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"Institutional and Social Permeability of Educational Pathways to Higher Education in Switzerland"

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Economic and political pressure to expand higher education in Switzerland led to fundamental educational reforms on upper secondary and tertiary level. Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education were established and two vocationally orientated school programmes that provide access to higher education complemented today the traditional general baccalaureate school as the common pathway to traditional universities. These reforms aimed at opening up new pathways to and, at the same time, at reducing social inequalities in the access to higher education. In this context, the paper aims at answering the following questions: To what extent do the different pathways lead their students to higher education? How do social characteristics (origin, gender) relate to higher education access in general, and on access to different higher education institutions in particular? How does institutional permeability of the different pathways impact on social inequalities in higher education access? Theoretically, we link policy-driven educational offers with the concepts of institutional and social permeability, push and pull factors of educational mobility and intersectionalities of social origin and gender. We analyse Swiss longitudinal register data to model educational transitions for the 2012 cohort of upper secondary graduates (N=8'925) by using cross-tabulations and logistic regression models. Results show that institutional and social permeability differ substantially between the three propaedeutic pathways. Social inequality in higher education access is significantly mediated by pathway-specific social composition and institutional permeability.