

# 2

## The Politics of Investment and Employability in the Public Employment Service

**Abstract** This chapter introduces the historical and legal development of public employment service and its institutions in Switzerland, most importantly the Regional Employment Offices (REO), the official institution in charge of job seekers. In this context, it discusses labour market measures (LMM), which are the main instrument of the REO's activation policy to improve the employability of job seekers. It focuses on the internal guidelines of the Canton of Fribourg for the allocation of LMM, namely language courses, which are based on the logic of return on investment. This chapter allows for a better understanding of the various logics of how and why investment and employability operate within bureaucratic institutions.

**Keywords** Switzerland · Unemployment · Labour market policies · Activation · Language courses

'Unemployment in sight? Take action!' This is the first recommendation on the website of the public employment service entitled 'Treffpunkt Arbeit' in German and 'Espace emploi' in French (our English translation: 'Work meeting point').<sup>1</sup> On this website, the national labour

authority SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) provides general information on unemployment and displays specialised material and details for job seekers, employers, and private employment agencies. Under the header ‘Unemployed—what next?’ (German: ‘Arbeitslos—was tun?’; French: ‘Au chômage—que faire?’), instructions can be found for the first steps to take once unemployed looms; most importantly, how to register successfully with a local branch of the Regional Employment Offices (REO). Further, the main aims of the REO (and consultants) are described, namely consultation and placement, the conditions for benefits and other financial aspects of the public employment service as well as additional institutional regulations.

The introductory statement and the ensuing instructions in the website are particularly telling when taking into account the activation turn that the process of public employment has taken: job seekers are ‘activated’ from moment one to take their fate into their own hands and to minimise the risk of actually becoming unemployed. Framed with this activist ideology, the (potentially) unemployed job seekers are provided with general details in the first section, entitled ‘First steps’ (always our translations into English), for example about legally binding periods of notice. Further, they are instructed to register with the REO on the first day of their unemployment (or rather: at the latest on the first day of benefits claimed). The second section (‘Registration’) informs job seekers about which personal and professional documents they have to submit for their registration with the REO and about attending a compulsory information event before being assigned to a personal consultant. The other sections are entitled ‘Consulting and placement’, ‘Financial issues’, ‘Labour market measures’, ‘Interinstitutional collaboration’, and ‘International issues and certification of periods of insurance’. While the information provided by this website appears rather clear and clean-cut, it will turn out that, in practice, job seekers often struggle with the institutional requirements and bureaucratic procedures.

As we ourselves found the range of legal documents and institutional stipulations challenging when researching this specific site in Switzerland, we will try to provide some insight for readers over the next pages. In order to do so, we will not only describe the function of the REO in some detail, but we will also outline its institutional history, which is

connected closely to the broader history of the Swiss unemployment and labour market policies. In this, we will provide an analysis of the political framework of the REO. In a second step, we will discuss the aforementioned labour market measures (LMM), as they are considered as the main instrument of the REO to optimise the employability of its clients. In our view, LMM epitomise the political economic logic of the public employment service and its conceptualisation of investment and employability, as reproduced and enacted by the consultants and as resulting in practices of selective investment. We will particularly focus on language courses as the one LMM around which most of our analyses in Chaps. 3 and 4 revolve. Before concluding this chapter, we will address the institutional linguistic regulations and practices of the REO in Fribourg, which are, *inter alia*, infused with discourses and ideologies of integration.

## 2.1 Unemployment in Switzerland: A Historical and Legal Outline

The Regional Employment Offices (REO; German: Regionale Arbeitsvermittlungszentren, RAV; French: Offices régionaux de placement, ORP) are the official institutions in charge of regulating the process of professional reintegration in Switzerland. These offices are mandated by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). The SECO is the national labour market authority, assigned with issues of the labour market as well as the legislation on the public employment service (unemployment insurance) by the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research. The current practice of public employment service is regulated by the Federal Unemployment Insurance Act (henceforth: AVIG/LACI; AVIG short for German: Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz; in full: Bundesgesetz über die obligatorische Arbeitslosenversicherung und Insolvenzenschädigung; LACI short for French: Loi sur l'assurance-chômage; in full: Loi fédérale sur l'assurance-chômage obligatoire et l'indemnité en cas d'insolvabilité; SR/RS 837.0) and its ordonnance (AVIV/OACI, short for Arbeitslosenversicherungsverordnung [AVIV] in German; Ordonnance

