administrative sciences

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Highly Skilled Migrant and Non-Migrant Women and Men: How Do Differences in Quality of Employment Arise?

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Abstract: Research shows that highly skilled migrant women often have poor quality jobs or no employment. This paper addresses two research gaps. First, it provides a comparative perspective that examines differences and commonalities in the quality of employment of four highly skilled groups: migrant- and non-migrant women and men. Four statistical indicators are examined to grasp these differences: employment rates, income, adequacy of paid work, and employment status. The results highlight the role of gender and country of birth: Swiss-born men experience the best employment quality, and foreign-born women the worst. Second, it offers a family perspective to study how the employment trajectories of skilled migrant women develop in time and place in relation to their partners'. The qualitative life-course analysis indicates that skill advancement is more favourable for migrant and non-migrant men than for migrant and non-migrant women. However, skill advancement for migrant women depends greatly on the strategies enacted by domestic partners about how to divide paid employment and family work, and where to live. The statistical study draws on recent data from Swiss labour market surveys. The life-course analysis focuses on 77 biographical interviews with tertiary-educated individuals. Participatory *Minga* workshops are used to validate the study results.

Keywords: migration; highly skilled; labour market outcomes; quality of employment; employment trajectories; employment inequalities; family; gender inequality; life-course analysis; participatory research; mixed methods

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Citation: Riaño, Yvonne. 2021. Highly Skilled Migrant and Non-Migrant Women and Men: How Do Differences in Quality of Employment Arise?. *Administrative Sciences* 11: 5. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11010005

Received: 18 October 2020
Accepted: 31 December 2020
Published: 8 January 2021

1. Introduction

Knowledge-based economies require highly skilled labour. In response, countries of the global North have established migration policies to attract international skilled workers, known as tertiary-educated individuals. However, research shows that many highly skilled migrants are either constrained to employment below their skill level or cannot find work at all (Bauder 2003; Riaño 2011; Pecoraro 2016). Particularly affected are highly skilled migrant women (Chicha 2012). Research results indicate that, compared with highly skilled migrant men in Switzerland, migrant women work more frequently below their skill levels and are more often unemployed (Gerber and Wanner 2019).

Furthermore, the correlation between family status and labour market disadvantage appears to be significant. Highly skilled migrant women who arrive as family migrants (i.e., through reunification with a partner who migrated earlier, or by marrying a Swiss citizen or Swiss resident) and have children are more likely to be excluded from the labour market than women who arrive as economic migrants and do not have children (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007; Gerber and Wanner 2019). Women arriving as family migrants report experiencing several types of exclusion, based either on their status as migrants, women, mothers, or nationals from Africa, Asia or Latin America (idem). How can these labour market disadvantages be explained, and how do they arise? To address these questions, two main research gaps are examined.

First, migration studies lack a comparative understanding of differences and commonalities in the quality of employment of both migrant and non-migrant women and

men who are educated to tertiary level. Using econometric models, Friedberg (2000) has compared migrants with natives in the USA, but without considering gender. Similarly, Chiswick and Miller (2009) have only focused on foreign-born and native men in the USA. We need an "intersectional" perspective (Crenshaw 1989; Nash 2008) that examines how various categories of social difference, such as gender and country of birth, intersect to create different employment opportunities for women and men (Riaño 2011).

The premise of this paper is that social understandings of gender and ethnicity have a direct influence on the differentiated abilities of highly skilled women and men (both native and foreign-born) to participate in the labour market. In this paper, the notion of gender refers to societal representations of "feminine" versus "masculine" identities (West and Zimmerman 1987). "Femininity" is usually connected with domesticity and part-time paid employment, identifying women as caregivers, domestic workers and consumers. "Masculinity" represents men as breadwinners and being more suitable than women for certain spheres of paid employment and public life. Such ideas have structured many social practices and institutional arrangements in Switzerland, resulting in gender inequalities in the labour market and in other public spheres of society.

Ethnicity refers to the categorising of individuals into collective social representations based on supposed similarities and differences, thus drawing social boundaries between "us" and "others". Those perceived as "us" are accepted and incorporated, whereas "others" are perceived as aliens and may be subject to discrimination and exclusionary practices (Barth 1969). In the Swiss context, foreign-born individuals are frequently perceived by natives as "other", a status often associated with a loss of power, identity and sense of self. Moreover, social and cultural capital is often devalued by migrant status (Riaño 2011), creating social and employment inequalities (Bauder 2003).

Second, the employment trajectories and labour market integration of highly skilled-individuals are often explained from a perspective that stresses the role of the individual. Yet, there is also a family dimension (Guillaume 2002; Riaño 2012). The family sphere is key to understanding how inequalities of skill development arise (cf. Kofman and Raghuram 2005). At present, there is insufficient understanding of how the division of paid employment and domestic responsibilities among domestic partners holds back an individual's career advancement, particularly that of highly skilled migrant women. Research shows that this division, usually referred to as the "gendered division of labour", creates inequalities of professional trajectories in dual-career households (Ledin et al. 2007). Domestic responsibilities—housework, childcare, and care of other relatives—are often shouldered by the woman, which constrains her abilities to develop her professional skills (Levy and Widmer 2013).

Some of the most persistent barriers to the mobilisation of women's professional skills appear to be domestic (Riaño et al. 2015; Ernst Stähli et al. 2008; Tissot 2020). Rising female employment rates in Switzerland are taken as a sign of increasing gender equality. However, with the arrival of the first child, families begin to organise along more traditional lines, with men increasing their paid work time and women reducing or even interrupting their professional activities (Levy 2018). Since the evolution of the professional trajectories of domestic partners is mutually connected, they must be studied from a relational perspective. Gender inequality in the division of professional and family work among couples is thus a key factor in understanding the labour market disadvantages faced by highly skilled migrant women. Therefore, the employment trajectories of highly skilled migrant women must be studied in relation to that of their partners'.

These knowledge gaps are addressed through the following specific questions: (a) How does the quality of employment of highly skilled Swiss-born and foreign-born women and men in the Swiss labour market vary, and to what extent are they able to utilise their tertiary education? (b) How does the distribution of paid employment and family work between couples shape the career trajectories of highly skilled migrant women compared to their partners'?

