

## How do young people from priority neighbourhoods fare after their *baccalauréat*?



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High-school students from priority neighbourhoods face specific difficulties in obtaining the *bac* and going on to higher education. Above and beyond the effects linked to their social background, does the fact of living in a priority neighbourhood have its own impact on their *post-bac* trajectories and their education-to-work transition? Céreq and the *Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires*/National Agency for Territorial Cohesion have collaborated on a study that sheds light on the education and employment trajectories of the young people who left the education system in 2013 and who, when they took the *bac*, were living in priority neighbourhoods.



ZEP - PRIORITY  
EDUCATION ZONE  
YOUNG PERSON  
SCHOOL-TO-WORK  
TRANSITION  
GENERATION SURVEY  
2013  
SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The term “priority neighbourhoods” (PNs) denotes the urban areas beset by the greatest social difficulties. The people living in these neighbourhoods, particularly young people, suffer from numerous handicaps from the very early years of their education and subsequent careers. Thus analysis of the education and employment trajectories of young people in the cohort that left education in 2013 and who were living in PNs when they took the *bac* (cf. Box 3) highlights the more or less persistent differences at the various stages of these trajectories between them and what is observed for the young people from other neighbourhoods in the same conurbations (other neighbourhoods in the surrounding urban units or ONSUUs).

that persists throughout the successive stages of individual trajectories? This “neighbourhood effect”, which evolves over time, may have made itself felt in various dimensions of these young people’s lives. They may have suffered from living conditions that hindered their studies (overcrowded housing, inadequate equipment), from social segregation that hampered their learning (peer effects, allocation to schools with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils, higher levels of turnover and lower average age of teaching staff, inadequate infrastructure) and, more generally, the acquisition of information throughout their trajectories (on their educational choices, on employment opportunities etc.). This “neighbourhood effect” may also include practices fraught with prejudice against them, with regard both to the guidance they received as they transitioned through the various stages of their education and subsequently in the labour market.

In part, the future of these young people who were living in PNs during their high school years was determined by their social backgrounds. The majority of them come from immigrant (50%) or working-class backgrounds (more than half were in receipt of grants awarded on social criteria); most attended “disadvantaged” high schools characterised by a low level of social diversity and their educational and employment trajectories bear the mark of this social environment. However, this begs the question of the specific effect of the neighbourhood they were living in when they took the *bac*, in both the short term (whether or not to continue after the *bac*, and if so what to study?) and the longer term (what did they gain from higher education and what were the implications for their transition into employment?). Is it possible to isolate a specific effect attributable to residing in a PN at the time of the *bac*, independently of individual characteristics,

### PNs and higher education: lower rates of entry overall but higher among holders of vocational *bacs*

Young people from PNs have enrolled in the upper secondary vocational pathway in much larger numbers than their counterparts in adjacent neighbourhoods. Thus among those leaving initial education in 2013 with at least the *baccalauréat*, those who were living in a PN when they took the *bac* were as likely to hold a vocational *bac* as a general *bac* (38% in both cases), in contrast to their counterparts from ONSUUs (23% and 54% respectively). This overrepresentation of vocational *bac* holders among young people from PNs explains to a large extent why they were less likely to



\* National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (formerly the CGET).

\*\* The PN boundaries were defined by means of a territorial grid derived from income data.

This made it possible to identify, within the urban units, pockets of poverty, i.e. areas in which households whose income is lower than that of households in the surrounding urban unit and the average income in metropolitan France are concentrated. In this way, 1,514 PNs were defined, with a total population of 5.5 million people.

remain in education after the *bac* (70% compared with 77% for their counterparts from ONSUUs). However, calculation of the rates for each individual pathway shows that the share of vocational *bac* holders from PNs who remained in education is significantly greater than that for their counterparts from ONSUUs (40% compared with 33%), whereas it is the same for holders of the general (91% vs. 93%) and technological (85% vs. 83%) *bacs*. Several, not mutually exclusive hypotheses can be advanced to explain what at first sight appears to be a paradoxical finding. The young holders of a vocational *bac* from PNs might have continued their education because of a greater sense of dissatisfaction with the guidance they received on entering high school. For comparable levels of ability, young people from the most disadvantaged social groups, who are overrepresented in the PNs, are indeed more likely to be directed towards the less prestigious vocational pathways if they are not included among the “good pupils” [1]. Another possible explanation is that, following the example of young people from immigrant backgrounds, the young people from PNs encountering difficulties in accessing apprenticeship training courses and contracts [2] were more likely to compensate by enrolling in higher education in order to equip themselves better for their future entry into the labour market. A third hypothesis is that the greater predilection for higher education shown by the holders of the vocational *bac* from PNs had a symbolic dimension to it, signalling the great hopes of upward social mobility nurtured by the children of working-class parents and those from immigrant backgrounds, who are overrepresented in the PNs [3 ; 4]. The extent of this difference in behaviour between the young holders of vocational *bacs* from the priority neighbourhoods and those from adjacent neighbourhoods is confirmed