sur l'assurance-chômage [OACI] in French; SR/RS 837.02). The conditions of possibility for such an act were created in 1976, when the Swiss people voted for the introduction of an obligatory unemployment insurance and, thus, in favour of the implementation of the following article in the Federal Constitution (FC; then: Art. 34<sup>novies</sup>, today: Art. 114 'Unemployment Insurance', SR/RS 101)<sup>2</sup>:

FC Art. 114 'Unemployment Insurance'

1. The Confederation shall legislate on unemployment insurance.
  2. In doing so, it shall adhere to the following principles:
    - a. the insurance guarantees appropriate compensation for loss of earnings and supports measures to prevent and combat unemployment;
    - b. the insurance is compulsory for employees; the law may provide for exceptions;
    - c. self-employed persons may insure themselves voluntarily.
  3. The insurance is funded by the contributions from those insured, whereby one half of the contributions of employees shall be paid by their employers.
  4. Confederation and Cantons shall provide subsidies in extraordinary circumstances.
  5. The Confederation may enact regulations on social assistance for the unemployed.
- (Official English translation)<sup>3</sup>

With the implementation of this article, the legal foundation for an obligatory unemployment insurance was finally realised, which would be primarily paid by employees and employers, but also by the national state. The article further articulates the aims and means of the unemployed insurance as the public employment service (Art. 114, para. 2, lit. a), one of which we will discuss in more detail below. In the end, the implementing law, the AVIG/LACI entered into force on 1 January 1983. Situating the creation of this act historically, it appears to be a reaction of the government to the economic crises in the preceding years, when unemployment had long been regulated informally in Switzerland, for example, through union-run unemployment funds (Magnin 2005). As not all of workers were automatically integrated in

a system of 'private' funds and with no global public insurance in place, unemployment was not treated as a social issue of general relevance in need of regulation. In case of unemployment, individual solutions were found. For example, women tended to retreat to unpaid work at home upon losing their jobs, while foreign migrant workers returned to their countries of origin. The long valid politics of rotation (Piguet 2013) for migrant workers, based on the idea of working contract-based sojourns in Switzerland, contributed to *laissez-faire* social politics, which remarkably resulted in extremely low official unemployment numbers in times of unprecedented waves of redundancies in the 1970s (Degen 1993). Yet, sending countries (most notably, Italy) started to become more involved in the socio-political rights of their workers abroad and successfully petitioned with the Swiss government to include the foreign workforce in a social plan for the unemployed. This history of the unemployment insurance and the inherent public employment service can thus be read simultaneously as a history of Swiss labour market policies (Tabin and Togni 2013).

Since its implementation to date, the AVIG/LACI has been revised four times in order to adapt it to transformations of the political economy and to the dynamic development of the economy and the labour market. What appears as the most relevant outcome of the second revision (1995) was the establishing of the REO as the official local institution of the public employment service of Switzerland. It was the purpose of this revision to streamline and professionalise the processes of the public employment service on a nationwide level, as the public employment service used to be organised differently by every canton (municipality, even), as is typical of the Swiss federalist political structure. Even with the nationwide standardisation, the cantonal employment agencies have remained in charge of executing the AVIG/LACI, of determining cantonal strategies, and of managing the REO. The consultants' role, duties, and possibilities were as much determined in this streamlining process as the job seekers'. What is more, as part and parcel of the revision of 1995, Switzerland introduced a policy widely known as 'activation', in accordance with (or: as a reaction to) the agenda pushed by the Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development (OECD 2001) and thus in line with most other Western

states (see for an overview of Europe and North America: Eichhorst et al. 2008; for a survey on activation schemes in the Swiss public employment service: Bertozzi et al. 2008; Duell et al. 2010; Magnin 2005; Schallberger and Wyer 2010; see for a critical assessment of such policies: Lessenich 2008; Spilker 2010).

