feel happy	6.2%	70.8%	2.5%	82.1%

The current situation perception

The data collected (Table 5) in the quantitative sample reflect a high degree of participants' frustration in relation to their job and academic situation and high degrees of satisfaction related to other aspects (partner, family, friends and overall personal situation). The analysis of the perception of improvement regarding the situation 10 years before, as well as the feeling of happiness, reveal that approximately 40% agree or strongly agree with the statement that their situation has improved from what it was 10 years ago, whereas approximately 70% agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I feel happy'.

In all of the aspects analysed, participants' degree of satisfaction with their current situation is more positive in the group with ISCED 2–6 studies, which shows statistically significant differences in terms of their job situation, academic situation, and feeling of happiness.

Biographical interviews corroborate these findings; youth, in nearly all of the cases, perceived difficulties and predominantly showed uncertainty and worry.

Conclusion

The population without qualifications aged 26–28 years has specific socio-demographic characteristics that differentiate it from people who have secondary or higher education. The most prominent characteristics are as follows: being male, having a mother with a low level of education, having children, and having a partner with children; living alone was a less prominent characteristic. According to the regression model applied, the first explanatory factors mentioned (being a boy, having children, and having a mother with a low level of education) determine a greater probability of having a low educational level (ISCED 0–1). These results are consistent with other research studies that reflect the greater weight of men and the relationship with parents' level of education, especially mothers' (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008; Waisgrais and Calero 2008; IVIE 2013), as well as a higher presence of teenage and early motherhood among women without education (Berga 2001; Delgado et al. 2009; Davia and Legazpe 2014; Salvà-Mut 2014).

From a gender perspective, we have found a greater effect on drop out before finishing compulsory secondary education on women's pathways. Women with low educational level present the lowest rate of employment, the highest rate of unemployment and

the lowest participation in education or training (three out of four). Furthermore, they have been mothers at an early age. Qualitative analysis data enabled us to document their tremendous vulnerability and also their children's. Their pathways are characterised by performing domestic and care work and seeking employment only when they need income or their partner loses his/her job for different reasons. Then, the sexual division of work persists in this group.

Another important finding, both in qualitative and quantitative data, is the relationship we observe between educational level, motherhood and fertility rate. Regression analysis has shown that the probability of having any qualification (ISCED 0–1) is higher among young people with children than among those without, especially for women. Early motherhood can be a cause and/or a consequence of early school-leaving. However, the analysis of the qualitative sample shows us that early motherhood is a consequence of dropping out, so these young women be mothers before leaving school (they dropout in an early age 10–15 and be mothers at 17–18 years old), pregnancy was not unexpected, they decide to be mothers as a way to normalise their lives (Berga 2001). Thus, our results are consistent with previous research (Delgado et al. 2009; Martín García 2010; Moreno 2012; Moreno Mínguez et al. 2012; Davia and Legazpe 2014) that have demonstrated that women with low level of education tend to advance their motherhood, present a higher fertility rate and have a minor presence in the labour market. The consequences of dropping out are differentiated by gender so women present a higher vulnerability risk than men (Salvà-Mut 2014).

Our results also reflect a certain polarisation concerning the relationship with employment in the 10-year period studied. Although the pathways characterised by the ease of access to the first job or the small presence of periods of unemployment are clearly the majority, these coexist with other situations that affect a very small number of young people who display a weak or inexistent relationship with work.

The strong effect of the crisis that began in 2008 on the young population with a low education level (García-Montalvo and Peiró 2011; Camacho et al. 2012; OECD 2013) is reflected by the fact that not having qualifications has a statistically significant negative effect on employment and a statistically significant positive relationship with unemployment and with being NEET.

The low employment rate and long periods of unemployment, which affect nearly half of the unemployed, illustrates the enormous difficulties in participating in the job market.

The results obtained suggest that, according to García et al.'s (2013) employment pathways typology, labourer pathways are decreasing in favour of erratic pathways, pathways of impasse and chronic unemployment, and inconsistent jobs.

Furthermore, we have found a strong relationship with employment has a weak correlation with education and training during this period.

The data suggest that this weakness is closely related to the specific difficulties entailed in returning to education and training for people without qualifications (Dale 2010; Bélanger 2011). The results suggest that the difficulties to access training noted in the studies on periods prior to the crisis (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008; García et al. 2013) have increased due to the confluence between a rise in the demand derived from unemployment and the decrease in budgets of educational policies, active employment policies and, on the whole, of social welfare.

The reduction of early school leavers does not lead necessarily to a reduction of youth unemployment so youth unemployment rate is still very high in Spain. This means that the main problem in Spain is the shortage on jobs, which is caused, in general, by the economic and financial crisis, and young people without qualification are disproportionately affected by it.

The explanation of the effects of the crisis on the population without any qualifications is considered a key factor to illustrate the difficulties that the study population must face to exit this situation. Therefore, these structural problems determine the obstacles that people without qualifications must face in accessing and in continuing education and training. In the case of the most vulnerable population, as is the case of single-parent women, the suppression – derived from austerity policies – of the specific employment, guidance and training project in which they had participated with such good results is documented.

