

# **Temporal trends in intergenerational social mobility in Switzerland: A cohort study of men and women born between 1912 and 1974**

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## **Abstract**

The central question addressed in this paper is to what extent the influence of social origin on life chances has changed over time for both men and women. In order to capture this change, intergenerational social mobility of eight different birth-cohorts, covering most of the entire twentieth century, is analysed using a unique collection of twelve Swiss national population sample surveys. The main results show that social mobility has remained constant across cohorts born in 1912 and those born in 1974. This suggests that unlike some other industrialised countries, inequality based on social origin is persistent in Switzerland.

## **Key words**

Social mobility; stratification; inequality; change; gender.

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## **1 Introduction**

While most industrialized countries have featured extensive research into the degree of change over time in intergenerational social mobility, to date little research has been carried out on this issue in Switzerland. Indeed, information documenting the influence of social origin on life chances in Switzerland is still rather scarce. In their report on the inequality of opportunity in the Swiss educational system, Coradi Vellacott and Wolter (2005, 90) underline that inequalities based on social background are often missing in surveys or are often neglected in research in comparison with inequalities of gender and national origin.

Therefore, the central question addressed by this study is the degree to which social origin influences the social position achieved in Switzerland. In particular, this study focuses on analyzing whether the influence of social origin on life chances has changed over time in Switzerland or if it has remained constant for both men and women, that is, as a persistent inequality.

In order to capture this change, the present study analyzes intergenerational social mobility by using a unique collection of twelve Swiss national population sample surveys. These cover people born during the beginning and the latter half of the twentieth century. Outcomes indicate that in contrast to other industrialized countries such as Sweden, France and the Netherlands, inequality based on social origin has remained persistent in Switzerland between

the cohorts born in 1912 and those born in 1974.

I will present the current state of the debate on (non-)persistent inequality in social stratification research and then propose some hypotheses about social mobility. In the methodological part, I introduce my study design. The results section will begin with a description of changes in the composition of the Swiss class structure and then proceed to analyze Switzerland's social mobility, firstly in absolute terms, and secondly in relative terms, also often referred to under the term of social fluidity, which is a measure of the mobility net of structural change.

## **2 Debates in the literature**

When it comes to the issue of social mobility, researchers have often been interested in assessing to what extent it has changed over time and through which mechanisms. As for mechanisms, most contributions have shown the eminent importance of education for the creation and reproduction of social inequalities (Pollak et al. 2007, 12). As for the degree of change, the great amount of empirical research carried out on this issue demonstrates that the issue is still highly debated in sociology today.

Back in the post-Second World War years, functionalist theorists believed that economic development would lead industrial societies to become more meritocratic and to enjoy higher rates of social mobility (Kerr et al. 1960; Parsons 1960; Blau and Duncan 1967; Treiman 1970). This theoretical framework, known as the liberal theory of industrialism, claimed that social selection in industrial societies would steadily become more based on achievement (i.e., meritocratic assets) rather than on ascriptive characteristics (i.e., social origin, sex, national origin, race). As a result, these societies would offer greater equality of opportunity, and the effects of social origin on class destination would diminish over time. Nevertheless, the liberal theory of industrialism has received very little empirical support, and has been

subject to some stringent criticisms. Notably, some critics have pointed out that there is no necessary relationship between economic growth and increased social mobility (Breen 1997). In contrast, the renowned “FJH” hypothesis<sup>1</sup>, which states that patterns of mobility are expected to be very similar in industrial societies with a market economy and a nuclear family system (Featherman et al. 1975, 340), has been largely confirmed. The most notable empirical research to support this thesis is the Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations (CASMIN) project, which was initiated by Walter Müller and John Goldthorpe in the mid-1980s. This research, now widely known under the name of *The constant flux* (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992), demonstrates the persistence of a strong effect of class inheritance and similarities in the patterns of social fluidity between eleven industrialized countries. It further reveals a high degree of temporal stability in social fluidity. As underlined by Hout and DiPrete (2006, 5) in their review of the most eminent findings from the RC28<sup>2</sup>, the finding of a common pattern in social fluidity is acknowledged as being “the major intellectual accomplishment of the RC”.

However, despite its influential role on social stratification research, the constant flux thesis has been increasingly called into question over the last couple of decades. In fact, a great amount of empirical research has supported change and variation in social mobility (Ganzeboom et al. 1989; DiPrete and Grusky 1990; Jonsson and Mills 1993; Vallet 1999; Vallet 2004; Breen and Jonsson 2007). Breen’s (2004a) edited book, entitled *Social mobility in Europe*, analyzes temporal change and cross-national variation in social mobility in eleven European countries between 1970 and 2000. Authors find differences in the strength of fluidity between some countries and within some countries over time (Breen and Luijkx 2004a, 400). What is more, their analysis indicates a general tendency towards increasing social fluidity, although this trend is not statistically significant in every case (Breen and

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<sup>1</sup> The authors who proposed this hypothesis are Featherman, Jones and Hauser.

<sup>2</sup> Research Committee on Social Stratification and Mobility.

Luijkx 2004a, 389). Likewise, another more recent comparative research analyzing long-term trends in educational inequality carried out on eight European countries (Breen et al. 2009, Breen et al. 2010) concludes that there has been a marked decline in inequality in educational attainment over time for both men and women.

Social mobility studies largely neglected the women's situation until the 1980s and 1990s, mainly for reasons of measurement issues. Thus, these mobility researchers (who were predominantly male then) were accused of "intellectual sexism" (Acker 1973). In *The constant flux*, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) focused predominantly on men's situation, but they do dedicate one chapter to women's social mobility. They found "evidence of how little women's experience of class mobility differs from that of men" (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, 275), an observation derived from the so-called conventional approach, which considers the family as the unit of analysis, not the individual. This approach attributes to the household the class position of the spouse who holds the dominant position in the labour force. In practice, it often consists of inferring the married woman's social position according to that of her husband. Thus, findings are heavily dependant on the measurement approach adopted, something that the authors also recognized. When the individual approach is taken, i.e., measuring women's own employment situation, women display greater downward mobility than men in absolute terms, even though no gender differences would have been observed in relative terms. Since the individual approach revealed this significant disparity, many more studies have utilized the individual approach. As a result, women's social mobility has been more systematically analysed, and international research has demonstrated that women display more social fluidity than men (Breen and Jonsson 2005, 236).