The activation turn, which indexes the current form of governmentality (Foucault 1994) to responsabilise job seekers in their job search (see Bachmann 2016; Clasen and Clegg 2006; Del Percio and Van Hoof 2017), is particularly suitable for highlighting the interrelation of investment and employability (see Chap. 1) and the ensuing tensions with which job seekers and their consultants have to come to terms with. From a bureaucratic perspective, job seekers are obliged to fulfil certain duties in order to receive benefits. Most importantly, they have to comply with institutional regulations, keep regular appointments with their consultant, be available within 24 h for potential work deployment, hand in their job application documentation every month, and participate in any labour market measures (LMM) deemed necessary by their consultant. Aside from these formal aspects, this new paradigm is based on the expectation that job seekers be active, motivated, and willing to do whatever it takes to find work.

Usually contextualised on a wider level in the concept of ‘workfare’ state (as a specific development away from the welfare state, see Sect. 1.1.1), the activation turn was further solidified in the performance agreement (1999) between the Swiss state and the Swiss cantons, which was geared towards a standardised management of the REO (Erb 2010). This agreement put an emphasis on efficiency and efficacy in the public employment service. Finally, in order to ensure the participation of job seekers, the instrument of negative sanction was introduced (Imboden et al. 1999), which means that in cases of non-compliance, job seekers could be penalised financially. For example, as defined in Art. 30 AVIG/LACI, job seekers can be sanctioned if their job search is not considered sufficient (Art. 30, 1c), which once again indexes the activation scheme that demands certain forms of self-investment.

## 2.2 The Instrument of Labour Market Measures (LMM)

As established, the labour market measures (LMM) are the main instrument of the Regional Employment Offices (REO) in their effort to impact upon the employability of their ‘clients’, namely job seekers. While the LMM used to be rather of ‘preventive’ nature, they were re-fashioned in the revision of 1995 as a major element of the newly standardised processes of the public employment service in Switzerland (Erb 2010), informed by the currently dominant framework of activation. On the one hand, the willingness of job seekers to work and cooperate could be tested by registering them in certain programmes (most typically, programmes of temporary occupation are used for such ‘tests’, as they are of long duration, up to 3 months, and take place on a daily basis, thus not allowing the continuation of any undeclared work). On the other, the different forms of LMM became framed in concepts of investment and actuarial logics of cost–benefit analyses. Concisely, this system rewards private initiatives and displays of motivation, while allowing for sanctions against less cooperative job seekers, as Bertozzi et al. (2008, p. 139) argue: ‘the system creates conditions governing benefit receipt. If the conditions are met, promotion follows—if not, such promotion is fully or partially denied’ (‘promotion’ here stands for financial support). In short, job seekers are thus not only to receive benefits, but also to actively and willingly participate in their personal improvement with the goal of new employment (Lechner et al. 2004, p. 7).

As a direct consequence of the extended application, the costs incurred by the LMM have increased sharply since the second revision of the AVIG/LACI, for example, from 400 million CHF in 1996 to a one-time peak of 800 million in 1997/1998 (Lechner et al. 2004), with language courses as one of the most financed LMM (see below). In general, there are three categories of LMM: (1) training measures, (2) employment measures, and (3) special measures. As elaborated in the act (AVIG/LACI) and its respective articles, the first category, *training measures*, includes collective and individual courses (in general

courses for reorientation, integration, further training, and in particular language or IT courses), training internship, and practice firms (Art. 60, para. 1, AVIG/LACI). Second, *employment measures* include programmes of temporary occupation, motivational semesters, and internships (Art. 64a, para. 1, AVIG/LACI), while, finally, *special measures* are rather technical instruments such as financial subsidies (when hiring a registered unemployed person), education allowance, commuter allowance, and support for self-employment (Art. 65-71d, AVIG/LACI).