Switzerland is chosen as case study for two main reasons. First, at nearly 25% of the total resident population (SFSO 2019a), it has the second-largest foreign-born population among countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and depends heavily on highly skilled foreign labour. The number of migrants with tertiary education has more than doubled in the past 25 years (Wanner and Steiner 2018). Furthermore, migrant women have a higher education level than Swiss-born women: 44% of employed migrant women, from the European Union (EU), and 41% of their counterparts from non-EU countries, are university-educated compared to 31% of Swiss women (SFSO 2017). Foreign-born men had a comparable education to Swiss-born men, 41% of whom had tertiary skills compared to 45% and 40% of their counterparts from EU and non-EU countries (SFSO 2017). Second, gender policies targeting equal education and employment opportunities have advanced considerably in recent decades. However, women's average income remains lower than men's despite equality of qualifications (SFSO 2019b).

This paper is divided into five parts. Following the introduction, the second part describes the methodological approach, and the third part introduces the research results. These are divided into three sections: first, the results of analysing official Swiss statistics on the employment situation of tertiary-educated individuals in Switzerland by gender and country of birth are introduced. Subsequently, this paper explores why migrant women are the most disadvantaged in the skilled labour market, and how this happens. Finally, three case studies are presented, comparing the employment trajectories of migrant women and their partners, their strategies to divide paid- and care work, and the outcomes of their respective gender roles. The Section 4 discusses the research results. The Section 5 concludes the paper and advances some new perspectives for migration and labour market policy-making.

2. Methodological Approach: Official Statistics and Biographical Interviews

Using qualitative and quantitative data is useful for addressing the questions posed in this paper. Statistical data allows us to capture numerically representative trends while qualitative data explains the processes and dynamics underlying these trends. To address the question of differences in quality of employment of highly skilled individuals by gender and country of birth, and the extent to which they are able to use their tertiary education, the paper analyses official Swiss statistics. These provide a numerical overview of patterns and trends in the quality of employment of tertiary-educated Swiss-born and foreign-born women and men in Switzerland.

Using descriptive statistics, four statistical indicators are examined in order to assess the employment situation of the four groups: employment rate, income, adequacy of paid work according to professional qualifications, and employment status. These indicators reveal the outcomes of labour market integration, or lack thereof, as follows: (a) "employment rate" measures the number of people who have a job as a percentage of the working-age population and thus the extent to which each group is able to participate in the labour market; (b) "income" measures the monthly gross income of individuals and therefore, in principle, their ability to reach and maintain a certain standard of living; (c) "adequacy of paid work according to professional qualifications" measures the number of people working in a position commensurate with their tertiary education and professional experience. This estimates the extent to which they can use and develop their professional qualifications; and (d) "employment status" measures the number of people in leadership positions. This indicates the potential degree of influence they can exert in their field of work. Two statistical databases are analysed: the 2017 Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS)[1] and the 2018 Swiss Earnings Structure Survey (ESS)[2]. The analysis of current data

[1] The Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS) includes a statistically representative sample of 50,000 people. The 2017 survey contains a module on migration, which made an intersectional analysis of gender and country of birth possible.

[2] The Swiss Earnings Structure Survey (ESS) is a written survey carried out every two years in enterprises in Switzerland. It contains data from 44,600 private and public businesses and institutions, including salaries for 1.7 million people.

is complemented with a retrospective analysis of the 2008 SLFS and ESS surveys to uncover trends (Bühler and Riaño 2014).

Second, explaining the labour market disadvantages faced by highly skilled migrant women, and why they arise, necessitates a qualitative *life-course analysis*, which assesses how the employment situation of an individual evolves over time and space. Employment is not a singular event but a dynamic phenomenon that may fluctuate between stagnation, re-orientation and achievement. The life-course analysis has been defined as a "sequence of age-related and institutionally embedded role configurations and status passages" that an individual enacts over time (Wingens et al. 2011, p. 4). This notion is compatible with the notion of 'trajectories', which refers to the employment course taken by a given person (Liversage 2009). The notion of the employment trajectory has the advantage of placing the dimensions of time and space at the core of inquiry. Individuals do not follow employment trajectories in abstract spaces but in concrete geographical places, which is important because the geographical location (central, peripheral) matters, as well as their size (large or small labour markets); as well as their gender culture and policy regimes (favourable or unfavourable to the integration of highly skilled migrants in the labour market). This paper therefore focuses on how the employment trajectories of highly skilled professionals evolve over time and place regarding quality of employment.

Moreover, the paper contends that the analysis of primary qualitative data is best suited for a life-course analysis of how and why highly skilled migrant women face labour market disadvantages, and how the distribution of paid employment and family work among couples shapes their career trajectories compared to their partners. The qualitative approach goes beyond a descriptive understanding of inequality patterns in the employment quality of individual and instead grasps the reasons and processes behind advantages or disadvantages. Consequently, this paper adopts the qualitative method of biographical interviews, which describes key biographical milestones (Denzin 1989) in the employment trajectories of individuals. This method allows a relational and processual understanding of how domestic partnership arrangements affect women's ability to mobilise their professional skills.

Case studies for the biographical interviews were selected via the "maximum variation sampling" (Maykut and Morehouse 2000), of individuals who represent a wide range of experiences relating to a particular phenomenon. The goal is not to build a random and statistically generalizable sample, but to represent a range of experiences relating to the study subject. Tertiary-educated individuals were thus selected based on diverse criteria, including country of birth, gender, age, family status, and residential location. The study participants are trained in professions including social and educational sciences, economics, management, law, health, natural sciences, architecture and engineering.

The study sample for the qualitative life-course analysis comprised 77 individuals with tertiary education, who lived in a household with children, were above 40 years old (this age allows adequate time to study how skills evolve), and lived in 13 different Swiss cantons (central and peripheral locations), mainly in German-speaking regions. The initial aim was to interview equal numbers of individuals for each group, but varying degrees of participants' willingness made this difficult. Women are more prevalent in the sample (59%) since men were more reluctant to give interviews. However, the percentage of Swiss-born and foreign-born participants is approximately equal. Among the foreign-born, the percentage of non-EU interviewees is nearly 60% and the percentage of EU interviewees is over 40%.

Interview participants were involved through personal contacts, leaflet advertising, the snowball principle, and collaboration with professional associations. Since the ability to mobilise tertiary skills in the labour market is strongly related to gendered divisions of housework and paid employment, both partners in the relationship were interviewed. Each interview was conducted separately to ensure freedom of expression. The bargaining power of an individual within a partnership depends heavily on their country of birth (c.f. Riaño et al. 2015). The social, institutional and legal resources of native people

are often stronger than those of people who have grown up abroad because the former have experience of living and working in Switzerland, are familiar with the country's gender expectations and norms, have acquired local professional qualifications, speak the languages of the country, and have established social and professional networks, and a Swiss passport. All this creates, in principle, better conditions for Swiss-born than for foreign-born to get better-paid employment and thus a stronger economic position within the relationship, which often coincides with more power to negotiate gender arrangements.