In an attempt to explain these new findings, Breen (1997, see also Breen and Luijkx 2004a, and Breen and Jonsson 2007) proposes a theoretical model of social fluidity. He maintains that changes in social fluidity can come through two fundamental mechanisms: change in

class returns to assets and/or in transmissibility of assets. By assets, the author means material, cultural or genetic resources. For instance, in the case of the educational asset, class return can decrease if education becomes less important in the labour market, while class transmissibility can decrease when education depends less on social origin (for example, after it undergoes school reforms).

According to some authors (Breen and Jonsson 2005; Breen and Jonsson 2007), a large part of differentials in outcomes between the constant flux thesis and most recent research are mainly due to technical reasons. The data used in the latter involve longer observation time periods because more cross sectional data are available and account for a larger sample size, which allows for more robustness in the models estimated. Authors also made an increasing use of dynamic modeling techniques designed to test change (Breen and Jonsson 2005, 236). Furthermore, while former research focused on assessing change by adopting a period approach, some recent research suggests that change is more likely to be driven by a process of cohort replacement rather than through period change, which would explain why former research failed to detect change (Breen and Jonsson 2007, 1805). Lastly, the majority of data collected now include women, whereas previous survey samples were often confined to men (Breen and Jonsson 2005, 235).

In the case of Switzerland, empirical evidence is also rather conflicted. While most research corroborates the constant flux thesis, one on a wider time scale suggests a weakening in inequality of opportunity. In terms of inequality in educational attainment, research demonstrates the considerable impact of social origin. The contribution of Buchmann and Charles (1993) on educational inequality found no evidence for a substantial weakening of social origin on educational opportunity between two Swiss-German cohorts born in 1950 and 1960. Further research has pointed out the persistence of a strong effect of social origin at specific levels. This is the case during the transition from the primary education level to the

secondary education level (Meyer 2009) and to the upper secondary level (Hupka-Brunner et al. 2010), but also at tertiary levels (Buchmann et al. 2007).

Currently, the literature gives competing views on change in social mobility in Switzerland. On the one hand, two empirical studies observed that it remained constant over time whereas another found that it increased. Firstly, the study from Levy et al. (1997a; 1997b) tests whether social mobility rates fluctuated congruently with economic growth and economic recession (i.e., upwardly and downwardly, respectively). Although they drew their main outcomes from only generations within one cross-section, their outcomes demonstrate that effects of contextual changes are much weaker than expected, substantiating the constant flux thesis. A second study, carried out by Bergman et al. (2002), analyses change in social mobility in the 1990s by comparing the 1991 Levy et al. survey with the first wave of the Swiss Household Panel of 1999. In line with previous research, the authors concluded that despite the economic crisis of the early 1990s, no change was confirmed. Nevertheless, both studies concentrate on a limited temporal frame that might overshadow a substantive trend (Levy, et al. 1997b, 487–488; Bergman et al. 2002, 286).

The third and latest study on Swiss social mobility provides slightly different conclusions. Joye et al. (2003) studied change in social mobility by using a wider time frame than previous research as well as a comparative framework through the implementation of the CASMIN and the ISCO-88<sup>3</sup> class schema. Using data from 1975, 1981, 1991 and 1999, the authors ran log-linear models to assess the degree of change in educational and occupational mobility among men. Findings demonstrate that educational and occupational mobility increased over time and over generations when measured with the ISCO-88 class scheme. Nonetheless, when run with the CASMIN class scheme, models converge in the sense of no change.

In sum, although some evidence suggests that the redistribution of resources may have

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<sup>3</sup> ISCO stands for the International Standard Classification of Occupations.

become more egalitarian, meritocratic and socially just, the authors conclude that men's overall intergenerational inheritance of advantage remains powerfully intact in Switzerland (Joye et al. 2003, 287). According to the authors, results are rather ambiguous due to data, coding hazard, model specifications and features of the occupational schemes (Joye et al. 2003, 286).

Although women's degree of social fluidity in Switzerland has not been investigated so far, research has found that they are more disadvantaged, on average, than men in terms of education and social position gained and that they are more likely to experience downward social mobility (Levy et al. 1997a; Levy et al. 1997b).

Given this debate in social stratification research, I test competing hypotheses about change in social mobility in Switzerland under the three following theoretical frameworks: the liberal theory of industrialism, the constant flux thesis and Breen's model of social fluidity.

### **3 Hypothesis about social mobility in Switzerland**

The first and central hypothesis tested in this paper is whether social mobility has increased over time in Switzerland. According to the liberal theory of industrialism, at least absolute social mobility should have increased over time in Switzerland. The considerable shift from the industry to the service sector in the Swiss social structure during the twentieth century would seem to favor such a change. In contrast, the constant flux thesis says that social mobility should have remained at a rather constant level in Switzerland when measured in relative terms. In this sense, this would be in line with most research on the inequality of opportunity in Switzerland. Conversely, Breen's theoretical model of social fluidity propounds that relative social mobility can increase if class returns to assets and/or transmissibility of assets decrease. In the Swiss case, one can expect that the considerable expansion of the Swiss educational system during the twentieth century, although still slight

in comparison with educational expansion in other industrialized countries, may have decreased the transmissibility of education. In fact, a decreasing proportion of young people leave school after compulsory education, and an increasing proportion attend higher education (Levy 2010, 34).

The second hypothesis raises concern as to whether social mobility fluctuated according to the economic context. The liberal theory of industrialism predicts that the increase in social mobility should have been more marked in periods of economic growth than in periods of economic recession, at least in absolute terms, because social mobility increases conjointly with economic growth. Conversely, following Breen's model of social fluidity, the degree of class return to assets is likely to evolve with the economic context. While class return to education might be less important on the labor market during periods of economic growth, it may be more important in periods of economic recessions, due to differentials in job opportunities. As a consequence, equality of opportunity (i.e., relative social mobility) should increase in the former context, whereas it should decrease in the latter. Some Swiss studies demonstrate the effects of such contextual variations. In the case of transitions from school to work, when the labor force expands, the occupational prestige of one's first job is significantly higher (Buchmann and Sacchi 1998, 434). In the case of job opportunity, during times of economic growth job opportunities improve whereas during recessions they deteriorate (Kriesi et al. 2010, 319). In terms of timing, the 1990s constitute a turning point between economic prosperity and economic recession in Switzerland. Indeed, while the effects of the early 1970s oil shock on the Swiss economy were mainly absorbed by the departure of foreign workers who lost their jobs or whose work permits were not renewed (Buchmann et al. 2009, 571), the effects of the crisis of the early 1990s were much more marked because of changes in immigration policy and in employers' and workers' behavior (Flückiger 1998, 392). Not only did Switzerland experience an economic recession of

exceptional length, but also the rate of unemployment reached unprecedented levels with a significantly higher increase than in any other European countries, although Switzerland's unemployment rate is still one of the lowest among all OECD countries (Flückiger 1998, 369). In contrast, the constant flux thesis expects to observe no variation in social mobility according to the economic context.