Consultants may choose one of these measures for their clients with appropriate reasons and in accordance with the cantonal strategy, which determines how to allocate resources reserved for the LMM (below, we will discuss the example of Fribourg). Since the introduction of a budget limit in 2006 by the national government, a regressive algorithm has been in place that decides how much each canton has at its disposal: the more unemployed people are registered in a specific canton, the less money is available per person (Erb 2010). These budgetary changes lead to the conclusion that activation is a policy implemented on all levels, as efficient performance is expected not only of job seekers, but also of individual consultants, the REO, and cantons even, based on a system of incentives and sanctions.

Ultimately, the introduction of the budget limit in 2006 resulted in a close monitoring and regular evaluation of the many private LMM providers and their courses in terms of economic efficiency, quality, and effectiveness. Even so, the general positive effect of LMM on employability of job seekers remains contested (e.g., Bachmann 2016; Marti and Osterwalder 2006), especially the effect of language courses as LMM. Indeed, the evaluation of language courses and their assessment of effects on the duration of unemployment produced mixed results (for a negative evaluation of the effect of language courses, see Gerfin and Lechner 2000; while for positive results, see Morlok et al. 2014). In the end, the popularity of language courses as LMM most probably relates to the common sense ideology that correlates language competences with successful integration and language courses with successful language acquisition within a rather short timeframe. However, the evidenced individuality of language learning due to its multifactorial

nature should make it clear that the results of language courses are not clear-cut. In spite of the contradictory evaluation, language courses continue to be the second most highly financed LMM, surpassed only by courses for job application strategies, which are courses that also draw on communication and language skills. In these courses, job seekers are instructed, for example, how to 'sell themselves' best on the labour market and which forms of language they should use with that aim in mind (e.g., positively and emotionally marked expressions). According to the information transmitted by the national labour authority SECO, in 2015 about 20,000 registered job seekers visited a language course in Switzerland, which cost about 45 million CHF (in comparison, about 42,000 attended a course in job application strategies for a total of about 62 million CHF).

When it comes to the allocation of language courses for job seekers, there are different practices and strategies from canton to canton. As for the Canton of Fribourg, explicit internal guidelines are in place on how to allocate language courses in relation to other LMM. Generally speaking, the so-called 'collective' language courses that figure as 'training measures' can be allocated rather indiscriminately, as the responsible authorities acquire them in bulk at the beginning of every year. These collective courses are either 'integration' courses that transmit competences at the level of A0–A1 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; CEFR) or professional language courses on that same level with a stronger focus on language used by workers with low or no qualifications. A third category of collective language courses are provided for higher levels, namely up to level B2. Advanced language courses of the levels B2–C2 have to be individually assigned and adequately justified by the consultant in charge. They are usually only granted when a potential employer requires a certain competence level for employment.

Summarising, LMM are intended as the most important instrument for consultants in helping to optimise the clients' employability. In order to find a suitable LMM, the consultants have to take into account the different factors that contribute to individual employability, namely labour market relevant variables such as training, motivation, age, health, and, finally, language competence. What also comes into play

in the allocation of LMM are the institutional (REO) and individual (consultant) conceptualisations of employer expectations and requirements, hence, of the ‘labour market’. In the end, the REO and consultants basically strive to develop and optimise competences as imagined to be needed on the labour market at the moment or in the near future. However, as the public employment service does not consider itself responsible for basic vocational training or for extensive further training, no courses are provided that are unrelated to existing professional experience or training; in other words: the professional reorientation of job seekers is hardly ever financed by the REO. In addition to this, further training is only marginally financed, as adaptability to the labour market is expected of job seekers. This means that job seekers are encouraged to accept any employment, even if it might not necessarily match their aspirations in terms of salary, domain, or position. In a nutshell, only LMM with an expected immediate benefit in terms of improved employability are allotted, thus legitimising any investment on the side of the public employment service, which is, in other words, the Swiss state. It remains to be seen how language courses are evaluated in terms of potential investment and benefit for an immediate or long-term improvement of employability. Yet, before we turn to a discussion of this logic of investment for the sake of employability in the context of the Canton of Fribourg, it needs to be pointed out that these policies are no Swiss idiosyncrasies. In fact, similar policies have been analysed in other contexts, in which language courses are only available for (specific) employment purposes rather than long-term educational and professional development goals (e.g., Baba and Dahl-Jorgensen 2013; Del Percio and Van Hoof 2017; Piller and Lising 2014; Tabiola and Lorente 2017; also see Chap. 1).