Before the crisis, the difficulties for the population without qualifications to participate in education and training were made up for by the ease in reproducing a family model characterised by a strong participation in employment on the behalf of men and, in the women, by a dual presence model or by devotion to domestic and care work. The rupture of this *status quo* brought about by the crisis, which has particularly increased unemployment in youths without qualifications, has made the exclusion of the population without qualifications from education and training more visible within a context of lifelong learning.

The intersection between the increase in obstacles to employment and to education and training has caused a high percentage of NEETs: 76.9% of women and 41.0% of men ISCED 0–1 are in this situation. This group is the one that is suffering to a greater extent from the lack of income and/or income insufficiency. Yet, this situation affects the entire population studied, even those who have a job. Thus, there is a gradation established regarding mean income among the group of young ISCED 0–1, headed by those who have a job (635€), followed by those who are receiving unemployment benefits (585€), by those who receive social welfare (267.60€) and by those who have no type of income or aid. In all cases, the income is below the minimum wage in Spain (645.30€). These data are consistent with those that point towards an increase in the risk of poverty and social exclusion in Spain, with the greatest effect in the population without qualifications (Consejo Económico y Social 2013).

Regarding participants' satisfaction with their current situation, it is worth noting the high proportion of those who state they are very or extremely satisfied with their family situation and with their friends, along with the low proportion of satisfaction with their work and academic situation. In all of the aspects analysed, participants' satisfaction degree and their assessment of their current situation are lower than the population with secondary education or higher, and the differences concerning their work situation, academic situation and feeling of happiness is statistically significant.

The effect of the crisis and austerity policies associated with these results break down the model that was dominant before them. Together with the decrease in the demand for unskilled labourers in the service and construction industries, successive labour reforms have led to greater job precariousness and a decrease in workers' rights, whereas the conditions of access to unemployment benefits have been strengthened, and public expenditure on education, equality policies and social welfare as a whole have decreased.

Notes

1. This is, therefore, a population group with an educational level of ISCED 0-1 according to the international classification of education. According with European Commission (2013) this is a specific group of early school leavers characterized for leaving educational system before finishing lower secondary education and not having any credential.
2. In the studied period, were three options for youth people without the GCSE credential: (1) Adult Secondary Education addressed to obtain the GCSE; (2) Social Guarantee Programmes that offers a basic vocational training; and (3) exam to access to Intermediate Vocational Training. According to European Qualifications Framework, Social Guarantee Programmes are included in Level 1 and the Intermediate Vocational Training in Level 2. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page>
3. Social Guarantee Programs are specific vocational training courses addressed to young people without qualifications. Spanish educational policies started to legislate these programmes in 1990 and had been modified in several occasions and also changed their names (Professional Initiation Programs between 2002 and 2006, Initial Vocational Training Programs between 2006 and 2014 and Basic Vocational Training, 2015).
Despite its name, the Social Guarantee Programs present different characteristics from the Youth Guarantee Schemes that were developed in the Nordic countries since 1990s. While Youth Guarantee Schemes were addressed to unemployed youth and funded by employment public services (Eurofound 2012) in Spain these courses were addressed to unemployed young people without any qualification and were included in formal educational system.
4. Jobs entailing 20 or more hours per week for a minimum of six months.
5. Palma de Mallorca is the capital of the autonomous community of the Balearic Islands (Spain). Its main economic activity is derived from tourism and its associated sectors. It is the biggest city in the Balearic Islands with 407,648 inhabitants and it's one of the eight largest cities in Spain (INE 2014). Also, Balearic Islands has the highest early drop out rate in Spain. Thus, Palma is a relevant place to analyse school to work transitions in an urban sitting. The limitations of the sample are influenced by its specialization in touristic economic sector and the exclusivity of an urban approach.
6. To determine the existence of a relationship between some of the categories of the variables studied with respect to others, we used global association measures (Phi and Cramer's V) and local association measures (standardised residuals).
7. As in most OECD countries, the Spanish unemployment protection system is organized around two types of benefits: contributory (unemployment insurance) and welfare (unemployment subsidy) (Albert, Davia, and Toharia 2008). Into the contributory system, benefits are intended for workers who have lost their jobs and have contributed for at least twelve months in the previous six years to becoming unemployed (the duration and amount of the benefit is related to the time worked and salary received). Welfare benefits are directed to the population without access to contributory benefits, for having exhausted or have not contributed the necessary time. None of the aid in question considers differentially young people. For more extensively, see Mato (2011).
8. All names appearing in the extracts from interviews we stated in the article are pseudonyms.
9. First job with a minimum duration of one month and a minimum dedication of 20 hours a week is considered; jobs shorter than this are not taken into account.
10. This project disappeared eight months after the realisation of biographical interviews as a consequence of austerity policies. It is important to note that this project was the only one addressed to unemployed low educated women with children.
11. ESO is the Spanish acronym referred to Compulsory Secondary Education.

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