The third and last hypothesis to be tested relates to gender differences in social mobility and addresses whether changes in social mobility differ between women and men. In fact, as women's labor force participation grew considerably over time, "increasing its share from little more than a third in 1980 to almost half of total workforce in 2000" (Oesch 2003, 245), gender differences may have decreased or increased in some respects. In fact, although the issue of gender differences has not been phrased in such terms by the liberal theory of industrialism, it is reasonable to expect under this theoretical framework that women's social mobility will increasingly converge with that of men, resulting in an overall increase in women's social mobility, given the rationale of a shift from ascriptive to achievement selection. In contrast, following Breen's theoretical model, one can argue that through the promotion of policies of equal opportunity between men and women by the Swiss Federal State in the last thirty years (Coradi Vellacott and Wolter 2005), the transmissibility and the class returns to assets may have increased. Indeed, the reduction of gender inequality in educational attainment and in the labor market may generate a perverse effect of a shift from gender inequality to social origin inequality. In this case, women's situation may converge with that of men, but the overall weight of social origin on social opportunities may increase. Conversely, in the constant flux thesis framework, women are more likely to experience downward mobility than men in absolute terms (when adopting the individual approach), but not in relative terms, where social mobility holds constant. This trend would be consistent with a great amount of research that points to the high level of sex segregation in the Swiss

labor market (Charles and Buchmann 1994; Flückiger 1998; Kriesi et al. 2010).

Finally, this analysis will adopt a cohort perspective to maximize its chances of discerning social change (Breen and Jonsson 2007).

## **4 Data, study design and method**

To test these hypotheses, I analyze a uniquely compiled dataset by using a collection of twelve Swiss national population sample surveys with detailed occupation codes gathered between 1975 and 2009. The surveys used are the following:<sup>4</sup> Attitudes politiques en Suisse, 1975; International Social Survey Programme, 1987; Les Suisses et leur société, 1991; Swiss Household Panel, 1999; European Social Survey, 2002; Swiss Household Panel, 2004 (second sample); European Social Survey, 2004; MOSAiCH, 2005; European Social Survey, 2006; MOSAiCH, 2007; European Social Survey, 2008; and MOSAiCH, 2009. These are all the best quality data available in Switzerland which are representative of the national population and contain social origin indicators (i.e., at least the respondent's father's occupation at the age of 15). Of course, as the data are never free from errors, I am aware of the potential bias that multiple cross-sections may induce. It is possible that differences in reliability and validity between the datasets may induce spurious temporal change (Breen and Luijkx 2004b, 40–41). Therefore, to minimize these effects, I applied weights (except for the 1975 and 1987 surveys, where no weighting variable was available). Further, I repeated my analysis using only the Swiss Household Panel data (i.e., the dataset with the largest number of observations) and found converging conclusions with those presented below.

I restrict my analysis to Swiss citizens and residents<sup>5</sup> aged between 35 and 64 years old at the time of the survey. This allows me to disentangle the potentials effects of intragenerational social mobility, such as occupational mobility, as it is relatively rare that people change in

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<sup>4</sup> Data were provided by the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS) and the Norwegian Social Data Service (NSD) for ESS surveys.

<sup>5</sup> When taking into account only Swiss citizens, the findings converge with the analysis presented below.

social position after about the age of 35 (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, 72). On the other hand, it prevents differential mortality between social classes, as people from lower social classes are more likely to die younger than those from upper social classes (Breen et al. 2009, 1481).

In total, the sample size is 16,614 individuals, who were divided into eight distinct birth-cohorts: 1912–1935; 1936–1940; 1941–1945; 1946–1950; 1951–1955; 1956–1960; 1961–1965; and 1966–1974. The birth-cohort approach enables me to capture more change through a wider time-scale than that which most other studies use. Furthermore, as already mentioned, change is more likely to be cohort driven rather than period driven. In this sense, the approach taken in this research provides new insight into changes in social mobility in Switzerland. Table 1 shows the detail of the sample for each survey and each birth-cohort by age. It should be noted that the mean age differs between birth-cohorts, and this variation may affect the results, especially within younger cohorts, which exhibit the smallest variance.

#Table 1 about here#

To ensure comparability between surveys, I coded social origins and social positions following the European Socio-economic Class schema, or ESeC (Rose and Harrison 2010). This newly created class schema should allow for better comparability between European societies. It is also important to notice that although most comparative social mobility studies have used the CASMIN<sup>6</sup> class schema, the ESeC schema remains very similar to CASMIN. They are both based on the concept of employment relationship; therefore, I expect that the conclusions of the present research will be comparable with the conclusions of other international research that draws on the CASMIN schema. The ESeC schema was constructed using the ISCO-88 grid and an employment status variable.<sup>7</sup> For the 1975 and 1987 surveys, I had to recode ISCO codes originally coded following the ISCO-68 grid into the ISCO-88

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<sup>6</sup> The CASMIN class schema is also often called EGP, in regards to Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, or simply called the Goldthorpe class schema.

<sup>7</sup> Syntax available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/esec/guide/docs/Appendix6.sps>.

version. It must be noted that no simple correspondence table between ISCO-68 and ISCO-88 exists, so there are some approximations in the classifications.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, some surveys contain only approximate information about individual employment status. This was the case most notably in the two oldest surveys, where no employment status information was available for the father's occupation; in addition, there was no status information for the respondent's social position in the 1987 survey. In these cases, I followed the ESeC schema simple syntax.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in the European Social Survey and MOSAiCH datasets, the father's employment status was assessed approximately in the case of self-employed.