### **2.3 Fribourg: The Cantonal Management of Regional Employment Offices**

The following focus on the Canton of Fribourg allows for an in-depth and detailed account of the practices and processes of the Swiss public employment service, especially with regard to how investment and

employability come together in institutional evaluations of language competences. What appears most relevant in this context, is an introduction to the local political conditions, under which the Regional Employment Offices (REO) are managed and the thereof resulting institutional conditions for consultants and job seekers alike. For this aim, we will discuss the cantonal labour market and its cantonal policies before turning to the institutional language management of the cantonal REO.

In the framework of the ‘LMM-Strategy 2013’ of the Canton of Fribourg, the first priority is given to measures that instruct job seekers in job application strategies as well as to so-called employment measures (see above). It is common practice to send the majority of job seekers to a course in job application strategies (with varying formats of content and duration depending on the professional qualification of the job seekers). Meanwhile, job seekers with low or no officially recognised qualifications (hence, commonly called ‘unqualified’) are often registered with programmes for temporary occupation, which last up to 3 months and consist of deployment in hotels, recycling plants, etc. Language and IT courses are only of second priority in Fribourg as well as any other training courses. The general rule is that these courses are only granted if there is a clear indication that specific competences need improving for the sake of employability, for example, when they have been repeatedly put forward as a reason for not getting hired. It is thus the task of the consultant to evaluate the job seekers regarding their competences and motivation when deciding upon the most suitable LMM.

Cantonal regulations are also in place concerning the institutional management of multilingualism, that is, of how to engage with speakers of other languages who are not necessarily competent in either German or French, the two official languages of the Canton of Fribourg. Institutions have increasingly shied away from accommodating speakers of foreign languages when it comes to documentation, information, and services. Instead, the three official languages of Switzerland (German, French, and Italian) are pushed as the only possible means of communication with institutions and authorities alike (e.g., courts, schools, administrative bodies), basically following the directive on official languages regulated in Art. 70 of the Federal Constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Tellingly, no other languages than the Swiss national languages are mentioned in this language article, thereby relieving the official institutions of their responsibility to account for and facilitate communication in ‘other’ languages. However, multilingual communication not only in the official languages used to be possible in Switzerland, as also in other Western European states. Before 2008, it was allowed, for example, to take the driver’s examination in several languages. This changed, when a nationwide regulation by the federal government was put in place to the effect that the theoretical driver’s examination could from then on be taken only in the official languages with English as an additional cantonal option (see Schiffman and Weiner 2012 on the same development in the USA). This noticeable shift to a restricted institutional and official multilingualism is aligned with increased legislative demand of competences in an official language for the aim of residence, settlement, and naturalisation, ideologically framed in the activating politics of ‘promotion and demand’ (German: ‘Fördern und Fordern’; see Motakef 2015 on its activating origin) and materialising in a ‘monolingual habitus’ (de Cillia 2001; Gogolin 1994), which puts emphasis on the responsibility of the individual migrant to learn the locally official language (Flubacher 2014). The REO are inscribed in the same logic, which is furthermore reinforced through the regulations by the national labour authority SECO. In practice, this means that job seekers receive relevant documents, brochures, and communication templates (invitations, decrees, information letters, etc.) only in one of the three official Swiss languages, as they are produced centrally by the SECO for all of Switzerland. What could be considered a ‘reasonable accommodation’, at least to the biggest immigrant groups of other languages, is not (yet) envisaged on a broad institutional or official level (see de Cillia 2001 for Austria; Meyer 2008 or Terkessidis 2010 for Germany; see Sect. 1.1.2 for a general discussion of institutional language discrimination), but becomes situationally enacted by (multilingual) individuals working in an institution. In this vein, the language management of the REO in Fribourg is defined broadly by

national SECO regulations, yet allowing for adaptive and accommodating practices within the REO, depending on the language skills of the individual consultants.

