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## **Discrimination as an Obstacle to Social Cohesion**

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**Although the issue of discrimination has found its way into the Swiss integration policy lately, the research on this topic is still in its infancy in this country. Competing explanations may account for this situation: either the phenomenon of discrimination is negligible or the propensity to discriminate is rather stable over time and appears as legitimate among the Swiss population. In all cases, the issue is understudied and under-documented; the need for systematic inquiry is thus pressing.**

Some studies on labor market integration of immigrant and their children were published in recent years (for example Liebig et al. 2012). Yet there is little information about the extent of discrimination of immigrants and their children in the Swiss labor market, with the exception of children-of-immigrants' access to the apprenticeship market (Imdorf 2010). The first in-depth study documenting discrimination in hiring procedures by Fibbi, Kaya and Piguet (2003) focused on entry level position. More recently, Mueller and Wolter (2014) have investigated whether the hypothesis of discrimination on the basis of insufficient information by employers plays a role in the probability of succeeding in the transition from compulsory schooling to a firm-based apprenticeship; but, based upon their results, this hypothesis cannot be fully confirmed. There is thus a strong need for innovative studies on if and how labor market discrimination of immigrants and their offspring occurs in accessing the labor market or along their career path while, at the same time, expanding the scope of observation from entry level to more advanced positions. As unequal treatment of equally qualified candidates can indeed be attributed to discrimination (whether enacted by employers or co-workers), social cohesion is undermined. To address this aspect of social cohesion, the project also examines

the determinants of (negative) attitudes towards foreigners and people of immigrant origin in Switzerland.

### **Research Questions**

In our research, we focus on the following questions:

- Does discrimination based on ethnicity or migrant status occur in the Swiss labor market?
- Does discrimination or, put differently, gaps in terms of labor market outcomes (such as likelihood of employment and wages received) differ for specific immigrant groups?
- What are employers' and human resources managers' perceptions and practices in hiring?
- How does the perception of unequal treatment affect immigrants and their children?
- How can unequal treatment in hiring decisions be explained? How important are taste-based and statistical discrimination? Are there other explicative hypotheses?
- What role do attitudes towards foreigners and immigrants play in general, particularly in terms of hiring decisions?

### **Ethnic Discrimination in Hiring Decisions in the Swiss Labor Market**

Switzerland has one of the largest immigrant populations of all OECD countries. 27% of the working-age population

in Switzerland is foreign-born, similarly high rates are only reported in Australia and Luxembourg (OECD 2012). However, despite this strong presence of foreign nationals and their children, Switzerland is one of the few countries in Europe that has not adopted comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, a fact that has been criticized in the latest MIPEX report, which stated that Switzerland is “one of the very few countries without a comprehensive anti-discrimination law and equality body with legal standing; a sizeable number of potential victims are poorly protected against racial, ethnic, religious and nationality discrimination” (MIPEX 2015). Since the labor market holds a key position in the integration of migrants and their children, discrimination in this sphere has far reaching consequences.

Using an interdisciplinary multi-method approach, this part of the project will focus on studying discrimination in hiring decisions in the Swiss labor market from a quantitative as well as a qualitative perspective. By combining a variety of research approaches, it will be possible to draw a comprehensive picture of ethnic discrimination in hiring decisions in the Swiss labor market and address not only the question *whether* discrimination occurs, but also *why* it occurs.

### Attitudes of Actors Involved in Discrimination

Practices of discrimination on the labor market involve two types of actors, those in the position of enacting unfair treatment and those in the position of being affected by unfair treatment. We approach those ‘actors’ in the next two parts of the project.

Negative attitudes towards foreigners and immigrants can also be considered as *intention to discriminate*: therefore such attitudes represent our second major focus. We build on acquired expertise on attitudes towards equal opportunities for foreigners (Pecoraro and Ruedin 2015). Examining the relationship between attitudes and ethnic concentration at the occupational level, preliminary results show that the reasons why individuals oppose foreigners tend to be multifaceted. More specifically, while standard correlations suggest that workers are at the same time wary of competition with foreigners and welcome their contribution to overcome labor shortages, the main mechanism at work can be better described by a sorting of Swiss workers into lower- or higher-quality jobs. Future studies on this topic aim at further disentangling the most salient determinants of anti-foreigner attitudes. We focus on the far less studied relationship between attitudes and self-employment.

Finally, we focus on those exposed to unfair treatment: we investigate subjective self-assessed discrimination. Personal accounts of discrimination reflect experience and perceptions of its magnitude. Although self-

assessed discrimination is not an accurate measure of actual discrimination, its perception is socially effective and influences representations and behaviors. Comparisons between subjective and objective measures of discrimination show that subjective accounts tend to underestimate the extent of the phenomenon (Bovenkerk 1992). The methodology for this set of studies is secondary analysis of already collected data. We first aim at measuring the extent of the perceived discrimination using data from the national surveys. Those findings will be further put into a wider comparative perspective by exploiting cross-national data from the European Social Survey.

Sociological studies on the consequences of perceived discrimination have often favored an approach based on collective mobilization under the assumption that subjective self-assessed discrimination would foster re-ethnicization movements. Exploiting existing health data, this project rather focuses on psycho-sociological consequences and individualized responses to situations perceived as stressful by analyzing various health outcomes.

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