In the end, I use the following ESeC schema collapsed on seven levels: 1. Higher salariat; 2. Lower salariat; 3. Intermediate employee; 4. Small employers and self-employed; 5. Lower white-collar; 6. Skilled manual; and 7: Semi-/un skilled. A labor contract employment regulation characterizes lower white-collars, skilled manuals and semi-/un skilled workers, while the higher and lower salariat define managerial professions involved in a service relationship. As the ESeC class schema does not distinguish the self-employed from the small employers, I could not analyze separately their social mobility.

Finally, analyses presented below were computed using the R (R Development Core Team 2010) and LEM (Vermunt 1997) softwares.

## 5 Results

This section analyses change in intergenerational social mobility over time in Switzerland. As the fundamental analysis of social mobility is based on the relationship between social origin and the social position attained, people who never had a job are excluded. Further, due to the lack of comparable information across surveys, I made no distinction between full-time and part-time jobs. In the first part, I focus on the description of changes in the composition of the

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<sup>8</sup> Correspondence table available on request from the author.

<sup>9</sup> Syntax available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/esec/nsi/matrices/Euroesec%20Simple.SPS>.

class structure. In the second part, I show to what extent absolute social mobility changed from one cohort to another. In the third and final part, I analyze change in relative social mobility.

## **5.1 Changes in the class structure**

To understand to what extent changes in the economic context transformed the structure of opportunities in Switzerland, I begin my analysis with a depiction of changes in the class structure across birth-cohorts, first by gender and then by social origin<sup>10</sup>.

First of all, the Swiss social structure displays changes that are characteristic of twentieth century Western countries: mainly a decline in the small employers and the self-employed, skilled manual and semi-/un skilled occupations, and a rise in the higher salariat, lower salariat, and intermediate employee occupations.

The higher salariat is certainly the class that exhibits the highest increase (almost 10%) as well as the major changes in regards to gender differences. The gender gap indeed weakened over cohorts, with the stagnation of the number of men in this class from the 1941–45 to the 1961–65 birth-cohorts, and a shift from less than 5% to more than 10% across birth-cohorts among women. This demonstrates that most of the global increase in the higher salariat class can be explained by women's higher opportunities in this class. Yet, this class is still the most sex-segregated of all, with a difference between men and women of more than 10% within each cohort. Therefore, the highest social class still remains profoundly male dominated. What is more, the percentage of men in the higher salariat increases more than 4% among those born after 1965, so it remains to be seen whether the weakening gender difference trend will continue, or whether this difference is an age effect.

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<sup>10</sup> Figures depicting changes in the class structure across birth-cohorts, by gender and by social origin could not be displayed here but are available for consultation on the journal's website in an electronic appendix.

One further noticeable fact within the higher salariat class pertains to the big difference between the pre-1936 birth-cohort and the 1936–40 one for men (with an increase from 12% to 24%). Although, it is possible to suspect that this particularly marked increase accounts for measurement effect, as the reliability of the oldest cohort is a little lower than others,<sup>11</sup> it is nevertheless also possible that this trend accounts for higher opportunities in this class for the 1936–40 birth-cohort. The latter indeed entered the labor market at the beginning of the *long boom* period following the Second World War. Furthermore, this change was not as sudden as it appears on the graph. When looking more deeply into the data, one will find that 6% of men born between 1912 and 1920 held a higher salariat position, around 10% for those born in the 1920s, and 18% for those born between 1931 and 1935.

In contrast to the higher salariat, the sex-segregation within the lower salariat is at its lowest level, since rates for both men and women are virtually similar. It should nevertheless be noticed that while men were on average more numerous in this class than women until the 1940–45 birth-cohort, this trend reversed by the 1946–50 birth-cohort, with the noticeable exception of the 1955–60 birth-cohort, which exhibits comparable percentages.

The female-dominated intermediate employee class increased 5% across cohorts whereas the small employers and self-employed class decreased more than 10%. This important change in the small employers and self-employed class has been more marked for women than for men: 18% of men and women were in this class in the oldest cohort and only 10% of men and 5% of women were in this class in the post-1965 birth-cohort.

Changes also occurred in the lower white collar and the skilled manual classes, which are female and male dominated, respectively. In the former, the percentage of women steadily

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<sup>11</sup> The oldest birth-cohort was indeed constructed mainly from the two oldest surveys which exhibit several measurement issues, such as approximations in the recoding from ISCO-68 to ISCO-88 and the computation of the ESeC class schema in its simple version for reasons of lack of information (except for respondents in the 1975 survey).

decreased and men's number remained relatively constant at a very low level, whereas in the latter, the percentage of men declined and women's number stayed at the same level.

Women in the semi/un skilled class exhibit probably the most important change with a collapse from 23% to 11% across birth-cohorts. As a consequence, the gender gap clearly declined in the semi-/un skilled class, demonstrating that women are no longer more likely than men to have a job in the semi-/un skilled class.

I now shift my attention to changes in the class structure by social origin. For reasons of simplicity, social origin was recoded into three main classes: salariat origin (higher salariat and lower salariat); intermediate origin (intermediate employees, small employers and self-employed); and working class origin (lower white collar, skilled manual and semi-/un skilled).

The first look at outcomes suggests that social origin is an important determinant of social position and social reproduction. For instance, the social origin of the higher salariat and the lower salariat is predominantly salariat, while that of the skilled manual and semi-/un skilled is preponderantly intermediate and working class origins.

Within the higher salariat class, the share of those from salariat origin increased constantly across birth-cohorts, which is less the case within the lower salariat. It is nevertheless important to notice that the proportion of those from an intermediate and working class origin also increased across cohorts among both the higher and lower salariat. Yet, the gap between the salariat origin and the rest of the population remains very high.

One exception is nonetheless displayed in the 1936–40 birth-cohort, in which people of intermediate origin have had more opportunities in the higher salariat than people of other origins. As already observed for men from the same birth-cohort, this observation must be a direct effect of the post-Second World War economic boom.

Among other social classes, the share of the salariat origin is most of the time less important than the share of the intermediate and working class origins, suggesting that there is indeed a marked barrier between salariat social classes and others.

To summarize the broad changes that occurred in the Swiss social structure over cohorts, I computed indexes of dissimilarity between men and women and between salariat and working class origins. This measure reveals how many women (or working class origin) would have to change their social position in order for women and men (or working class and salariat origin) to have the same social position distribution.