This margin between legal stipulation and individual agency is of particular interest for our study when trying to understand how consultants communicate with clients of other linguistic background, sometimes without competences in the local language(s). This is especially important, as no interpreting services are organised or paid for by the REO. What is more, even if some consultants would be able or willing to consult in another language, allophone clients are generally advised to bring along an interpreter on their own. This lack of linguistic accommodation could be read as part of the promoted linguistic assimilation politics. Yet, as the acting REO directors in the Canton of Fribourg elaborated in their interviews, this practice rather should be understood as providing additional language practice to job seekers and, thus, as helping the clients in acquiring the local language. The director of one REO phrases it as follows:

Int2: and how ahm: what is envisaged for those for the communication are there interpreters

Dir1: well yes that means that (-) with regard to the seco huh / [...] the the communication has has to be in the three official languages huh / so it's french german italian and erm [...] the seco is still very attentive that to neither erm:: push the system too much as it is still the idea in terms of integration it's to bring people to learn one of the three official languages of the country (-- ) if we keep the people in their language (-- ) they will have problems

(Interview with Director of REO1, 2 August 2013, 164–189)

French original

Int2: et comment hé: qu'est-ce qui est prévu pour eux pour la communication est-ce qu'il y a des traducteurs

Dir1: alors oui c'est-à-dire que (-) par rapport au seco hein / [...] la la communication doit se faire dans les trois langues officielles hein / donc c'est français allemand italien et euh [...] le seco est quand même très attentif c'est de ne pas non plus euh:: trop pousser ce système puisque l'idée quand même en termes d'intégration c'est d'amener les gens à parler une des trois langues officielles du pays (-) si on maintient les gens dans leur langue (-) ça risque de leur poser problème

We can thus see how the politics of linguistic assimilation for the sake of integration has pervaded the discourse of the REO and its directors in the Canton of Fribourg. In maintaining the rule of the official language, the REO contribute to the integration of the migrant population in Switzerland, as otherwise 'they will have problems'. Consequently, only in cases of emergency will a consultant switch to another language that could serve as a lingua franca (English, e.g.) or to the main language of the client, if possible. One exception to this rule was one REO (REO2) that had a large client base hailing from the Portuguese community and thus hired consultants with competences in at least one Romance language to make use of inter-comprehension if needed, as the director elaborates:

Dir2: [...] erm but basically i would say that we PUSH our job seekers to use the regional language

Int1: [yeah yeah]

Dir2: and even if: our colleagues speak portuguese or spanish that's okay to \ Open a file \ after that in this moment that it is in the LMM language integration that they have to learn \ otherwise they don't get better and there the individual responsibility comes back into play / yeah \ so YES we don't profit from that it's NOT a priority \ yeah

(Interview with Director of REO2, 20 June 2013, 763–772)

#### French original

Dir2: [...] euh mais à la base je dirais que on POUSe nos demandeurs d'emploi à utiliser la langue régionale

Int1: [ouais ouais]

Dir2: et lorsque: nos collègues parlent portugais ou espagnol ça va pour \ OUvrir un dossier \ après c'est à ce moment-là c'est dans les MMT

langue intégration qu'il faut qu'ils apprennent \ autrement ils améliorent pas et là la responsabilité individuelle elle revient / ouais \ donc OUI on en bénéficie pas c'est PAS prioritaire \ ouais

