

## 11<sup>th</sup> International Metropolis Conference, Lisboa, Portugal, 5.10.06

### Expanding and Re-creating Spaces of Participation: Experiences and Strategies of Skilled Immigrant Women in Achieving Professional Integration



Foto: Baghdadi/Riaño

Yvonne Riaño / Nadia Baghdadi  
Department of Geography, University of Bern, Switzerland  
<http://www.giub.unibe.ch/sg/immigrantwomen>

# Introduction

- Labour market participation is an important aspect of citizenship
- Access to the labour market is controlled by immigration legislation
- Recent emphasis of immigration policies is on skilled migration
- Educational qualifications are seen as “key to integration”
- Institutionalised cultural capital (educational resources) can be transformed into economic capital (Bourdieu)

## Aims of presentation

- To what extent are skilled immigrant women from non-EU countries able to transfer their educational qualifications and achieve socio-economic citizenship?
- What are key factors influencing the process of socio-economic participation?
- What are the strategies of immigrant women to achieve professional integration?

## Approach for studying migrant women's economic citizenship

Citizenship is understood, in its wider sense, as „full membership in a community“ (Marshall 1950)

→ Equal opportunity of access to political, economic, social and symbolic resources (participation)

Intersectionality can be a useful approach for understanding the process of immigrants' access to societal resources (inclusion/exclusion)

→ Addresses the interplay of class, ethnicity and gender

Taking into account structure and agency (Giddens 1994)

# Joint production of knowledge between migrant women and academics



- Interactive group analysis (MINGA) of experiences and strategies of economic participation
- 12 MINGA-Workshops in Swiss German Regions (Zurich, Bern, Aargau)
- Case study of 56 women from Latin America, Middle East, South Eastern Europe
- Study framework: „Social Integration and Exclusion of Skilled Immigrant Women in Switzerland“ (NRP 51)

## Educational resources at time of arrival

Areas of origin / Education	Latin America	Middle East South East Europe	Total
<b>Highly-skilled</b>			
Commerce, business administration & Law	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>16</b>
Social & behavioural sciences, journalism	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>
Computer science, engineering, architecture	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>
Education / humanities	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
Medical science & health related	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Skilled</b> (Education after high-school in CH)	-	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>56</b>

## Overview of professional participation

Type of labour market participation		Latin America	Middle East/South East Europe
<b>a) Not in the labour market (30%)</b>	Not economically active	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
	Unemployed	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>b) Employment below skills (25%)</b>	Short-term employment	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	Long-term employment	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>c) Employment according to skills (45%)</b>	Short-term employment	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
	Long-term employment	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>

## Examples of professional participation

Education	Current occupation	Economic participation
1. Electrical engineer	Unemployed	<b>Not in the labour market</b>
2. Agronomist	Shop assistant	Employment <b>below skills, short-term</b>
3. Primary school teacher	Cashier at supermarket	Employment <b>below skills, long-term</b>
4. Political Scientist	Consultant (freelance)	Employment <b>according to skills, short-term</b>
5. Ethnologist	University lecturer	Employment <b>according to skills, long-term</b>



## Structural obstacles: Intersection of ethnicity, gender and class

### **Prejudiced ideas about the value of immigrant women's skills constrain access to skilled jobs**

- Employers and institutions undervalue the educational and professional experiences of immigrants, especially those from non-European countries
- No unified accreditation system available / decisions often subjective

## Structural obstacles: Intersection of ethnicity, gender and class

### Difficult conditions for immigrant women to acquire new skills and to work

- Traditional ideas about gender roles → lack of child-care facilities and work-unfriendly school schedules
- High costs of educational training and lack of programs for supporting skilled immigrants
- Unequal gender relations within the couple, especially in the case of bi-national marriages (e.g. Low priority given to immigrant women's education)

## Structural obstacles: Intersection of ethnicity, gender and class

### **Discrimination / disadvantages due to origin, religion and gender**

- Prejudices about ethnic origin and religious membership constrain access to skilled jobs
- Patriarchal ideas about gender roles constrain access to leading positions
- High-level language requirements constrain access to skilled jobs

### **Migration policies discriminate non-EU immigrants**

- Stratified system of immigrant rights (EU / Non-EU)
- Foreign spouses law

## Strategies and responses of immigrant women

<b>1. Try to access the labour market</b>	Take any job, often below qualifications
	Create own employment
<b>2. Do unpaid work</b>	Carry out voluntary social work
	Assume domestic role
<b>3. (Re-) skill</b>	Improve German proficiency
	Redo tertiary education
	Carry out postgraduate education
<b>4. Build networks</b>	Build social networks
	Build professional networks
<b>5. Find an escape</b>	Adopt victim attitude
	Return to country of origin

## Conclusions

- Despite educational qualifications and professional experiences poor economic citizenship
- Women from non-EU countries face disadvantages and discrimination due to origin, religion and gender
- Migrant women mobilise many resources to improve socio-economic participation and citizenship