From the oldest birth-cohorts to the 1941–45 birth-cohort, differences in the class distribution between men and women were reinforced 10%, mainly because men of these birth-cohorts enjoyed higher opportunities in the higher salariat. In contrast, the trend reversed in the subsequent cohorts. Constantly decreasing across the cohorts, the index of dissimilarity shows that women's situation globally improved over time. Despite this converging trend, there still remains more than a 20% dissimilarity between men and women's social position distribution, which they would have to bridge before they reach gender equality in social positions. The picture grows even less encouraging when it comes to differences between the salariat and the working class origin. While there seems to have been a diminution of differences between the 1936–40 and 1941–45 birth-cohorts, no real change happened in the following birth-cohorts, with an index of dissimilarity stabilizing at around 28%.

Thus, to what extent are the changes observed in the class structure likely to have influenced social mobility chances?

## **5.2 Trends in absolute social mobility**

Absolute social mobility is a measure of observed mobility, as it refers to mobility that can be calculated directly from a mobility table. For example, to measure the percentage of

immobility in a mobility table that cross-classifies social origin and social position, researchers sum the percentage of cases that fall on the main diagonal of the table.

Figure 1 shows how mobility rates have changed across birth-cohorts for men and women aged 35–64. These rates were calculated following Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992, 195) framework to ensure as much comparability as possible with international research. The total mobility rate is the percentage of cases that do not fall on the main diagonal of the mobility table. This rate is the proportion of people located in a class different than that of their father. Of course, this measure is sensitive to the number of classes identified, but with a seven-class schema like CASMIN, this rate usually ranges between 60 and 70 percent of individuals (Breen 2004b, 17) in industrialized countries. This rate can be decomposed into the following rates.<sup>12</sup> The vertical mobility rate is a measure of long-range mobility whereas non-vertical mobility is a measure of short-range mobility. Upward and downward rates are themselves a decomposition of vertical mobility; they respectively designate mobility movements up and down the main diagonal (i.e., ascending and descending mobility).

#Figure 1 about here#

First of all, Figure 1 shows the noteworthy trend that most rates prove to be very stable over cohorts, suggesting that the level of social mobility in Switzerland remained quite constant over time, at least in absolute terms.

Gender differences in total mobility are small, although women demonstrate a slightly higher level of mobility than do men, a difference that can mainly be imputed to gender differentials in the social structure between fathers and daughters. Further gender contrasts exist between vertical and non-vertical rates. The latter exhibit a higher gender gap than the former,

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<sup>12</sup> Following Erikson and Goldthorpe's framework (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, 45; Breen 2004b, 17–18), these rates were computed using a collapsed version of the ESeC class schema. This grouping into three-levels is as follows. For comparison with the authors' original frameworks that use the CASMIN class schema, I show its equivalent between brackets: 1. Classes 1 and 2 (I + II); 2. Classes 3, 4, 5 and 6 (III, IVab, IVc and V+VI); 3. Class 7 (VIIa and VIIb). Vertical mobility designates cases that do not fall on the main diagonal of the collapsed class schema version, whereas non-vertical mobility accounts for the difference between total mobility and vertical mobility.

indicating that the higher level of total mobility rate observed for women results only in higher short-range mobility.

The rates of upward and downward mobility show that highest variations occurred among women. Their rate of upward mobility and downward mobility respectively increased and decreased more than 10% over cohorts. Specifically, variations in upward rates stabilized during the 1951–55 birth-cohort, whereas downward rates increased slightly among the subsequent cohorts. This suggests that in comparison with the 1951–1955 birth-cohort, women of the following cohorts have suffered slightly higher downward social mobility. With respect to men, younger cohorts have had little less social opportunities than those of older cohorts, as upward mobility decreased slightly and downward mobility increased slightly for younger men. Finally, it is noticeable that men and women's opportunities in terms of upward and downward social mobility tend to converge from the 1951–55 birth-cohort onward, although men are still more upwardly mobile than women and women more downwardly mobile than men.

One striking fact regarding absolute rates of social mobility presented in Figure 1 is that total mobility rates are on average higher than those traditionally found in other social mobility research for both men and women. Indeed, they range here from around 75% to 85%, whereas they usually lie between 60% and 70% within the CASMIN schema, as mentioned above. In order to assess to what extent this difference is substantial rather than merely a class schema measurement effect, I compared the mean for each rate of the present outcomes with that of the data of the Swiss Household Panel 1999 (the biggest sample size dataset) that I computed with the ESeC schema and with the CASMIN schema. Furthermore, I calculated the mean rates for Europe in order to outline a comparative dimension of Switzerland's absolute social mobility.

The outcomes displayed in Table 2 indeed reveal some classification effects. Rates computed

with the ESeC class schema tend in fact to overestimate the degree of total mobility, particularly for men: 77% with the ESeC schema (both all datasets and SHP99 data) versus 67% with the CASMIN schema (SHP99 data). The examination of other rates indicates that the dispersion between classifications is the highest for non-vertical mobility.

#Table 2 about here#

With these measurement effects controlled, substantial trends can be drawn. Interestingly, Swiss men exhibit on average higher upward mobility and lower downward mobility than European men (39% versus 31% of upward mobility and 12% versus 17% of downward mobility for Swiss and European men, respectively), suggesting that the structure of opportunities has been better for the former than for the latter. In contrast, Swiss women's rates of downward mobility seem to be a little higher than those of European women (21% versus 19%), but when controlling for Swiss citizenship (not shown here), it appears that Swiss women experience similar rates of downward mobility as European Women, whereas immigrant women experience much more downward mobility (on average 30%). This observation shows that the experience of migration for women tends to come at the price of lost social position. Yet, these observations are based on means that are nowhere near adequate enough to describe real trends.

Now, how many of these variations result from intrinsic change rather than pure structural change? The analysis of relative rates of mobility will disentangle the structural effects from the net effects.

### **5.3 Trends in relative social mobility**

In contrast to absolute social mobility, relative social mobility shows a given society's degree of openness. Relative social mobility measures one person's chances of access to a given social position in comparison with people from different social positions. In other words, "it tells us something about the advantages and disadvantages associated with being born into

one class rather than another” (Breen 2004b, 20). Concretely, through the use of the odds ratio, a statistic that has the property of being independent of the marginal distribution, the measure of relative social mobility has the ambition of capturing intrinsic changes in social mobility, which is net of structural changes.