in an analysis by identical characteristics. Thus it is not solely social origins and a migration background that explain this difference; there is also an effect specific to being resident in a PN when the *bac* is taken, such that identification with the neighbourhood appears to constitute a social marker in its own right.

### Steered towards less selective courses, more likely to leave without qualifications

The *post-bac* educational preferences expressed by the high school pupils in their final year in school varied considerably depending on where they were living. Thus whether they held the vocational, technological or general *bac*, the young people from PNs were less likely to apply for the most elitist institutions (the university institutes of technology (IUTs) or the *grandes écoles*) and more likely to opt for local institutions; 45% of the holders of the *baccalauréat* from PNs declared a preference for the STS or sections de *techniciens supérieurs*, where they could prepare for the *brevet de technicien supérieur* (a *bac*+2 qualification), compared with 32% of their counterparts from the ONSUUs, or for non-selective institutions (university). A greater share of holders of the vocational *bac* from PNs than their counterparts from ONSUUs declared a preference for university (24% vs. 14%); conversely, holders of the general *bac* from these neighbourhoods were less likely to apply for entry to a preparatory class for the *grandes écoles* (14% vs. 22%). Social inequalities and the local contexts in which education and the guidance processes played out help to explain these differences [5]. They may be due to the lower average level of educational attainment among these young people, who received their education in “disadvantaged” schools, or, as is the case with young people from immigrant backgrounds [6], to a

## 1 Level of qualification attained by young people who left initial education in 2013 by place of residence at the time they took the *bac* (in %)

### The 2016 survey of the 2013 cohort

From April to July 2016, Céreq questioned 19,500 young people representative of the 693,000 young people who left the education system in France for the first time during or at the end of the academic year 2012-2013. The survey is designed to investigate the conditions under which the young people accessed employment depending on their initial education and various individual characteristics (gender, social background, national origins) and focuses on individuals' educational trajectories and employment situations from month to month between departure from the education system and the spring of 2016. Thanks to funding from the ANCT (*Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires*, formerly the CGET), the survey enabled us to record the addresses and to identify the type of neighbourhood in which respondents were living when they took the *bac*. This collaboration gave rise to an article that appeared in the 2018 report of the *Observatoire national de la politique de la ville* (ONPV), on which this edition of *Training & Employment* is based [9].

### Scope of the data

The individuals included in this study are those who hold at least a *baccalauréat* or equivalent level IV qualification and who declared that, during the academic year in which they took the *baccalauréat*, they were living in an urban unit containing at least one priority neighbourhood (PN). The scope is gradually restricted to those who continued into higher education, whether or not they failed there, and finally to those young people who left with higher education qualifications. The former high school students from PNs are compared with their “neighbours”, defined here as former high school students from other neighbourhoods in the urban units surrounding the PNs. The former were systematically less likely than the latter to get through the successive stages: fewer of them obtained at least the *baccalauréat* (54% vs. 77%), fewer went into higher education (38% vs. 59%) and, finally, fewer obtained a higher education qualification (25% vs. 47%). And in studying the education-to-work transition three years after the departure from initial education, the population under consideration was once again all the young people who held at least a *baccalauréat*.

