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**“New Migration” and New Forms
of Integration: Families in
Geographical Itinerancy**

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The demands of the job market increasingly bring professionals, their partners and their children to engage in trajectories of repeated international mobility. In Switzerland, whose policies encourage “highly skilled migration”, the number of mobile families is likely to grow in the next few years. Who are these families, and how do they live on the move? How do they experience their temporary stay in Switzerland? And what are the implications of hosting these mobile families for Switzerland?

Messages for Decision-Makers

- A better inclusion of highly qualified accompanying partners, both men and women, in the Swiss labor market would be in the interest of these families and of Switzerland.**
- Local initiatives can foster encounters between mobile and sedentary residents, and thus social inclusion.**
- A majority of mobile children attend public school, creating new demands on teachers and the educational system, which are not always acknowledged.**

Four Challenges for Mobile Families in Switzerland

The international mobility of professionals has long been associated with the movement of corporate and business expatriates as well as diplomats and their privileged living conditions. Nowadays, a wider range of professionals, e.g., scientists, IT experts, entrepreneurs, academics, international civil servants, need to move for their career trajectories, and they often do so with their partners and

children. These repeated relocations have challenging implications for these families’ lives. Interviews with members of mobile families – person having moved to Switzerland with a working contract, partner, one or many children – as well as data from the Migration-Mobility Survey show four specific challenges faced by this population.

First, the high cost of living in Switzerland suspends the “privileged” status that these mobile families could have in other countries. Additionally, the traditional full support package that covers expenses of accommodation, childcare, and relocation is often not included in their contracts, or only partially. Consequently, these families have to find accommodation and local goods under conditions similar to permanent residents, but without the same social networks.

A second challenge comes from the fact that professionals’ contracts are often fixed-term. This is especially the case for early and mid-career academics and international civil servants. While allowing for great flexibility, this form of contract is likely to create conditions of precariousness, due to constant relocation and flexibility as part of the employment prospect.

Third, dual career arrangements have increasingly become the norm in mobile families. The accompanying partner often faces practical challenges in finding a new employment in the Swiss labor market. This is due, for example, to a lack of local language knowledge or to skill mismatch. An increasing number of men follow their working female partner in international mobility, also in Switzerland. Some of these partners are confronted with challenges relating to their work transition, as well as to gender-based social expectations.

Finally, a significant number of these professionals' children are now enrolled in Swiss public schools rather than international schools. For instance, 74,3% of the Migration-Mobility Survey respondents with children living in Switzerland have enrolled them in public schools. Although only temporarily in Switzerland, these children may thus get a significant part of their primary and/or secondary education in the country. They often have rich experiences due to their mobility and can quickly pick up new languages. But, according to their parents, they can also experience difficulties if schools do not attend their specific needs.

Strategies Facilitating the Life of Families on the Move

Families in repeated mobility develop strategies to adjust to diverse host countries and live temporarily in Switzerland. For instance, they find support in self-organized groups of people having comparable experiences (rather than relocation agencies) for practical help as well as psychological support. They often wish to meet long-term resident people, but do not always feel easily accepted. Children can play an integrative role, and local events and associations can facilitate such meetings; conversely, when this contact cannot take place, these families turn to people with mobile experience, creating what is perceived as an "expat bubble".

Overall, mobile families' first priority is to recreate the same activities everywhere. They thus reinforce their daily life routines, practice similar sports across countries, and create a space to engage as a family in regular activities. They also progressively detach from material objects. Many move "light" and prioritize carrying small gadgets and children's toys, for instance. Furthermore, these families build a continuum of social relationships by, at the same time, enlarging their social networks at the local level and strengthening particular transnational ties, and focusing inward on the relationships within the nuclear family.

Hence, our study shows that families can live on the move, as long as they develop a sense of continuity across countries and are capable of re-establishing a sense of active determination over the constant changes, while temporarily settling in.

Implications for Practitioners and Policy-Makers in Switzerland

The increasingly high number of mobile families temporarily in Switzerland raises a series of challenges for the country. In particular, facilitating the professional integration of the (often highly skilled) accompanying partners would be in the interest of both the Swiss economy and the well-being of these individuals and their families.

Moreover, mobile families in Switzerland often wish to join local communities: local initiatives (such as "meet the neighbors" parties) may support social inclusion, rather than social division between mobile and sedentary residents.

Finally, as the majority of mobile families send their children to public school, they create new demands on teachers. Examples are the need to facilitate rapid linguistic integration, or the management of diverse life and schooling experiences in the classroom. When their needs for flexibility are not attended, these children may be reoriented to international schools. This is a loss both for the educational system that has already invested in these children, as well as for the families given the integrative power of public schools. Facilitating school integration may encourage these children with rich experiences to pursue higher education in Switzerland rather than abroad.

Key Publications

- Cangià, Flavia, Tania Zittoun, and Déborah Levitan. "Work and Geographical Mobility: The Case of the Male Accompanying Spouses." In *Culture, Work and Psychology: Invitations to Dialogue*, edited by Pedro Bendassoli. Charlotte, NC: Advances in Cultural Psychology, Information Age Publishing, 2018.
- Cangià, Flavia. "Precarity, Imagination, and the Mobile Life of the 'Trailing Spouse.'" *Ethos* 46, no. 1 (2018): 8–26.
- Levitan, Déborah. "The Art of Living in Transitoriness: Strategies of Families in Repeated Geographical Mobility." *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 2018 (online version).
- Levitan, Déborah, Tania Zittoun, and Flavia Cangià. "Relocation Experts for Families in Geographical Itinerancy: Beyond the 'Cultural Problem.'" In *Cultural Psychology of Intervention in the Globalized World*, edited by Sanna Schlieve and Nandita Chaudhary. Charlotte, NC: Advances in Cultural Psychology, Information Age Publishing, 2018.
- Zittoun, Tania, Déborah Levitan, and Flavia Cangià. "A Sociocultural Approach to Mobility: The Case of Repeated Mobility of Families." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2018 (online version).