To measure relative social mobility, I apply the classical log-linear models approach to the men and women’s mobility table. Based on inferential statistics, the baseline idea of log-linear models is to adjust a model so that the deviance between expected frequencies tested under a certain hypothesis and observed frequencies is not statistically significant (Hout 1983, 14). In the present analysis, I test the following three models, where O stands for social origin, D for social destination and C for birth-cohort:

$$\log(m_{ode}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^O + \lambda_d^D + \lambda_c^C + \lambda_{oc}^{OC} + \lambda_{dc}^{DC} \quad (1)$$

Equation 1 shows the first model, which is named the conditional independence model (Cond Ind). This is the baseline model. It makes the assumption that social origin and social destination are independent within each cohort (i.e., that equality of opportunity over birth-cohorts stands in the Swiss society).

$$\log(m_{ode}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^O + \lambda_d^D + \lambda_c^C + \lambda_{oc}^{OC} + \lambda_{dc}^{DC} + \lambda_{od}^{OD} \quad (2)$$

Conversely, the second model applied (Equation 2) is called the constant social fluidity model (CnSF), and assumes that the association between social origin and social destination has remained constant across birth-cohorts (i.e., that inequality of opportunity did not change).

$$\log(m_{ode}) = \lambda + \lambda_o^O + \lambda_d^D + \lambda_c^C + \lambda_{oc}^{OC} + \lambda_{dc}^{DC} + \beta_c \psi_{od} \quad (3)$$

The third and last model tested is shown in Equation 3 and is known as either the uniform difference model (Unidiff), or the log-multiplicative layer effect model (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992; Xie 1992). This model, which tests for substantial change in the strength of the association between origin and destination over cohorts, is very powerful for detecting a

dominant trend in the data. In other words, if this model fits, it accounts for a change over birth-cohorts.

In addition to classical model comparison, I use the BIC statistic for model selection, because this statistic combines both parsimony and goodness of fit (Raftery 1986; Raftery 1995). The more negative the BIC value, the more the model is preferred.

#Table 3 about here#

The results of models fitted are displayed in Table 3 and indicate that for both men and women, the constant social fluidity model should be preferred. The BIC statistic has the most negative value for both sexes in this model. Alongside this value, the Unidiff model does not provide a significant improvement over the CnSF model in either case, with a loss of seven degrees of freedom (*df*). In other words, among the cohorts considered, the strength of the association between social origin and social destination has remained constant; no major change has occurred to an individual's chance of successfully achieving a given social position relative to another.

Figure 2 provides the parameter details for the two models tested. The graph on the left shows the  $\lambda$  parameter value for the origin-destination diagonal cells of the CnSF model, and it discerns which classes have the highest level of social reproduction. Without surprise, the highest level of social status inheritance is in the higher salariat and in the semi-/un skilled class, for both men and women. The inheritance is also high for men in small employers and the self-employed class for obvious reasons of the transmissibility of the family business from father to son. Finally, the intermediate employee class appears to have the lowest level of inheritance for both men and women, suggesting that this class is the most fluid. It is also noteworthy that men from the lower white-collar class have a negative value of social inheritance; this means that men born into this class are disproportionately likely to vacate it.

#Figure 2 about here#

The graph in the middle of Figure 2 displays the  $\beta$  parameters of the Unidiff model that illustrate the direction of change over cohorts that are implied by the fitted Unidiff model. Although some shifts in social fluidity must be recognized over cohorts, they do not imply substantial increases or decreases in overall fluidity. For men, parameters indicate that inequality of opportunity remained stable from the 1941–45 birth-cohort to the 1966–74 one. However, between the 1912–35 and the 1936–40 cohort, the parameters display a very strong increase in social fluidity, with a fall from 1 to 0.61. Although this increase in social fluidity is consistent with the trend of increasing opportunities within the higher salariat from the pre-1936 birth-cohort to the 1936–40 one, this impressive difference may account to some extent for measurement effect. I have indeed already pointed in the analysis of changes in the class structure that the measurement quality of the oldest birth-cohort should be a little less reliable than others. More than 70% of it was indeed constructed from the two oldest data sets (1975 and 1987) for which the recoding from ISCO-68 to ISCO-88 was approximated and the ESeC class schema was computed in its simple version for reasons of lack of information (except for respondents in the 1975 survey). To my view, the ISCO recodification should not be the main issue, as this effect has never been underlined in comparative research. The simple computation of ESeC probably accounts to some extent for this difference: such an effect can, in fact, be suspected when models are run using the simple version of the ESeC class schema for all data with a drop in parameters between the oldest and the 1936–40 birth-cohorts from 1 to 0.88. But one must bear in mind that the oldest birth-cohort is very heterogeneous and includes people born between 1912 and 1935, so this change may have been substantial but not as sudden as it looks. Unfortunately, the too small sample size within the oldest cohort does not allow me to test this hypothesis any further with log-linear models. In contrast to men, women's parameters reveal an overall trend towards increasing social fluidity.

In order to show how much life chances are conditioned by social origin, the graph on the right of Figure 2 displays some odds-ratios computed from the origin-destination parameters obtained from the CnSF model. They indicate, for instance, that the chances of accessing a social position in the higher salariat rather than among the intermediate employees are around 3.6 times higher for both men and women who have a father from the higher salariat than for men and women who have a father from the intermediate employee. In the same vein, men and women who were born in the higher salariat class rather than in the semi/-un skilled class are respectively 32 times and 36 times more likely to attain a social position in the higher salariat class rather than in the semi/-un skilled class.

## **6 Discussion and conclusion**

To sum up, the present findings do not lend support to the liberal theory of industrialism, which predicts an increase in social mobility over birth-cohorts, as well as Breen's model of a decrease in the transmissibility and/or class return to assets in Switzerland. Although the Swiss social structure underwent an upward shift with a decrease of the proportion of people in the lowest social classes and an increase of those in higher rank positions, both measures of absolute and relative social mobility support the trend of no change (i.e., the constant flux thesis). In fact, not only do the rates of absolute social mobility remain steady over time, but the log-linear model estimates also clearly favor the model of constant social fluidity. Therefore, it seems that in Switzerland, both upward directed changes in the social structure and the overall expansion of the educational system did not result in a substantial reduction in the inequality of opportunity.