		SECONDARY LEAVERS			LEAVERS FROM HIGH EDUCATION			TOTAL
		No qualification	CAP-BEP	<i>Bac</i> holders who did not go into HE	...non graduates	...graduates		
					<i>Bac</i> +2 to <i>bac</i> +4 qualifications	<i>Bac</i> +2 to <i>bac</i> +4 qualifications	<i>Bac</i> +5 qualifications or higher	
At the time of <i>bac</i> , or on completion of education for those without the <i>bac</i>	...was living in PN (9% of 2013 cohort)	29	17	16	13	15	10	100
	...was living in another neighbourhood in the surrounding urban units (45% of the 2013 cohort)	13	10	18	12	25	22	100
	...was living outside an urban unit containing a PN (46% of the 2013 cohort)	12	15	21	10	25	17	100

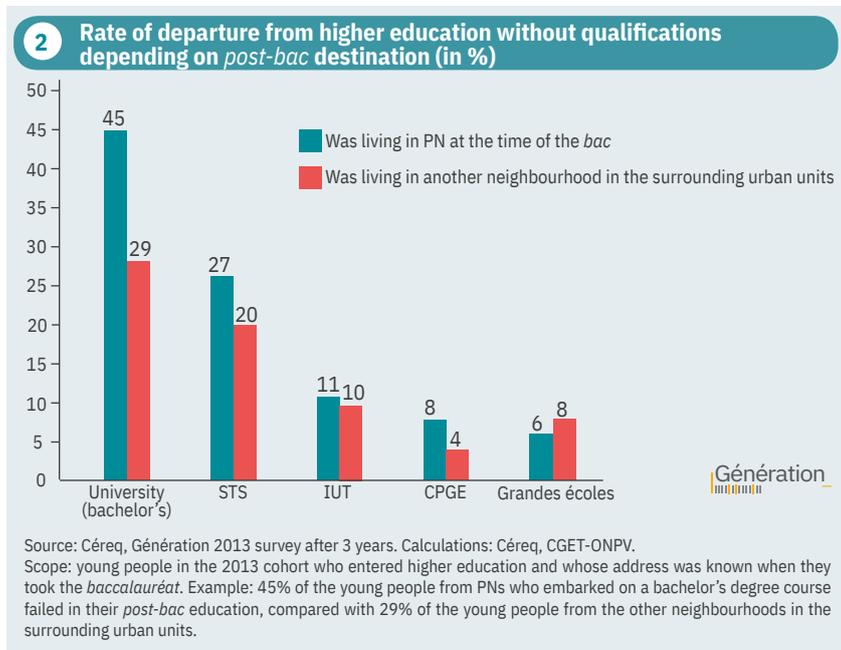
populations studied in this article

Source: Céreq, Génération 2013 survey. Calculations: Céreq, CGET-ONPV. Scope: young people who left initial education in 2013. Example: 29% of the young people resident in a PN left initial education in 2013 without an upper secondary qualification. The underlined numbers correspond to the populations studied in this article.

form of self-censorship or to inadequate provision of information about the full range of courses on offer, which may in turn be due to the influence high schools exert as they “channel” their pupils into certain options [7]. Another possible cause is the cost of mobility for these young people; the most selective institutions are more concentrated geographically and are therefore generally less accessible.

In accordance with the preferences expressed when they took the *bac*, those young people from PNs who did actually remain in education tended to be channelled into less selective institutions than their counterparts from ONSUUs. The only exception in this regard was the STS, which were attended by 33% of the young people from PNs who remained in education, compared with only 24% of those from ONSUUs. Although they were more accessible for the former group, the STS were still a more selective option for them: the proportion of preferences that actually became a reality was lower than among their neighbours. Ultimately, their chances of entering higher education were greatest if they applied for a university degree course (48% vs. 39% of young people from ONSUUs, despite this option being preferred by the same share of each group) [9]. However, having taken the vocational or technological *bac* rather than the general *bac*, the young people from PNs were less well prepared for the more general bachelor’s programmes. Moreover, it would seem that the holders of a vocational *bac* who enrolled in the first years of a university degree course were often those with the least good academic records who were unable to access the more selective institutions (e.g. the STS)[8].