This example shows us two things: on the one side, the potential agency for the institution and individuals ('if our colleagues speak portuguese or spanish that's okay'), on the other, the institutional insistence on the linguistic integration of migrants ('we PUSH our job seekers to use the regional language') even if the institution could profit more from multilingual competences of its employees. Yet, it remains the paramount goal of the Fribourg REO to promote the learning of the local language(s) and to bring the clients (ideally) to be able to come to their bi-monthly appointments by themselves without needing an interpreter. In order to do so, consultants not only try to use the local language(s) as much as possible, but also motivate their clients to sign up for language courses (even if not paid for by the public employment service), register them for LMM ('LMM language integration') in the framework of which they expect them to practice their language skills (e.g., programmes for temporary occupation), and encourage them to practice on their own in their free time and in taking on 'individual responsibility'. We can thus conclude that competences in the local language(s) is institutionally highly valued in the context of unemployment, especially for a successful procedure as envisioned by the public employment service. The question remains how language competences are evaluated and invested in for the employability of individuals with all sorts of profiles and backgrounds.

## 2.4 Concluding Remarks: Ideal Types and the Field

In this chapter, we have laid out the historical development of the unemployment insurance in the form of public employment service in Switzerland, its institutionalisation and management via the Regional Employment Offices (REO). The labour market measures (LMM) were presented as the single most important instrument of the REO and

their consultants to optimise their clients' employability. In addition, we outlined some key features of the language management of the REO, which is caught between institutional regulations and individual agency, aiming towards the linguistic assimilation of job seekers. In other words, the individual agency refers to the room for manoeuvre for consultants who can circumnavigate the 'monolingual' regulations by making use of another language, if they are willing to do so.

Before turning to individual case studies in the following chapters and the particular processes as elaborated in the first chapter (see Sect. 1.4), we shall discuss the 'ideal type' as presented by the national labour authority SECO of how language investment effectively improves the employability of a job seeker. Returning to the website 'Treffpunkt Arbeit/Espace emploi' ('Work meeting point'), we can see that, in line with above, the LMM are presented as part of the process of the public employment service. Possible measures are listed, first of which are 'courses' (German: 'Kurse') as well as information on their conditions of participation or duration, for example. For reasons of illustrating the utility of LMM, the website introduces a fictional job seeker with the name of Mrs. Schuler (with slight variations on names and places between the German, French, and Italian versions). The story of Mrs. Schuler is narrated in a simple and causal manner<sup>5</sup>: In the German version, she lost her job as a shoe salesperson near (German-speaking) Zurich when her employer filed for bankruptcy. Following her husband to an Italian-speaking city in the South of Switzerland, she relocated to another linguistic region which language she did not master. Even if she knew some Italian at that time, she lacked practice and had not attended any Italian language course after her schooldays. In spite of her very good professional qualifications, she did not find any position in her domain, which is why her REO consultant advised her from the beginning to attend an intensive language course (3 h per day for 3 months). With her professional qualifications in order, her consultant thus invested in her language competences, as they seemed to be the missing piece in her employability. This investment paid off, as she was reinserted in the labour market after 4 months only, securing a position as a salesperson in a local boutique.

The story of Mrs. Schuler is clearly presented as an ideal case of how an LMM (in this case, a course in the local language) positively affects the employability of a job seeker. Mrs. Schuler thus appears as an emblematic figure of successful reinsertion, which is framed in clear-cut variables. On the website of the REO, her trajectory is narrated along the effective implementation of language investment, which, in turn, directly and efficiently leads to employment. Granted, there are certainly a number of cases for which a similar simple procedure and outcome can be recorded. Yet, we would like to tell a more complex story about investment and employability, as the trajectories of job seekers whom we encountered in the field did not entirely correspond to this narrative. In other words, there are no clear routes and recipes, as every story is different and bears its idiosyncratic challenges. As different as the individual stories and backgrounds of the participants in our study were, questions of employability became more complex and complicated as time progressed. Sometimes, language competences were considered a key element for employability, while at other times, the professional background, qualifications, and experiences were foregrounded, and, in yet other moments, motivation and soft skills became the central elements. This variability in the evaluation of the importance of language competences becomes further evident in the individually differing allocation of LMM.