Therefore, to take account of differences or commonalities in country of birth, three types of couples were included in the study: (a) Swiss couples (two native Swiss nationals); (b) bi-national couples (one foreign-born individual and one native Swiss national); and (c) migrant couples (both foreign-born individuals).

The interviews were analysed using the qualitative content analysis method, an interpretative approach that condenses data and identifies key themes through deductive and inductive coding procedures[3]. The results were validated through two Minga workshops in the Swiss cities of Basel and Bern. This action-oriented method consists of reflecting on the research results with the interview partners and subsequently reflecting on appropriate policies for encouraging gender equality in the workplace (Riaño 2015). The workshops were held in cooperation with the Offices of Gender Equality of Basel and Bern, each with a total of 30 research participants.

3. Results

3.1. Employment Quality of Highly Skilled Professionals: Inequalities by Gender and Country of Birth

This section examines the results of the analysis of official statistics on the employment quality of highly skilled individuals in the Swiss labour market to ascertain what differences and commonalities exist, and whether it is conducive to developing their professional skills.

Individuals are differentiated by country of birth (Swiss-born/foreign-born) and by gender (women/men). When data is available, foreign-born individuals are differentiated between EU and non-EU nationals. The reason for this choice is that current policies in Switzerland differentiate between EU and non-EU nationals in terms of migration and integration rights. EU nationals enjoy freedom of mobility and facilitated integration (resulting from bilateral agreements with the EU) whereas non-EU nationals face significant restrictions on their mobility and residential rights. Tables 1–5 below show the results of the statistical analysis for each one of the employment indicators used: employment rates, income, adequacy of paid work according to professional qualifications, and employment status. The assessment is based on the assumption that full-time employment commensurate with professional qualifications, an adequate salary and/or a leadership position are the ideal conditions for using and developing their tertiary skills.

Table 1. Employment Rates of Highly Skilled Individuals in Switzerland by Gender and Country of Birth (15–60 years old), 2017.

	Women	Men	Gender Gap
Swiss-born	90%	94%	4%
Foreign-born	75%	90%	15%
Born in EU28/EFTA countries	80%	92%	12%
Born in other European countries	69%	86%	17%
Born in non-European countries	65%	85%	20%

Data source: SFSO—Swiss Labour Force Survey, 2017. (Survey sample: 50,000 people).

[3] Following an iterative process, some first interviews were analyzed to gain initial insights and develop a preliminary coding system. The MAXQDA software was used for coding the interviews.

Table 2. Unemployment Rates of Highly skilled Individuals in Switzerland by Gender and Country of Birth (15–60 years old), 2017.

	Women	Men	Gender Gap
Swiss born	2.3%	2.1%	0.2%
Foreign born	9.6%	5.7%	3.9%
Born in EU28/EFTA countries	7.6%	4.5%	3.1%
Born in other European countries	11.0%	8.3%	2.7%
Born in non-European countries	14.0%	8.6%	5.4%

Data source: SFSO—Swiss Labour Force Survey, 2017 (Survey sample: 50,000 people).

Table 3. Gross Monthly Salary for Swiss and Foreign Citizens *, by Type of University and Gender, Including both Private and Public Sectors, Switzerland, 2018.

	Classical Universities			Universities of Applied Sciences		
	Women	Men	Gender Gap	Women	Men	Gender Gap
Swiss citizens	9063	11,185	2122	8114	9914	1800
Foreign citizens:	8333	10,189	1856	7584	9129	1545
Short-term permit (L)	6803	7704	901	6630	7527	897
1-year permit (B)	7631	8961	1330	6863	8197	1334
Settlement permit (C)	9919	11,894	1975	8140	9802	1662
Border-crossing permit (G)	7598	9424	1826	7523	8964	1441

* Median value in Swiss Francs (1 Euro = 1.07 Swiss francs). *Data source*: SFSO—Swiss Earnings Structure Survey, 2018 (It contains data from 44,600 private and public businesses and institutions, including salaries for 1.7 million people). Standardised monthly salary: Full-time equivalent; 40 h per week. Median value: For half of the jobs, the standardised salary is above the median value presented here; the other jobs fall below this value.

Table 4. Adequacy of Paid Work: Distribution of Employees with Tertiary Education by Nationality, Skill Level, and Gender, Switzerland, 2018.

Nationality	Skill Level	Women	Men
Swiss citizens	1. Simple tasks	2%	2%
	2. Practical tasks	12%	12%
	3. Complex practical tasks	27%	21%
	4. Complex problem-solving and decision-making	59%	65%
Foreign citizens	1. Simple tasks	2%	2%
	2. Practical tasks	13%	11%
	3. Complex practical tasks	28%	21%
	4. Complex problem-solving and decision-making	57%	66%

Data source: SFSO—Swiss Earnings Structure Survey, 2018. (Population universe: employees in the private and public sectors. Data from 44,600 private and public businesses and institutions). 1 = Simple physical or manual tasks. 2 = Practical tasks (e.g., sales, care, driving, security, use of machinery, data). 3 = Complex practical tasks that require knowledge in a specialised field. 4 = Tasks that require an ability to solve complex problems and make decisions based on specialised theoretical and factual knowledge.

Table 5. Employment Status of Tertiary-Educated Professionals by Gender and Country of Birth, Switzerland (15–60 years old), 2017.

	Women				Men			
	1 Self-Employed	**2 Members of Management**	**3 Leadership Role**	**4 No Leadership Role**	**1 Self-Employed**	**2 Members of Management**	**3 LeadershipRole**	**4 No Leadership Role**
Swiss-born	12%	7%	19%	62%	17%	13%	31%	39%
Foreign-born	12%	7%	21%	60%	12%	12%	31%	45%
Born in EU28/EFTA countries	12%	6%	24%	58%	12%	13%	31%	44%
Born in other European countries	9%	8%	16%	67%	13%	8%	33%	46%
Born in non-European countries	11%	6%	21%	62%	13%	11%	29%	47%

Data source: SFSO—Swiss Labour Force Survey, 2017 (Survey sample: 50,000 people).

3.1.1. Employment and Unemployment Rates

"Employment rates" measure the degree to which highly skilled native and foreign-born individuals (tertiary education) participate in the Swiss labour market. For a start, at 80% in 2020, Switzerland has a relatively high employment rate compared to other countries such as the USA (56%) and Germany (76%) (Trading Economics 2020). Table 1 (below) shows the percentage of highly skilled professionals in Switzerland in paid employment in each of the four studied groups. Foreign-born individuals are further differentiated according to whether they were born in (a) a European Union member state, (b) other European countries, and (c) non-European countries.