Additionally, too little evidence was found regarding the impact of economic variations on social mobility. Although the period of the *long boom* seem to have resulted in higher opportunities in the higher salariat class for men and for the intermediate class born between 1936 and 1945, no further contextual effect was observed in subsequent cohorts. The slight

decrease in upward mobility and slight increase in downward mobility observed for younger men are not substantial enough to reach the conclusion that Switzerland's economic context generated significant effects. Moreover, the  $\beta$  parameters of the Unidiff model corroborate the idea of the stability of inequality of opportunity over time for men, although men from the 1936–40 birth-cohort seems to have enjoyed particularly higher opportunities.

The 1936–40 birth-cohort is indeed the only one that contextual effects seem to really have impacted. I mentioned in the analysis that important changes observed between the oldest birth-cohort and the 1936–40 one might be a little overestimated, as the level of reliability within the oldest birth-cohort is a little lower than others. Yet, there are also reasons to suspect that this change was indeed rather important. In the post-Second World War context, Switzerland enjoyed a particularly enviable situation, having preserved intact its industry, whereas the industry in the rest of Europe had been largely destroyed. As Switzerland's industry was a central actor in Europe's reconstruction, it is possible to suspect that the number of opportunities in higher salariat positions greatly and rapidly increased in that period, which particularly benefited men overall as well as anyone of intermediate origin born in the 1936–40 birth-cohort.

Globally, the greatest changes occurred among women. In spite of the fact that the Swiss social structure is still highly sex segregated, women's situation has improved globally over time. Women from recent birth-cohorts indeed enjoyed greater upward social mobility and lower downward social mobility than women of older birth-cohorts, resulting in an increasing convergence with men's situation in terms of absolute social mobility chances. Yet, in relative terms, changes that this study has observed have not been substantial enough to reveal a decreasing trend in inequality of opportunity in Switzerland. Of course, these observations apply only to workingwomen. In this respect, there are good reasons to suspect some selection bias in the social composition of the oldest birth-cohorts of women, as for these women, being

a housewife was the social norm. As a consequence, workingwomen were more likely to be located in low qualified occupations, while men held highest social positions. I should also emphasize that outcomes for women would certainly have been different if I could have distinguished between full-time and part-time employment. It is, in fact, probable that women in full-time employment would enjoy greater upward social mobility whereas those in part-time employment would be more likely to experience downward mobility.

Finally, the results of the present research are consistent with previous studies on social mobility in Switzerland that focused on smaller time frame. They coincide particularly with those of Levy et al. (1997a; 1997b) and Bergman et al. (2002), who had found no effects of contextual changes on social mobility. In this respect, I can now maintain, on the basis of the present research, that substantive change was not overshadowed by the limited time frame that the authors used. Instead, there seems to be substantially no change in social mobility in Switzerland. Furthermore, the present outcomes also converge partially with those from the analysis of Joye et al. (2003) on Swiss men's social fluidity, at least with the CASMIN schema.

From a comparative perspective, this research also tentatively highlights a difference in the level of upwards and downwards rates of social mobility between Switzerland and European countries, with Swiss men tending to be more upwardly mobile and less downwardly mobile than European men on average. This research further underlines that women's situation does not seem to diverge substantially from that of European women when controlling for Swiss citizenship, whereas women who immigrated to Switzerland tend to have experienced much more downward mobility than Swiss women on average. The experience of migration for women seems to come at the price of a loss of social position in Switzerland.

In contrast, the non-changing trend observed in social fluidity in Switzerland is inconsistent with the argument stating that research using longer observation time periods, a larger sample

size and adopting a cohort perspective is more likely to detect change. Indeed, the present research demonstrates the clear-cut result of non-substantial change in social fluidity in Switzerland despite a robust research design.

In sum, the constant flux thesis provides a good description of the evolution of social mobility in Switzerland. It remains to be seen whether particular institutional settings could explain the strong persistence of inequality of opportunity in Switzerland.

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## Tables and figures

Table 1. Sample detail: surveys by birth-cohort (unweighted data)

	1912– 1935	1936– 1940	1941– 1945	1946– 1950	1951– 1955	1956– 1960	1961– 1965	1966– 1974	Total
1975. Attitudes politiques en Suisse	505	102	30	-	-	-	-	-	637
1987. International social survey	146	85	100	123	42	-	-	-	496
1991. Les Suisses et leur société	169	143	215	243	252	54	-	-	1076
1999. Swiss household panel	99	588	754	932	988	1095	955	-	5411
2002. European social survey	-	93	172	167	178	197	260	111	1178
2004. Swiss household panel	-	57	350	406	478	569	612	438	2910
2004. European social survey	-	28	183	183	153	161	225	187	1120
2005. MOSAiCH	-	-	91	93	108	95	112	103	602
2006. European social survey	-	-	144	135	146	171	187	214	997
2007. MOSAiCH	-	-	52	70	81	96	104	161	564
2008. European social survey	-	-	47	149	121	153	178	283	931
2009. MOSAiCH	-	-	17	98	102	114	122	239	692
Total (n)	919	1096	2155	2599	2649	2705	2755	1736	16614
Age mean	56.0	57.2	56.8	52.7	48.1	44.3	39.9	37.5	47.9
(Age variance)	(46.0)	(58.2)	(34.1)	(31.9)	(24.6)	(14.6)	(11.1)	(4.3)	(71.5)

Figure 1. Decomposition of absolute social mobility for men and women aged 35–64 by birth-cohort in percentages

