

Analysis

“Choosing a Career: One Step Closer to Gender Equality”

Progress and Tenacious Trends

In Switzerland, women earn less than men with a comparable level of employment, in part due to gender-specific career choices. While there has been a notable increase in the number of women working in traditionally male-dominated professions, occupational segregation persists. To further promote gender diversity, Avenir Suisse asserts that apprenticeships are a crucial avenue for achieving this goal.

On average, women earn less than men with a comparable level of employment. According to a new publication from Avenir Suisse, this gap is partly due to career choices. Many jobs are still predominantly dominated by either men or women. However, there has recently been a convergence here: 25 percent of women or men would have to change their job category in order to achieve a gender-neutral distribution. In 1995, this figure was still at 36 percent.

The number of women in highly qualified, traditionally male-dominated professions has significantly increased. This has been facilitated by a growing proportion of women in tertiary education. Today, around 275,000 women work in professions that were once considered male-dominated. According to the authors of the study, Marco Salvi and Patrick Schnell, this represents a threefold increase since 1995. For instance, the increase was pronounced among female doctors (+18,000), while the number of male doctors has remained unchanged. On the other hand, there are jobs that were once considered mixed but have gradually become typical female professions. These include, in particular, primary and pre-school teachers and nurses, where women now make up 85% of the workforce (67% in 1995). The completion of an apprenticeship often leads to a profession that is considered typically male or female. This trend has hardly changed in recent decades.

The authors of the study closely analyzed the data on wage and revealed that a greater gender mix in various fields could tend to help reduce the gender pay gap. However, the effect is likely to be smaller than expected. Harmonizing the careers of both genders in terms of interruptions and level of employment would have a more meaningful impact than influencing the choice of a profession.

Finally, the authors of the study state that occupational segregation is the result of a complex combination of individual decisions, social expectations, and opportunities available to women and men. Should the political goal be to further improve diversity, the authors present potential measures in three fields: education, family and economic policy. They recommend improving permeability in vocational qualifications and reducing barriers for a better work-life balance.

Analysis: “Choosing a Career: One Step Closer to Gender Equality – Progress and Tenacious Trends” («Berufswahl: Die letzte Meile der Gleichstellung? Fortschritte – und beharrliche Muster»), Marco Salvi and Patrick Schnell, 11 pages, available online on May 23rd, 2024, www.avenir-suisse.ch/en.

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