

# **Destandardization and Destabilization, but for whom? Job-Shift Patterns in West Germany, 1984-2008**

## *Authors*

Dr. Johannes Giesecke  
Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)  
Reichpietschufer 50  
10785 Berlin, Germany

Phone: ++ 49 (030) 25491 527  
Fax: ++49 (030) 25491 514  
Email: [johannes.giesecke@wzb.eu](mailto:johannes.giesecke@wzb.eu)

Jan Paul Heisig  
Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)  
Reichpietschufer 50  
10785 Berlin

Phone: ++ 49 (030) 25491 383  
Fax: ++49 (030) 25491 360  
Email: [heisig@wzb.eu](mailto:heisig@wzb.eu)

## **Destandardization and Destabilization, but for whom? Job-Shift Patterns in West Germany, 1984-2008**

### Abstract:

We contribute to the long-standing debate about an alleged “destabilization” and “destandardization” of employment biographies by analyzing how the job-shift patterns of West German workers have changed since 1984. Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, we study changes in the rates of (both upward and downward) within- and between-firm mobility as well as of employment exit. In contrast to most previous studies, we focus on group-specific rather than aggregate changes, analyzing trends separately by gender, education, labor force experience, firm size, and sector. Our analyses of the observed group-specific transition rates are complemented by analyses of “counterfactual transition rates” that fix the composition of the workforce at 1984 levels and by multilevel models.

Our first major finding is a considerable and pervasive decline in the rate of (upward) within-firm moves. The reduction is stronger for men and particularly steep for employees of large companies and for those with limited labor force experience. We interpret these findings as evidence for a decline of internal labor markets and for increasing difficulties among labor market entrants. With respect to “external” mobility, we find no evidence of a general increase in the likelihood of between-firm moves or employment exits. This aggregate stability does, however, mask considerable variation in group-specific trends. Notably, rates of both between-firm moves and employment exits have risen most strongly for low-educated men and women. A third insight from our analysis is that male and female mobility patterns have converged somewhat over the last 25 years, but are still rather distinct. This finding raises doubts about the common practice of pooling men and women in studies of trends in mobility patterns. All these results show that by investigating group-specific trends we are able to develop more nuanced and credible reformulations of the destabilization hypothesis.