

Intergenerational links and upper secondary track choice: Pattern and consequences

Jean-Marc Falter, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Giovanni Ferro Luzzi, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Federica Sbergami, University of Geneva, Switzerland

Intergenerational mobility has often been investigated by computing educational attainment correlations between parents and children. However, parental choices may influence children education at earlier stages. This is the case in Switzerland where decisions about secondary school track take place between the age of 10 and 15, depending on the cantons. While this choice may be affected by innate ability, parental background may also affect the upper secondary school track. We first investigate the importance of parental background over the last 6 decades with the help of the Swiss Household Panel data. Next, we try to disentangle between ability, as measured by a cognitive test score, and parental background. Finally, the impact of school track decisions on wages is investigated. Our results show that the impact of parental background is specific to educational tracks and gender. The importance of parental background on educational inequality greatly depends on the opportunity to pursue tertiary education. Our analysis also indicates that parental background effects are mostly independent of cognitive ability, while this is not the case of gender or nationality effects. Finally, the impact of parental background on wages, through upper secondary educational attainment, is smaller in Switzerland than in other countries.