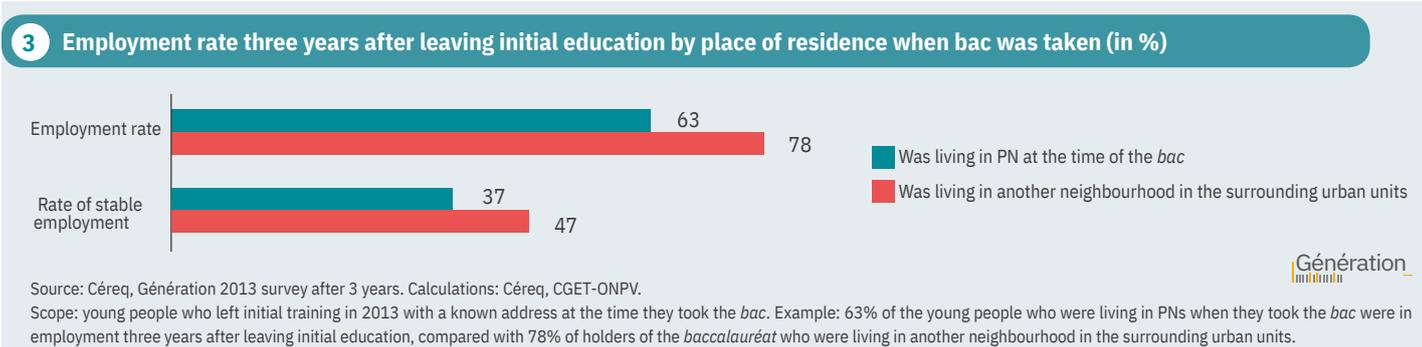
Of all the young people who enrolled in higher education, some did not obtain any qualification at all. This applied to 34% of the young holders of the *bac* from PNs, compared with 20% of those from ONSUUs (cf. Figure 1). The characteristics of the populations living in PNs contributed to these higher failure rates. Thus in PNs as elsewhere, the failure rate was higher for young people with at least one immigrant parent (parent born a foreigner abroad). Those whose parents were blue-collar workers or white-collar clerical workers or had never worked also failed more frequently than those who had at least one parent with cadre (managerial) status or in an intermediate occupation. Furthermore, the failure rate varied depending on the type of *bac* and was highest among holders of the vocational *bac* (73% for



holders of the vocational *bac* from PNs, compared with 55% for those from ONSUUs). For individuals of the same gender and from the same social or immigrant background and with the same type of *bac*, the young people from PNs systematically failed more in higher education than the other holders of the *bac* from the urban units, particularly women and holders of the vocational *bac*.

The difference in higher education failure rates between these two populations was particularly great at university (45% vs. 29%, cf. Figure 1), where recruitment is less selective, teaching methods are far removed from those used in French *lycées* and staff/student ratios are considerably less favourable. Thus the young people from PNs paid the price for being “channelled”, rather against their wishes, into the university system, which was not their first preference and led to 40% and 31% respectively of holders of vocational and technological *bacs* enrolling in programmes for which they were ill prepared (compared with just 20% and 17% respectively of the young people from ONSUUs with the same types of *bac*).

Overall, on average, the young higher education graduates from PNs did not attain as high a level of qualification as those from ONSUUs. Thus fewer of them obtained the highest levels of qualifications (1% vs. 5% for PhDs, 38% vs. 41% 2-year master’s or



\* *Translator's note:*  
The *Parcoursup* process is an application procedure designed by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education to allocate undergraduate places to high-school students and other applicants.

## → Learn more

[1] *Choix d'orientation et origine sociale : mesurer et comprendre l'autocensure scolaire*, N. Guyon et E. Huillery, Paris Sciences Po./LIEPP, 2014.

[2] « Inégalités dans l'accès aux stages, à l'apprentissage et à l'enseignement professionnel : des formations empêchées ? », A. Kérel, E. Sulzer, *Injep analyses & synthèses* n°10, février 2018.

[3] *80 % au Bac... et après ? Les enfants de la démocratisation scolaire*, S. Beaud, Paris, La Découverte, collection « textes à l'appui », 2002.

[4] « Les scolarités des enfants d'immigrés de la sixième au baccalauréat : différenciation et polarisation des parcours », Y. Brinbaum, A. Kieffer, *Population*, 2009/3 (vol.64).

[5] « Comment l'orientation contribue aux inégalités de parcours scolaires en France », S. Landrier, N. Nakhili, *Formation Emploi* n°109, 2010.

[6] « Parcours de formation et d'insertion des jeunes issus de l'immigration au prisme de l'orientation », Y. Brinbaum, C. Guégnard, *Formation Emploi*, n°118, 2012.

[7] « Les inégalités d'accès à l'enseignement supérieur, Quel rôle joue le lycée d'origine des futurs étudiants ? », A. Van Zanten, *Regards croisés sur l'économie*, 1(16), 2015.

[8] « "30 % de boursiers" en grande école... et après ? », S. Beaud, B. Convert, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* n°183, 2010/3.

