



Understanding Inequalities in the Labour Market: The Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity

Zusammenfassung der Projektergebnisse – Kurzversion

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Employment Inequalities in Switzerland: The Significance of Gender and Origin

Research goals: We do not yet have a complete and differentiated understanding of how and why gender inequalities in the Swiss labour market persist. Three areas in particular need to be addressed: (a) although women and men are diverse in terms of their origin and experience, few studies exist that examine the specific employment situations of native Swiss and foreign-born women and men; (b) although recent progress has improved women's access to education, information regarding their long-term success in using, maintaining and further developing those qualifications is scarce; (c) we lack insight into the variety of strategies developed by women and their partners to counteract the hurdles that women face in terms of professional advancement. The goal of this research project is to address these research gaps.

Methodology: The study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative study is based on the 2008 and 2010 Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS) and the 2008 Swiss Earnings Structure Survey (SESS). The qualitative study uses biographical interviewing, MINGA workshops, and expert interviews as methods of data collection. The sample for the biographical interviews includes native Swiss and foreign-born individuals from both EU and non-EU countries. It comprises a total of 77 individuals with tertiary education or vocational training, in households with children, over the age of 40 and living in 13 different Swiss Cantons, mainly in German-speaking Switzerland. The analysis of how the employment situations of individuals is influenced by the division of housework and gainful employment with their household partners was conducted for three types of relationships: Swiss couples, bi-national couples, and migrant couples.

Principal results of the quantitative study: Gender plays a central and pervasive role in shaping employment inequalities between native Swiss and foreign-born women and men:

- Foreign-born women are the most disadvantaged group in the Swiss labour market, with the lowest employment rates, average income levels, and numbers of individuals in leadership positions. Native Swiss women follow in the ranking of disadvantage. Native Swiss men occupy the most advantageous rank in the Swiss labour market as they have the highest employment rates, average income levels, and numbers of individuals in leadership positions. Foreign-born men occupy the second rank of advantage with similar rates to native Swiss men, but with lower levels of average income.
- Despite their high levels of education, foreign-born women are the most disadvantaged group in terms of employment that is not commensurate with their qualifications. Swiss women with tertiary education and foreign men with vocational training follow in the ranking of inequality.

Origin, however, plays a more important role than gender in unemployment inequality, as both native Swiss women and men have much lower percentages of unemployment than foreign-born women and men.

Principal results of the qualitative study: Foreign-born and native Swiss women are the two groups that most frequently experience inequality of gainful employment. How can the dynamics and processes of the inequalities revealed by the quantitative and qualitative studies be explained? Results of biographical interviews indicate that in comparison to their male partners, the professional careers of many native Swiss and foreign-born women are characterized by biographical discontinuity. Comparatively, women experience more difficulties than men in order to achieve similar or less advantaged positions in the labour market, as well as to maintain professional qualifications over time. Foreign-born women, particularly those from non-EU countries, stand out in terms of the difficulties that they face and the various strategies that they use. Foreign-born men from non-EU countries also face difficulties. However, the interviews show that the disadvantages caused by origin are often counterbalanced by advantages associated with gender. As foreign-born men are expected by Swiss society to play a breadwinner role, the latter creates more favourable conditions for insertion in the Swiss labour market than foreign-born women, who are more typically expected to assume a childcare role. A main conclusion of this study is that although native and foreign-born women achieve high educational levels, their valuable resources are not yet being sufficiently used and recognized, nor have measures been put in place that prevent their professional devaluation. If the professional potential of native and foreign-born women is to be fully realised, and gender equality in Switzerland to be achieved, new perspectives and new policies need to be adopted (see long summary).