Table 1 shows a higher-than-average employment rate among Swiss people with tertiary education, reflecting the advantages of being Swiss-born. At the same time, men, both Swiss-born and foreign-born, show a significant employment advantage over foreign-born women. Furthermore, gender intersects with country of birth: foreign-born women from non-European states experience the lowest employment rate of all groups. Thus, gender and country of birth are key variables in explaining differences in employment rates among the highly skilled. For highly skilled migrant women, tertiary education per se does not necessarily guarantee employment.

In terms of the "unemployment rate", which measures the numbers of unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force[4], Switzerland has a relatively low unemployment rate (3.2 % in 2020) compared to other countries such as the USA (8%) and Germany (4.4%) (Trading Economics 2020). Table 2 below shows unemployment rates for each one of the four studied groups.

Table 2 shows that country of origin plays an important role in employment: Swiss men have the lowest level of unemployment (2.1%), followed by Swiss women (2.3%). In contrast, foreign-born men (5.7%), and foreign-born women (9.6%) show much higher unemployment rates than the Swiss average (3.2%). Thus, in the case of unemployment, country of origin plays a more important role than gender. At the same time, gender and country of origin converge once again to the disadvantage of women born in non-European countries—their unemployment rate is the highest (14%) among the four studied groups, and nearly five times higher than the Swiss average.

[4] People actively seeking paid work.

3.1.2. Income

The "income" indicator estimates differences in monthly gross income between highly skilled Swiss-born and foreign-born individuals who work full-time. Tertiary-education can be obtained in Switzerland at universities with a classical orientation or at universities providing applied knowledge in sciences and arts, as seen in Table 3. The results presented below show that the monthly gross income of highly skilled individuals in Switzerland is generally above the Swiss average of 6304 Swiss Francs (5883 Euros) (Trading Economics 2020). Among the highly skilled, gender is key to shaping income inequalities: Swiss-born and foreign-born men receive the highest income, whereas foreign-born women are the lowest earners among all four groups. Interestingly, foreign-born men have higher salaries than Swiss-born women. Furthermore, the gender gap shown in Table 3 reflects the general situation in Switzerland. In 2018, men's earnings consistently exceeded those of women (SFSO 2019b).

3.1.3. Adequacy of Paid Work according to Professional Qualifications

The "adequacy of paid work" measures the number of people working in a position commensurate with their tertiary education and professional experience. This helps estimate the extent to which they can use and develop their professional qualifications. Table 4 below assesses what level of skill is required by the jobs of highly skilled professionals, by gender and country of birth. In this case, data is not available by "country of birth" but by "nationality". Thus, the distinction is between "Swiss citizens" and "foreign citizens". Four types of skill level are examined. The first, "simple tasks", is interpreted as a high level of discrepancy between workplace activities and tertiary-education. The second type "practical tasks" is also interpreted as not commensurate with the skills acquired by tertiary training. The third type "complex practical tasks" is viewed as activities only requiring a level of education corresponding to vocational training. These first three situations imply that individuals with tertiary education are over-qualified for these positions. The fourth type "complex problem-solving and decision-making" is assessed as being the only one commensurate with tertiary-education.

Table 4 discloses that 'over-qualification' (i.e., carrying out employment tasks that are not commensurate with tertiary-education) affects all four studied groups to varying degrees. Gender, however, is the most important factor in creating inequalities since a higher percentage of foreign women (43%) and Swiss women (41%) are affected by overqualification compared to foreign men (34%) and Swiss men (35%). Nearly one third of all tertiary-educated women in Switzerland, whether Swiss or foreign, do not utilise their professional skills, despite the fact that in 2019 more women graduated with advanced degrees than ever before in Switzerland (SFSO 2019c).

3.1.4. Employment Status

Finally, employment status measures the numbers of people in leadership positions, and indicates the potential degree of influence that they can exert on their field of work. Table 5 below shows four types of situations in terms of employment status: 1. self-employment; 2. member of management; 3. leadership role; 4. no leadership role. The latter category ("no leadership role") can clearly not be considered as a position of direct influence while categories 2 ("member of management") and 3 ("leadership role positions") imply directing a group of people or an organisation and therefore exerting influence. The first category, "self-employment" is harder to assess because working for oneself does not necessarily imply exerting influence over a group or an organisation. Also, self-employment can be precarious. Thus, the clear categories of "member of management" and "leadership role positions" are used to estimate the approximate percentages of highly skilled individuals who move to advanced positions in the labour market. The results show that country of birth is not the central factor behind inequalities in achieving positions of leadership, whereas gender plays a significant role. Among tertiary-educated Swiss-

born and foreign-born individuals in Switzerland, about 45% of the men occupy leading positions in their workplace, yet only a quarter of the women do so.

The above results demonstrate that in 2017/2018 gender was an omnipresent factor in shaping inequalities in the quality of employment of highly skilled migrant- and non-migrant men and women in Switzerland. Swiss-born and foreign-born men have higher rates of employment than Swiss-born and foreign-born women, and they more frequently occupied leading positions in jobs that were commensurate with their level of education. Moreover, the results show that, in the case of skilled migrant women, gender and country of birth intersect to create the highest degree of disadvantage among the four studied groups, as they have the lowest income, the lowest rate of employment, the highest rates of over-qualification, and only a few occupy leadership positions. Unfortunately, the patterns of labour market inequalities by gender and country of origin observed today are consistent with the same patterns of inequality observed a decade earlier, as our analysis of 2008 labour market data reveals (Bühler and Riaño 2014).

3.2. Why Are Migrant Women the Most Disadvantaged in the Highly Skilled Labour Market?

This section provides an overview of the results of the 77 biographical interviews regarding the outcomes of the employment trajectories of tertiary-educated native and foreign-born women and men in Switzerland. The interviews reveal that, compared to male partners, the employment trajectories of Swiss-born and foreign-born women are characterized by discontinuity. Women experience more difficulties than men in achieving similar—or less advantaged—positions in the labour market, as well as maintaining their professional skills over time. Foreign-born women, especially those from countries outside the EU, face particular difficulties of under-employment and over-qualification.

Research shows that the ability of skilled migrants to obtain employment commensurate with their qualifications is dependent on variable factors (Shirmohammadi et al. 2019). This study reaches similar conclusions. For a start, Switzerland's conservative gender culture limits opportunities for women to use and develop their professional skills. The interviews reveal that in many sectors of Swiss-German society—even among highly educated couples—there is a widespread assumption that external childcare impacts children negatively, that men should be the main income-earners, and that women should support their partners' careers by assuming childcare responsibilities.