[9] « Le Bac et après : des trajectoires d'études plus courtes, des conditions d'insertion plus erratiques pour les jeunes de quartiers prioritaires », T. Couppié, P. Dieusaert et M. Vignale, *Rapport annuel 2018*, ONP.V.

other *bac*+5 qualification, 18% vs. 22% for a *bac*+3/4 qualification excluding health and social work and 6% vs. 9% for a *bac*+2/3 qualification in health and social work). However, 37% of them left initial education with a qualification requiring 2 years' post-secondary study (*bac*+2), that is 14 percentage points more than their counterparts from adjacent neighbourhoods.

For individuals with identical characteristics, the fact of living in a PN when taking the *bac* significantly reduced the chances of attaining a level of qualification higher than *bac*+2. By way of illustration of this neighbourhood effect, it would appear that holders of the *bac* from PNs usually terminated their studies at a level requiring between 2 and 4 years' post-secondary study because of certain constraints: a greater share of them stated that they left education because they were forced to do so, notably for financial reasons (35% vs. 23% in the ONSUUs), because they were not accepted on to the course they applied for (12% vs. 10%) or because the course they wanted to take was not available nearby (12% vs. 7%).

## Less linear career trajectories and less skilled jobs

Thus those young people who were living in PNs when they took the *bac* were less likely on average to go into higher education, opting instead for shorter, less prestigious courses of study. Given the part that qualifications play when young people enter the labour market, they consequently had to face greater difficulties in effecting the transition from education into work. Thus three years after leaving initial education, 37% of them were without a job compared with 22% of their neighbours at the time in the ONSUUs (cf. Figure 2). Their occupational trajectories are more erratic: they were slower to obtain their first jobs and over the course of these first three years spent less time in employment than their counterparts from the ONSUUs. On the other hand, of those who did succeed in finding employment, the employment contracts they obtained were fairly comparable. In 2016, 59% of the young people who were living in PNs when they took the *bac* were employed on permanent contracts or as state employees ("stable" employment), compared with 60% of those from the ONSUUs. However, there were differences in the nature of the jobs obtained, with the young people from the PNs holding at least the *baccalauréat* being employed in generally less skilled jobs. Thus three years after leaving initial education, 53% had *cadre* (managerial) status or were in intermediate occupations, compared with 63% of those who were living in ONSUUs when they took the *bac*. Conversely, they were more likely to be employed in blue-collar positions (45% vs. 35%) [9].

The greater difficulties they encountered in obtaining employment, as well as the less skilled positions the

young holders of the *bac* from PNs occupied once they did find employment, were determined largely by their prior educational trajectories. However, this explanation does not extend to all the differences between the two populations.

Thus for identical socio-demographic characteristics and educational trajectories, the young people who were living in PNs when they took the *bac* were 1.3 times less likely to be in employment three years after leaving initial education than their counterparts in ONSUUs. Similarly, and again for identical characteristics, the young people who were living in PNs were 1.2 times less likely than those from ONSUUs to be in a job with *cadre* (managerial) status or in an intermediate occupation rather than a blue-collar or white-collar clerical post. This accumulation of unfavourable characteristics leading to less skilled positions might explain the stronger feeling of downgrading among young people who were living in priority neighbourhoods when they took the *bac*. On the survey date, 35% of holders of the *bac* from PNs in paid employment regarded themselves as employed below their level of competence, compared with 29% of their counterparts from the ONSUUs.

● For the same individual characteristics, and particularly the same level of qualification, the effect attributable to living in a PN at the time of the *bac* turns out to have relatively little impact on the conditions under which employment was accessed. The main factor influencing the education-to-work transition is the level of qualification attained. Now this latter is itself the product of the educational trajectory of which it is the culmination, which is strongly influenced in its various stages by the fact of living in a PN at the time that the *bac* is taken. Obtaining the *baccalauréat* and succeeding in higher education is, after all, a seemingly impossible challenge for young people living in PNs as they finish high school. They have not only to overcome educational difficulties but also get through successive educational guidance processes. In this respect, the results of several decades of priority education and educational support targeted at young people in disadvantaged social environments are decidedly mixed, given the massive educational inequalities that persist. The case of the holders of the vocational *bac* from PNs is emblematic. Their real appetite for higher education came up against their entry in large numbers into the university system, where they failed, and against the difficulties they encountered in accessing the STS in any great numbers. From this point of view, the experiment within the *post-bac* *Parcoursup*\* process, whereby holders of the vocational *bac* are given access to a BTS programme as of right provided the school report is favourable, may be a worthwhile avenue to explore in shaping the public provision of support and guidance for young people in PNs. —●

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