Against the backdrop of the institutional regulations, the cantonal strategies, and the individual stories, it is the aim of the following two chapters to recount the stories of job seekers who do not necessarily fit the 'scheme' of the REO as personalised in the fictional figure of Mrs. Schuler. For this, we will critically dissect and analyse the negotiations and decisions that are taking place in the REO between job seekers and their consultants. We argue that there are patterns within these discussions that revolve around questions of language investment and employability and thus entail varying consequences for the unemployment processes and individual professional trajectories. In the end, these negotiations are indexical of the complicated process that is the public employment service and explain why the reinsertion process is not always as clear-cut as depicted in the fictional case of Mrs. Schuler. To illustrate the complex interplay of the different elements coming

together in this process, most importantly language investment and employability, we will discuss specific case studies in the following two chapters.

## Notes

1. ‘Treffpunkt Arbeit’, [www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/erste\\_schritte/](http://www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/erste_schritte/); ‘Espace emploi’, [www.espace-emploi.ch/arbeitslos/erste\\_schritte/](http://www.espace-emploi.ch/arbeitslos/erste_schritte/), date accessed 7 March 2017.
2. FC Art. 114: ‘Unemployment Insurance’ (German original: BV Art. 114 ‘Arbeitslosenversicherung’)
  1. Der Bund erlässt Vorschriften über die Arbeitslosenversicherung.
  2. Er beachtet dabei folgende Grundsätze:
    - a. Die Versicherung gewährt angemessenen Erwerbssersatz und unterstützt Massnahmen zur Verhütung und Bekämpfung der Arbeitslosigkeit.
    - b. Der Beitritt ist für Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer obligatorisch; das Gesetz kann Ausnahmen vorsehen.
    - c. Selbstständigerwerbende können sich freiwillig versichern.
  3. Die Versicherung wird durch die Beiträge der Versicherten finanziert, wobei die Arbeitgeberinnen und Arbeitgeber für ihre Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer die Hälfte der Beiträge bezahlen.
  4. Bund und Kantone erbringen bei ausserordentlichen Verhältnissen finanzielle Leistungen.
  5. Der Bund kann Vorschriften über die Arbeitslosenfürsorge erlassen.
3. Official English translation of the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, [www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995395/201601010000/101.pdf](http://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995395/201601010000/101.pdf), date accessed 27 January 2017.
4. FC Art. 70: ‘Languages’ (German original: BV Art. 70: ‘Sprachen’)
  1. The official languages of the Confederation are German, French, and Italian. Romansh is also an official language of the Confederation when communicating with persons who speak Romansh.
  2. The Cantons shall decide on their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, the Cantons shall respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages and take account of indigenous linguistic minorities.

3. The Confederation and the Cantons shall encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities.
  4. The Confederation shall support the plurilingual Cantons in the fulfilment of their special duties.
  5. The Confederation shall support measures by the Cantons of Graubünden and Ticino to preserve and promote the Romansh and the Italian languages.
5. The whole case in German from the SECO website ‘Treffpunkt Arbeit’, [www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/arbeitsmarktliche\\_massnahmen/Massnahmenliste/](http://www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/arbeitsmarktliche_massnahmen/Massnahmenliste/), date accessed 27 October 2016. ‘Fallbeispiel: Frau Schuler, seit mehreren Jahren Schuhverkäuferin in einem Laden am Stadtrand von Zürich, ist nach dem Konkurs ihres Arbeitgebers arbeitslos. Frau Schuler hat soeben geheiratet und wird sich nun in Bellinzona niederlassen, wo ihr Mann bereits eine Stelle als Küchenchef hat. Sie spricht zwar etwas Italienisch, aber nur wenig, und konnte seit ihrer Schulzeit keine Sprachkurse mehr besuchen. Trotz sehr guter Qualifikationen findet sie deshalb im Tessin keine Stelle in ihrem Beruf. Deshalb rät ihr der RAV-Personalberater schon von Anfang an zu einem Intensivsprachkurs: Während dreier Monate soll sie drei Stunden täglich Italienisch lernen. Frau Schuler macht schnell Fortschritte und nach vier Monaten findet sie erneut eine Stelle als Verkäuferin, diesmal in einer Lederboutique.’

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