Our interviewees said that a lack of access to affordable external childcare (combined with school schedules that conflict with a professional workday) make it very difficult for women with children to balance housework and paid employment. Particularly in the career-critical years between ages 30 and 40, many women in Switzerland typically reduce their paid-work hours to 50% or 60%, or stop paid employment to concentrate on family and child-care tasks. This constitutes a barrier for the professional advancement of many tertiary-educated women as data for Switzerland show (SFSO 2018). This is known as the "motherhood penalty", i.e., working mothers encountering systematic disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to men with children and child-free women. According to Anderson et al. (2003) this is typical of other industrialised nations including Australia, Japan, Poland, South Korea and the United Kingdom, and it shows no signs of declining. Several interviewed men revealed that, although they were willing to share childcare duties with their spouses, their employers (or prospective employers) expressed a reluctance to accommodate requests for reduced working hours, possibly perceiving it as a lack of commitment or competency in leadership positions.

The 77 interviews show that while couples often begin with similar educational levels and the desire to advance professionally, gender-based inequalities in their quality of employment develop and consolidate over time. In the case of migrant women (especially those from countries outside the EU), the first obstacle is that their foreign educational and professional qualifications risk being devalued by prospective employers in Switzerland. Migrant job-seekers must overcome an absence of professional networks, limited knowl-

edge of the Swiss labour market, and limited linguistic competency in the Swiss German dialect as well as standard German (in many cases).

In principle, foreign-born men, particularly those from non-EU countries, face the same obstacles as foreign-born women. However, the interviews show that Switzerland's gender culture favours male career development and helps foreign men compensate for existing disadvantages, whereas women are expected to reconcile housework and paid employment with little institutional support. This is particularly challenging for migrant women due to the absence of family support networks often enjoyed by Swiss-born women. Migrant men in bi-national marriages often get more support from their Swiss partners to advance professionally compared with foreign-born women in the same situation. As Switzerland's gender culture views men as the main income-earners, the interviews show that Swiss-born women support their foreign-born husbands, either by assuming a higher bulk of childcare and housework, mobilising personal contacts to help their husbands get a job, and/or coaching them through the job seeking process. Cases of Swiss-born men doing the same for their foreign-born spouses are limited.

Moreover, the interviews reveal further obstacles faced by foreign-born women with tertiary education. These women often arrive in Switzerland at a child-bearing age. Having started a family with their partners, they often take on the bulk of childcare responsibilities, and struggle to acquire competency in German without regular or full-time employment in their field. Finally, Swiss migration and integration policies are unfavourable to foreign-born women, particularly those from countries outside the EU. Many skilled migrant women arrive in Switzerland as trailing spouses and are not recognised by the state as immigrants with their own economic potential. Consequently, they are not targeted by migrant integration programmes, and programmes that prevent the loss of professional qualifications for accompanying family members are extremely rare (Bachmann 2014; Riaño et al. 2015). Finally, women who arrive as spouses lack independent residential rights, as their Swiss residence permits are linked to their marriage status for the first three years. In the interviews, many women state that these factors led to unexpected gender inequalities in their relationships. Research has shown that the migration status of dependents or tied migrants (Raghuram 2004) often shapes the professional prospects of migrant women.

The interviews illustrate diverse models of family-work arrangements and their effects. For example: (a) where the man works full-time and the woman assumes both domestic and professional work (i.e., part-time paid work/no paid work), posing barriers to advancing her professional skills; (b) where the partners share paid and household work, creating favourable opportunities for the professional advancement of both; or (c) where, in national couples, the foreign-born individual has less bargaining power than the Swiss-born partner and therefore risks not being able to develop their professional skills.

3.3. Professional Trajectories and Strategies Developed by Couples about Where to Live, and How to Divide Paid Work and Care Work: Impact on Career Development

As argued above, the employment-related bargaining power of individuals within a migrant couple strongly depends on whether they were born and raised in Switzerland or not. Therefore, to understand how (in)equalities of opportunities to develop their professional skills arise within a partnership, this section examines the employment trajectories of three couples, two bi-national and one where both people are foreign-born: (1) Mjelde-Müller (bi-national), (2) Rodríguez-Schmid (bi-national), and (3) Sen-Patel (both foreign-born).[5] The first case exemplifies typical processes by which migrant women find themselves unemployed or precariously employed, despite a high level of education. The second case illustrates that even within a conservative gender culture, highly skilled migrant women do not necessarily waste their skills—the outcome depends largely on arrangements to share paid employment and unpaid household work. The third case

[5] All names have been anonymized.

illustrates how country of birth, study discipline, residential location, income level, and equal family-work arrangements combine to create positive conditions for advancing the professional skills of both partners.

Focusing on bi-national couples (the first two case studies) is particularly interesting for this study. First, they exemplify asymmetric power dynamics within a relationship: the native partners benefit from formal citizenship as well as Swiss social and cultural capital, enabling them to more easily utilise their skills than the foreign-born partners. Understanding how bi-national couples deal with such inequalities is important. Second, research on bi-national couples is scant even though they constitute more than a third of new marriages each year in Switzerland.

3.3.1. Case Study: Ms. Mjelde & Mr. Müller: Migrant Woman Works below Her Qualifications; Her Swiss Partner's Job Matches His Skills and Experience

Ms. Mjelde was born and raised in a Scandinavian country and studied agronomy there. Mr. Müller was born and raised in Switzerland and studied forest science. At the time of the interview, they were living in a small Swiss town and had two children. Mr. Müller was satisfied with his job as a project manager for the local government. By contrast, Ms. Mjelde struggled. She first gained paid employment 11 years after completing tertiary education. At the time of the interview, 26 years after graduation, she had a care-assistant job helping elderly people, a position clearly not commensurate with her agronomy training. Although Ms. Mjelde and Mr. Müller began with the same qualifications and personal motivations, gender-based inequalities appeared over time. Why?