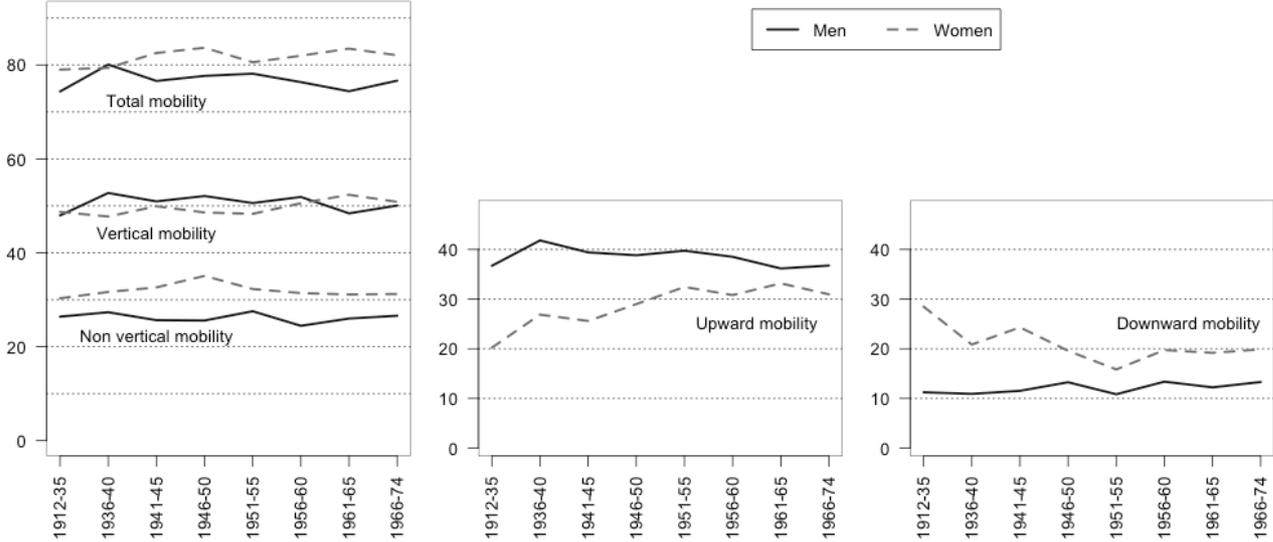


Table 2: Comparison between Switzerland and Europe of average absolute mobility for men and women, controlling for classification effects with the Swiss Household Panel 1999 data.

	Men				Women			
	Switzerland			Europe	Switzerland			Europe
	ESeC	Esec	Casmin	Casmin	ESeC	Esec	Casmin	Casmin
	<i>12DS</i>	<i>Shp99</i>	<i>Shp99</i>		<i>12DS</i>	<i>Shp99</i>	<i>Shp99</i>	
Total mobility	76.8	76.5	66.6	67.0	81.6	78.8	77.3	74.3
Vertical mobility	50.6	52.7	54.5	48.4	49.6	46.0	54.2	50.5
Non-vertical mobility	26.2	23.8	12.1	18.5	32.0	32.8	23.1	23.8
Upward mobility	38.5	40.5	42.3	31.3	28.6	24.2	31.9	31.3
Downward mobility	12.1	12.2	12.2	17.1	21.0	21.8	22.3	19.2

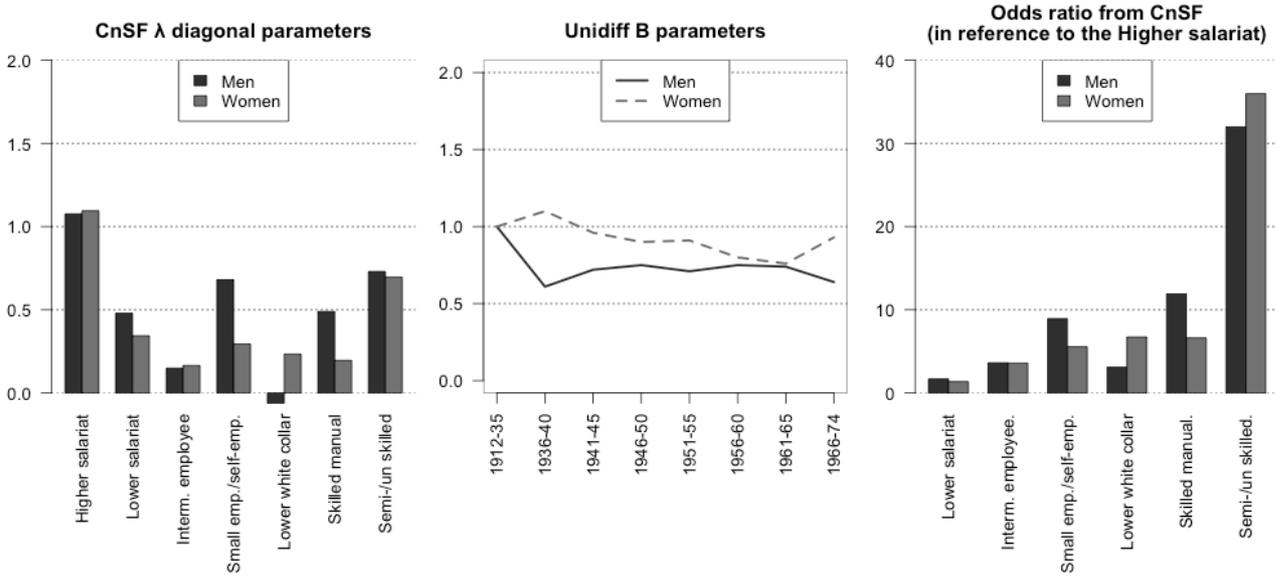
Note: 12DS=all 12 datasets; Shp99=Swiss Household Panel 1999 data; Rates for Europe were computed from tables 3.6 and 3.17 shown in Breen and Luijkx (2004b) and correspond to average rates for the period between 1970s and 1990s (Pp. 48, 66). Countries covered are Britain, France, Germany (West-), Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

Table 3: Results of fitting the log-linear models to the eight cohorts mobility tables (men and women aged 35–64 who are currently employed or are unemployed having had a job)

Model	<i>Df</i>	Men ( <i>n</i> = 5919)			Women ( <i>n</i> = 5428)		
		<i>G2</i>	<i>P</i>	BIC	<i>G2</i>	<i>P</i>	BIC
1. Cond Ind	288	1092.8	0.0000	-1408.7	793.7	0.0000	-1682.9
2. CnSF	252	309.8	0.0075	-1879.0	328.6	0.0008	-1838.5
3. Unidiff	245	302.5	0.0072	-1825.5	324.8	0.0005	-1782.0

Notes: Cond Ind=conditional independence model; CnSF=constant social fluidity model; Unidiff=uniform difference model. *Df*=degree of freedom, *G2*=deviance, *P*=p-value, BIC=Bayesian information criterion.

Figure 2: Parameters detail of log-linear models fitted: CnSF model diagonal parameters (left), Unidiff model beta parameters (middle), and odds ratio computed from the origin-destination parameters of the CnSF model; higher salariat versus other classes (right)



Note: CnSF=conditional independence model; Unidif=uniform difference model.