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## Understanding Inequalities of Access to The Labour Market: The Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity

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Feminist authors have argued that the key to women's social citizenship - understood as "full membership in the community" - is equal access to spaces of paid work. Indeed, scholars argue that women require equal access to sources of income and/or material support outside of their family relations if they are to acquire or maintain social and economic autonomy. Accordingly, Switzerland's Gender Equality Act, which came into effect in 1996, states as one of its main aims "to promote gender equality in all areas of society, particularly in the work place, and to eliminate any form of direct or indirect gender-based discrimination". In discussions of social citizenship, migration scholars have also highlighted the particular importance of labour market participation for women of foreign origin. Often immigration authorities extend residence permits and grant foreign women formal citizenship on the condition that they are employed. An analysis of achievements towards gender equality shows that, while much progress has been achieved in recent decades in the fields of legislation and education, women and men in the labour market still have unequal access to paid employment, professional positions, division of labour in family households, wages and welfare dependence.

Unfortunately, we do not have a complete and differentiated understanding in Switzerland of how and why gender inequalities in the labour market persist. Three areas in particular need to be addressed by researchers if we are to advance our understanding and formulate sound and innovative policies to counteract inequality. First, although women are diverse and experience oppression and inequality in varying situations and in varying degrees of intensity, it is still not clear how gender and ethnicity intersect to generate different situations of inequality. Second, although women have made much progress in recent years in acquiring professional qualifications, no information is available as to how they succeed over the long-term in using, maintaining and further developing such qualifications. Third, we lack insight into the variety of strategies that women develop to counteract hurdles they face when acquiring and applying new qualifications in the labour market.

The overall goal of this research project is to address the former research gaps. Using a comparative perspective, this project will examine three sets of questions regarding both Swiss and non-Swiss individuals: (a) how the intersection of gender and ethnicity/national origin generates unequal access to paid work; (b) the extent to which individuals succeed in applying, maintaining and further developing their

professional qualifications in the labour market, (c) the strategies that individuals devise to apply and acquire new professional qualifications. The analysis will combine macro- and micro perspectives to understand gender inequality by focusing on the concepts of gender culture, intersectionality and household arrangements. The quantitative aspects of the study will provide a systematic and representative overview of the variety of situations faced by Swiss and foreign men and women in the labour market. The qualitative aspects will provide insight into the reasons and processes behind gender and ethnic inequalities in the labour market, and into the strategies of individuals to maintain and advance their professional qualifications. An important aim of the qualitative study is to understand how women's access to the labour market depends on the various arrangements made with their household partners regarding division of housework and paid employment.

The quantitative study will be based on the statistical database provided by the 2009 Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS), which contains a representative sample of 50'000 individuals. The qualitative empirical study will deal with 30 women of Swiss and non-Swiss origin who have vocational training or university education, who live in a household with children, and who are between 40 and 50 years old. The study will be conducted in the city of Berne and its surroundings. The qualitative methods of data collection include biographical interviews, MINGA workshops and expert interviews. Interviews to document professional biographies will be conducted with both members of couple households. This will allow a relational understanding of how the professional careers of each one of the couple's members evolve before and after having had children. Overall, 60 biographical interviews (in 30 households), 6 MINGA workshops, and 6 expert interviews are planned. It is also planned that the project's progress will be monitored by a working group composed of two representatives of Gender Equality Offices in Berne and Zurich and two academics. This working group is intended to fulfil two purposes: first, to provide on-going feedback on the project's evolving results and second, to participate in formulating practical guidelines for policy-makers aiming to counteract gender and ethnic inequality in the Swiss labour market.

*Project duration:* 2011 - 2013

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