It began with Ms. Mjelde's migration to Switzerland, when she thought she would face no professional barriers given her qualifications and knowledge of German. Mr. Müller was averse to move to Scandinavia as he feared losing his professional networks in Switzerland. After Ms. Mjelde arrived in Switzerland, they got married, she fell pregnant, and Mr. Müller took over a consulting firm in a small Swiss town. There they started building a family home, which was Mr. Müller's dream. He was fully committed to his new firm. When their first child was born, she became responsible for childcare due to her husband's work commitment, lacking day care facilities and close family networks. Being young, Ms. Mjelde felt compelled to adapt to a local culture in which most young mothers stayed at home. She applied for jobs but found that local candidates were chosen. Applying elsewhere was infeasible due to a lack of mobility and scheduling flexibility resulting from her childcare obligations. By migrating to Switzerland, Ms. Mjelde involuntarily entered into a traditional model of gender roles and faced professional de-skilling as the interview quotation below illustrates:

> "[The distribution of care work and paid employment] was not satisfactory for me. As a young woman I imagined living in a different family model."

In hindsight, the couple realized they never reflected on how to distribute paid and unpaid work so that they could both advance professionally. Moreover, Ms. Mjelde says that in Scandinavia she was accustomed to professional couples easily reconciling family and career, and she assumed this would be similar in Switzerland:

> " . . . In my country, absolutely no problem, social services and day care were so widely available already in the 1970s, that both [members of the couple] can work... In Switzerland when the children arrive the mother stays home... And ten years pass until the woman says 'Yes, I would like to restart my professional career'."

> "I was almost around the children too much. They could have also developed well in a crèche... Generations of Scandinavians grew up in childcare centres... and one cannot say that children became disturbed people [laughs]."

Today, Ms. Mjelde is critical of the decisions made in the past and believes that she should have started thinking about her professional future earlier and look at the issue of external childcare differently:

> "Today, I would certainly start immediately with courses to improve my German... That is very important... Also, I would be much more conscious about what to do regarding my professional perspectives . . . I should have started much earlier with occupational retraining or continuing education... Also, I would have looked differently at the issue of external childcare."

Likewise, Mr. Müller is also critical of the decisions made in the past, as he did not give enough importance to Ms. Mjelde's professional development and invested too much time in his own professional development. Also, the decision to have children and build a house so early on was wrong because it closed the door for Ms. Mjelde's study and career advancement, as the interview quotations below illustrate:

> "I was very optimistic... I thought [my wife getting a job], no problem... I didn't realize... I thought everything would be much easier and straightforward."

> On having children: "The children came too quickly... We would probably do that differently today. Because otherwise the freedom [for my wife] to carry out further studies and everything else is gone... I think that if we had fostered her language [knowledge] and further education, things would have turned out differently..."

> "And I should have probably worked less... maybe I just didn't want to (laughs)... Yes, it would have been possible..."

> On having decided to build a house: "That was . . . not absolutely necessary in that phase of life when one, that is my wife, has children, has to orient herself professionally again, carry out further education... Without a financial burden one can keep more doors open."

3.3.2. Case Study: Ms. Rodríguez & Mr. Schmid: Migrant Woman and Her Swiss Partner Are Both in Employment according to Skills and Experience

Ms. Rodríguez was born and raised in Southern Europe and studied mathematics there. Mr. Schmid is Swiss-born and studied engineering in Switzerland. Being financially independent and being active beyond household work were important values for her as she expresses:

> "I am not a career person, I never was. But it was always important for me that I am financially independent and that I do something outside the home."

At the time of the interview, they lived in a small town in central Switzerland and had three young children. They both held jobs that matched their qualifications and had long-term prospects. Although Mr. Schmid's has more advantages to get a job in the highly skilled Swiss labour market due to his Swiss nationality, gender, professional networks and local university training, Ms. Rodríguez was also able to utilise and develop her skills as a mathematician.

This shows that skilled women in bi-national couples are not necessarily doomed to experience gender- and ethnic-based employment inequalities. Which strategies did Ms. Rodríguez and Mr. Schmid use to co-develop their professional skills? After migrating to Switzerland, the couple postponed having a family so that Ms. Rodríguez could advance her German language skills. They spoke German together and chose to live in a flat-sharing community so that she could practise with other native speakers. She also benefitted from Mr. Schmid's personal networks: his friends helped her find work, first as a statistician for an insurance company, then at a market research institution. The scarcity of mathematicians (particularly female ones) in Switzerland created a unique employment opportunity for Ms. Rodríguez, and she later obtained a position as a mathematics teacher at a Swiss high school as she recounts:

> "At that time, it was rather easy for mathematicians to get a job. Mathematicians and physicists were in great demand in Switzerland. That was in 1998 and virtually every company was looking for mathematicians or something similar"

Her gender was also instrumental: the school was explicitly looking for a female teacher to be a role model for female students as she expresses in her own words:

> "[. . .] that was really a special thing, so the former rector [of the high school] was a very communicative person and he really wanted a woman doing that job"

> "[. . .] the idea was of course to have a woman teaching science as a role model for girls . . . of course, they always had female language teachers, but not yet women teaching physics and mathematics"

Ms. Rodríguez and Mr. Schmid ultimately had three children. The couple's values regarding gender roles, career development and childcare helped Ms Rodríguez utilise and advance her skills. She wanted to work four days per week (whereas many mothers in Switzerland with young children reduce their work schedule to two or three days), so they sent their children to a creche. As the quotation below illustrates, Ms. Rodríguez was always in favour of having external care for her children:

> "From my experience in Spain, it was always clear to me that my children would go to a crèche"

Furthermore, since Ms. Rodríguez arrived in Switzerland at an older age than Ms. Mjelde (see previous case study), she was less vulnerable to pressure from the local conservative gender culture. Finally, her husband reduced his work schedule after the first child so that he could care for his children one day a week, thus easing Ms. Rodríguez' career advancement. This decision emerged from Mr. Schmid's appreciation that his wife had made a substantial effort to come to Switzerland and that he should therefore also commit to children care:

> "Yes, that was always clear to me because she [Ms Rodríguez] made a huge effort to come to Switzerland, to integrate, to look for a job, and therefore I cannot just say I will work full time and you stay home'. That was not possible. Therefore, I tried to work three days of the week [at an industrial company] and then they said, no, that it's not enough, they wanted four days of the week, and then somehow we finally agreed on me working three days and half [laughs]."

> "But when that [job offer in public administration] came, I thought, indeed this is an opportunity for me. It was a full-time position. I said 'No, four days'. I played a bit of poker [. . .]"

Interestingly, Mr. Schmid continued to advance professionally despite reducing his workload. In the case of this couple, it can be said that a situation of relative equality exists in terms of gender arrangements because both dedicate one day a week to taking care of their children while also satisfying their needs for professional development. This case study also shows the crucial role played by the Swiss partner in facilitating the foreign partner's career development. In sum, the quotes above reflect the partners' values in three important ways: (a) Ms. Rodríguez positive valuation of external child-care, and her desire to be financially independent from her partner; (b) Mr. Schmid's commitment to supporting his wife's career; and (c) by sharing household duties, they both advanced professionally.

