

Report

TRANSNATIONAL REPRODUCTIVE MOBILITY FROM SWITZERLAND

Dr. Veronika Siegl, Dr. Christine Bigler, Dr. Tina Büchler, Laura Perler (MA),
Prof. Dr. Carolin Schurr
Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies and Institute of Geography, University of Bern

Commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health, Bern, 27 February 2021

Abstract

Worldwide, more and more people are travelling abroad to fulfil their desire of having children. In Switzerland, the relatively restrictive legal situation compared with other countries and the high cost of fertility procedures are the main factors that drive Swiss residents to seek out fertility clinics abroad. The Swiss media frequently report on people's individual experiences of these new forms of transnational reproduction, particularly related to egg donation and surrogacy, but figures on the scale of the phenomenon of transnational reproductive mobility from Switzerland are currently lacking. This commissioned study, conducted by the University of Bern on behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH, uses quantitative social research methods to look at how many Swiss residents travelled abroad in 2019, for what reasons and for which fertility procedures. The study focuses on the following four procedures: in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), egg donation, sperm donation and surrogacy. The results are based on five different surveys aimed at doctors in Switzerland who are licensed to carry out IVF procedures; fertility clinics and sperm banks abroad; and selected cantonal regulatory civil registration bodies and Swiss consulates.

The data collected as part of this study include details of 516 cases where individuals or couples who were resident in Switzerland in 2019 travelled abroad for a fertility procedure. In most cases this concerned heterosexual couples (84.65%) and patients or intended parents aged between 35 and 44 (72.30%). The most widely used procedure by far is egg donation, which accounted for 82.17% of journeys abroad, and was mainly carried out in Spain. The data presented in the study can be considered an approximation of the true scale of reproductive mobility. This is because, on the one hand, the data are mainly based on estimates by fertility doctors, and on the other, because we have to assume a high number of unreported cases. However, in order to have an informed political debate with a view to a potential change in the law in Switzerland, the data situation must be improved. This would require fertility clinics and sperm and egg banks in Switzerland and abroad to systematically collect anonymised data about their patients and be prepared to share them with researchers and authorities. Further qualitative research would also be important to gain a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon of transnational reproductive mobility, and of the affected groups and their experiences when travelling from Switzerland.