3.3.3. Case study: Ms. Patel & Mr. Sen: Both Migrant Partners in Employment according to Skills and Experience

Both partners have the same educational resources and share the same foreign birth status. Ms. Patel studied biology in India and Mr. Sen studied electrical engineering. At the time of interview, they were living near Zurich with their two young children, and were employed in positions commensurate with their educational level and with long-term prospects. What strategies did they use to advance their professional skills and achieve employment equality regardless of gender?

Mr. Sen came to Switzerland as an IT specialist for a telecommunications company. His wife accompaniedr him and soon discovered that a degree from an Indian university was an asset for obtaining an IT job, even though it wasn't her field of study. This created a unique employment opportunity. She began a full-time job as an IT specialist and became

pregnant shortly thereafter. Her workplace was family-friendly. She could work part-time, and her employer provided childcare services. Furthermore, as Mr. Sen's job was not bound to a specific place or time, he could do housework while looking after his children. After the second child, Ms. Patel decided—against her husband's and her employer's wishes—to become a stay-at-home mother. After four years, she returned to full-time work as an IT specialist at a Swiss bank, which is her current position. Mr. Sen is currently in a leadership position, working full-time, and has flexibility to look after his children while working from home.

Their strategy to reconcile paid employment and household labour is a combination of external childcare, temporary nannies, and shared housework. Contrary to what some foreigners from Africa and Latin America experience, studying in India proved to be an asset to their professional careers. Furthermore, their residential location near Zurich, high salaries, and shared family-work arrangements intersected to create positive conditions for the skill development of both partners.

4. Discussion

Labour market research has highlighted the gender-specific disadvantages that highly skilled migrant women face, including unequal gender arrangements (Kofman and Raghuram 2005; Ernst Stähli et al. 2008; Aure 2013; Riaño et al. 2015); lack of financially and geographically accessible external support for those with childcare obligations (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007; Levy 2018; Gerber and Wanner 2019); occupational segregation (Kofman 2014); a lack of employment opportunities in a given sector for accompanying spouses (Tissot 2020); the employers' perception that female candidates are less suitable for the job because of their gender, age or religion (Riaño and Baghdadi 2007; Chicha 2012); and migration policies insufficiently focusing on their gender-specific disadvantages (Riaño 2012; Kofman 2014; Boucher 2018; Gomes de Araujo 2020). How do this paper's results advance our current understanding of inequalities in the quality of employment of highly skilled individuals?

Exploring intersections of gender, class, country of birth, residential location and family-work arrangements improves our understanding of how skilled individuals end up in disadvantaged or advantaged circumstances of employment. Thus, the statistical results show a complex hierarchy of inequalities in the quality of employment of highly skilled individuals in Switzerland, depending largely on gender and country of birth. This shows that skill-utilisation inequalities cannot be simply understood as situations of either equality or inequality. There is a variety of situations of disadvantage, which affect migrant women the most among the four studied groups, as they have the lowest income, lowest rate of employment, highest rates of over-qualification, and only a few of them occupy leadership positions. Furthermore, these patterns of inequality were already present a decade earlier, as our analysis of 2008 labour market data reveals (Bühler and Riaño 2014). The different situations of labour market advantage or disadvantage existing among the four studied groups need to be acknowledged and targeted by group-specific policies aimed at enabling all highly skilled professionals to improve their quality of employment. Pay equity will not only benefit highly skilled professionals and their families but also knowledge economies (Chicha and Charest 2009).

Furthermore, the qualitative results indicate the pertinence of a life-course perspective in understanding how and why inequalities in the labour market emerge, and how the employment trajectories of highly skilled migrant women evolve in relation to their partners'. The results show that gendered inequalities in career trajectories often emerge at critical biographical moments. This paper focuses on biographical milestones that play a potentially critical role in shaping the future of migrant women's skills, such as choosing a career, marriage, childbirth, divorce or retirement (Krüger and Levy 2001), all of which can result in "a loss or gain of privilege, influence or power, and a changed identity and sense of self, as well as changed behaviour" (Glaser and Strauss [1971] 2010, p. 2).

In studying these critical moments, particular attention is given to childbirth and transnational migration. Feminist research has shown that while having a child usually impacts women's careers negatively (Kahn et al. 2014), it often affects men's positively. However, transnational migration has not been addressed as a critical biographical moment although it is crucial because it can jeopardise the worth of migrants' skills. In addition to having children, the results reveal international migration as a further critical moment, as illustrated by the Mjelde-Müller case study: leaving the country of tertiary education and moving to Switzerland.

Another is internal migration: moving away from large urban centres to peripheral locations, where opportunities for skills development—particularly for foreign-born individuals—are limited. At the same time, international and internal migration critical moments may or may not play a negative role depending on where highly skilled individuals migrate to. In this sense, "the social and cultural capital of migrants has no universal value per se but is place-specific" (Riaño 2011, p. 1544; also see Aure 2013). This brings us to the next point:

The results reveal that critical places are intertwined with critical moments, i.e., the significance of a biographical moment depends on where it occurs. The ability to utilise skills depends on certain characteristics of the host country, including its geography (location, size, history, economy, infrastructure), society (institutions, politics, relationships), and culture (norms, values, regimes). Thus, depending on its "gender culture" (Pfau-Effinger 1998), the host country may offer varying degrees of institutional support for reconciling employment and family work, and its particular norms and values may therefore influence how women and men integrate differently into either household labour or the general workforce. Discrimination also prevents migrant women, particularly those from countries outside the EU, from using their tertiary qualifications in the labour market. For the purposes of this paper, a "critical place" is defined as one where it is particularly difficult for migrant women to use and practise their skills, whether due to stereotypical divisions of labour based on gender, prevailing discrimination against foreigners, or peripheral geographical location.

The qualitative results disclose that for many highly skilled migrant women, moving to Switzerland represents a challenge in managing family and professional life, and developing their professional skills. Switzerland has been described as a "conservative-traditionalist welfare regime" (Pfau-Effinger 1998, p. 162). Using the OECD family database, Tissot (2020) shows that family policies in OECD countries, including supporting the work of caring for children and family members, have undergone significant changes in the past 20 years. In Switzerland, however, these policies have lagged behind. From that point of view, Switzerland becomes a critical place for the development of migrant women's skills. Clearly, the above results illustrate that the choices made by the partners at key biographical transition points (i.e., critical moments) are bound to the constraints and opportunities determined by the specific gender culture of the places where they live (cf. Duncan and Smith 2002).

Migrating to Switzerland created power asymmetries between bi-national couples. These power asymmetries can be further reinforced by moving away from large urban centres to peripheral locations. Such locations present a further challenge for women due to traditionally conservative gender cultures, a lack of access to childcare infrastructure, and long commutes to larger job markets. The issue of where migrants use their tertiary skills is thus crucial for migration studies. In the Mjelde-Müller case they did not foresee the need to implement strategies to alleviate this situation. Subsequently, a lack of access to childcare, the financial burden of building a house, and the barriers to labour market that Ms. Mjelde faced as a migrant further reinforced their gender-based inequalities in terms of career opportunities. In contrast, Ms. Rodríguez and Mr. Schmid put strategies in place to share paid work and family work from the outset, which were conducive to facilitating the employment opportunities of Ms. Rodríguez.

Furthermore, the research results show that there is nothing inevitable about critical moments and critical places. Couples and individuals can mobilise their agency to creatively influence their futures. A couple's shared commitment to supporting the woman's professional development appears to be central. Moreover, the results also show that migrating to Switzerland does not necessarily make it impossible for migrant women to acquire new qualifications. In the case of Ms. Mjelde, she is in the process of acquiring new skills. However, there are several problems inherent to this solution, including both economic and psychological costs. For a start, the financial costs of a new training for skilled migrants must be paid, and so far, there is no state or university programme that addresses this need. The psychological costs can also be high as they cause stress and sometimes depression (Trevisan 2019). Moreover, the difficulty for migrant women of reconciling domestic and professional life still persists. Many migrant women thus resort to obtaining skills that are compatible with their childcare duties, even though they may not be in their preferred professional field.

5. Conclusions

This paper breaks new ground in the study of the employment trajectories of highly skilled migrant women by, first, comparing their quality of employment in relation to tertiary-educated foreign-born men and native-Swiss women and men, and second, by studying their employment trajectories in relation to their partners'. Statistical analyses of the 2017 Swiss Labour Force Survey and the 2018 Swiss Earnings Structure Survey show that the role of gender in shaping inequalities in the quality of employment of highly skilled migrant- and non-migrant women and men is central and pervasive. Swiss-born men experience the best employment quality and foreign-born women the worst. The latter score the lowest in terms of employment rates, income, adequacy of employment and leadership positions, showing that gender and country of birth can intersect to create the most disadvantageous situation in the Swiss labour market.

Biographical interviews demonstrate that professional skill advancement is more favourable for migrant men and native men than for migrant women, owing in great part to traditional, gender-based values which view men as the main income-earners and women as caretakers of the home and family. Couple relationships are thus micro-societies in which professional inequalities are not only shaped, but can also be reproduced. However, the final quality of employment of the migrant woman depends largely on the strategies that the couple develops to share paid employment and unpaid household work.

There are several propositions for better understanding how gender inequalities in skill-utilisation emerge among tertiary-educated individuals. First, skill-utilisation inequalities cannot be simply understood as situations of either equality or inequality. There is a continuum of inequalities ranging from extreme privilege to extreme disadvantage, depending mainly on gender and country of birth. Highly skilled migrant women emerge as the most disadvantaged. A lack of opportunity to practise and develop skills can cause them to follow "patterns of downward mobility" (Chang 2014) or become "marginalised elites" (Riaño 2015). Second, this paper highlights the importance of studying the division of paid and unpaid work within couples to understand how gender inequalities of skill-utilisation arise. It is not inevitable that highly skilled migrant women will lose their skills—the outcome depends to a great extent on a couple's strategies to share paid employment and unpaid household work. This has not been sufficiently addressed by migration research.

Third, giving attention to how critical moments intertwine with critical places is of paramount importance in understanding the evolution of gender inequalities in skill-utilisation. Critical moments are biographical milestones, such as the birth of a child or transnational migration, but parenthood is not necessarily the critical moment at which gender inequalities emerge. Migration from a country or region with a high level of gender equality to one with a more conservative gender culture can be the turning point. In such cases, parenthood only reinforces inequality between partners. Critical places are where

the "gender culture" remains traditionally conservative and mobility becomes a crucial factor in employment opportunities. These results support the work of Aure (2013) and Schaeper et al. (2001) who stress that labour market access is profoundly contextual in social, gender-related, cultural, and geographical terms.

Finally, migration- labour market- and regional planning policies targeting highly skilled migrant women need to give more attention to gender equality concerns if highly skilled migrant women's potential is to be fully realised (cf. Kofman 2014; Boucher 2018) and knowledge economies are to benefit. I suggest adopting four new policy perspectives:

An *intersectional* perspective: The concept of intersectionality can help organisations that assist highly skilled migrant women to better understand the dimensions of gender inequality. Highly skilled programmes need an intersectional perspective whereby the differentiated needs of women are addressed depending on their nationality, country of birth, ethnicity, age and ability. A greater cooperation between agencies working for migration and for gender equality issues bears great potential.

The perspective of *critical moments and critical places*: Policies of gender equality for highly skilled migrant women need to recognize the critical moments and critical places leading to the devaluation of their skills in order to be effective at the right times and in the necessary places. Adequate measures are required to prevent skill-devaluation as a result of critical biographical transitions, particularly international and internal migration, and childbirth.

The perspective of *regional disparities*: Policies attempting to address the locational disadvantages of highly skilled women living in areas with limited access to employment and external child-care need to devise programmes that facilitate their spatial mobility to more central areas and also support internet-based income-earning activities. There is much potential in migration- and regional planning authorities cooperating to improve access to childcare facilities and improving mobility infrastructure.

The *family and couple* perspective: Counselling programmes need to adopt a family perspective that targets couples rather than only individuals. They can help raise awareness among couples about the need to carefully assess how the professional future of both individuals may be impacted by their decisions over where to live, and how to divide paid work and unpaid work, thus avoiding potential disadvantages for highly skilled women. Bi-national couples exemplify particular asymmetric power dynamics within a relationship and thus need to be given attention by counselling programmes.

Funding: This research was supported by the Swiss National Center of Competence in Research 'nccr-on the move', which is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) [grant 142020].

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Restrictions apply to the availability of the full data from the Swiss Labour Force Survey 2017 and the Swiss Earnings Structure Survey 2018. Data for the analysis was obtained with the permission of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO).

Acknowledgments: I am grateful to the research participants for their great insights during the interviews and *Minga* workshops. Marco Pecoraro assisted me with statistical data processing. This paper benefitted from comments by the editors of this special issue as well as by anonymous reviewers.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest to be reported.

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