



## E-Learning Box

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# Equal Rights and "Female and Male Professions" in Switzerland

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### Legal and Constitutional Protection against Discrimination on the Basis of Gender in Terms of Appointments and the Allocation of Tasks

The Swiss [Gender Equality Act](#) (GEA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in terms of appointments and the allocation of tasks. Complaints and grievances against contraventions of the law can be raised by both organisations and individuals (Article 7 GEA). One [complaint](#) relating to the [allocation of tasks](#) was made a few years ago, when a customer adviser moved into insurance from another field. After her initial training, she took on more demanding tasks; after three years she changed to a different department with a view to promotion. But she was then assigned only undemanding work for quite a long time and her manager repeatedly insinuated that she would probably drop out of work because of pregnancy. Finally she did get more appropriate work and a pay rise, but she still earned significantly less than her male colleagues. She requested an adjustment of her salary, and when this was refused, she handed in her notice. The arbitration body found that although there had been no pay discrimination for the first year,<sup>2</sup> this had been the case for the time between the employee's induction in the new department and her resignation. The complainant was also able to demonstrate discrimination in terms of the allocation of tasks in relation to the hints about potential pregnancy that had been made. The arbitration body recommended the award of CHF 7,500 compensation, and this was accepted by both parties.

### Gender-typical Career Choices

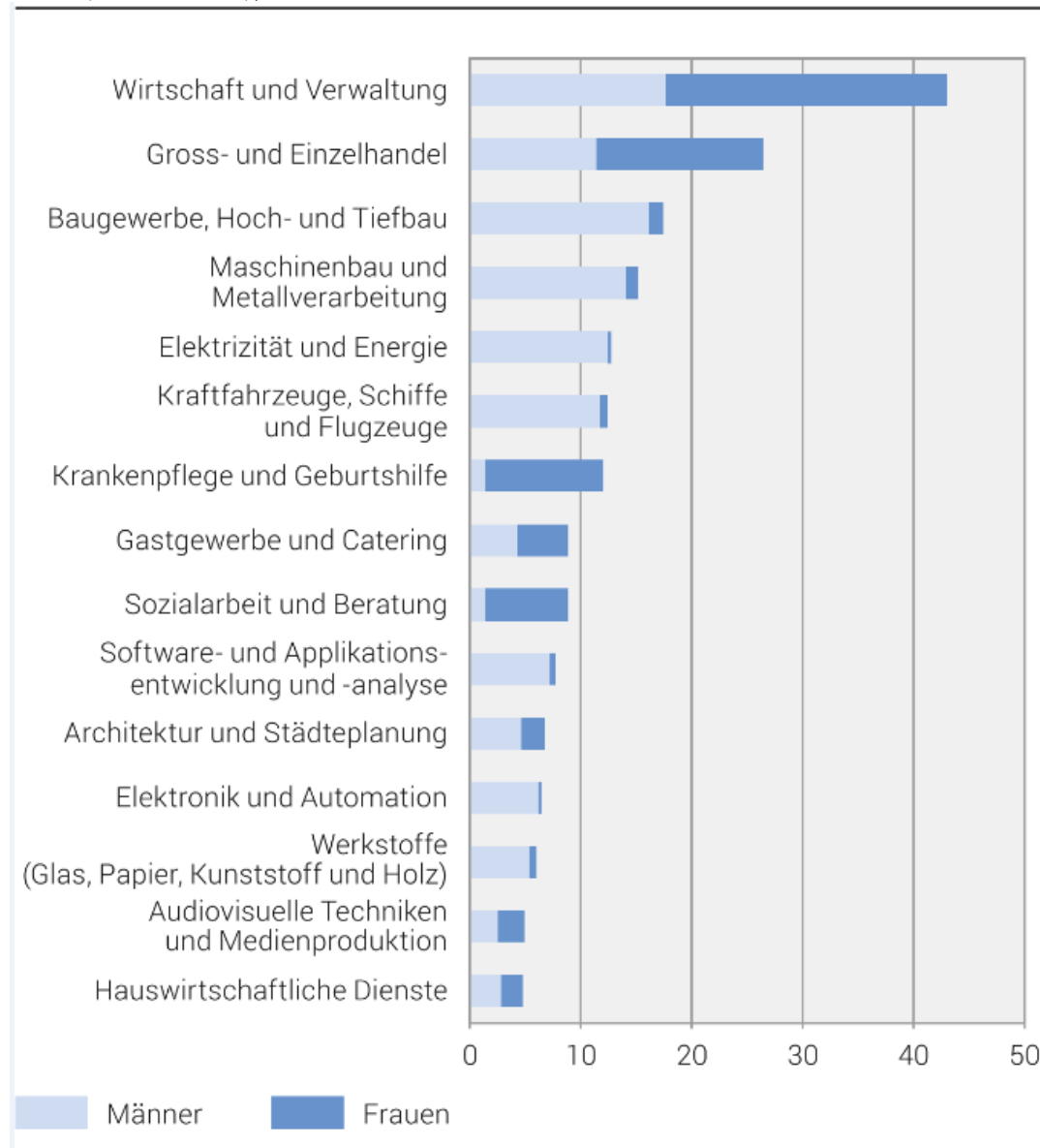
Today as in the past, many professional fields attract a majority of men or women. This is known as horizontal gender segregation. Women also tend to be concentrated in just a few professions (Schwiter et al. 2014), as is already clear from the professions for which people under 20 are currently being trained. More than 80% of people working in the fields of "health care and midwifery" and "social work and advice" are women, and these fields are therefore clearly female-dominated, as the figures from the [Federal Statistical Office](#) show, while the fields of "electrical engineering and energy" as well as "electronics and automation" have proportions of men over 90% and are thus clearly male-dominated. In terms of "business and administration" as well as "hospitality and catering" on the other hand, the distribution of the genders is more or less equal (see Figure 1). On the whole, the gender typical preferences for different areas of work have altered little in the last two

<sup>1</sup> The project was conducted by [Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Social Work](#) and financed by the [Swiss National Science Foundation \(Agora\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> The claimant alleged that she had been put on a lower starting salary than her male colleagues, and that subsequent increases were lower, too. She demanded an apology for the discriminatory allusions to pregnancy as well as the additional back payment of 64,880 Francs. The employer justified her lower salary by claiming that she needed more initial training because she had moved sideways in her career and had no qualifications specific to the field.

decades. Amongst young women there is a slight move away from "business and administration" towards "social fields" and "health fields"; for young men the fields of "engineering and technology" as well as "manufacturing" have lost some of their importance, while the fields of "information technology" and "business and administration" have experienced a period of growth (Bundesamt für Statistik 2013).

**Figure 1: Apprentices in basic professional training in terms of gender and the most common fields (in thousands), 2015/16**



Source: Federal Statistical Office – "Statistik der Lernenden" 2017

## Why Do Gender segregation and Gender-typical Areas of Work Present Problems of Equality?

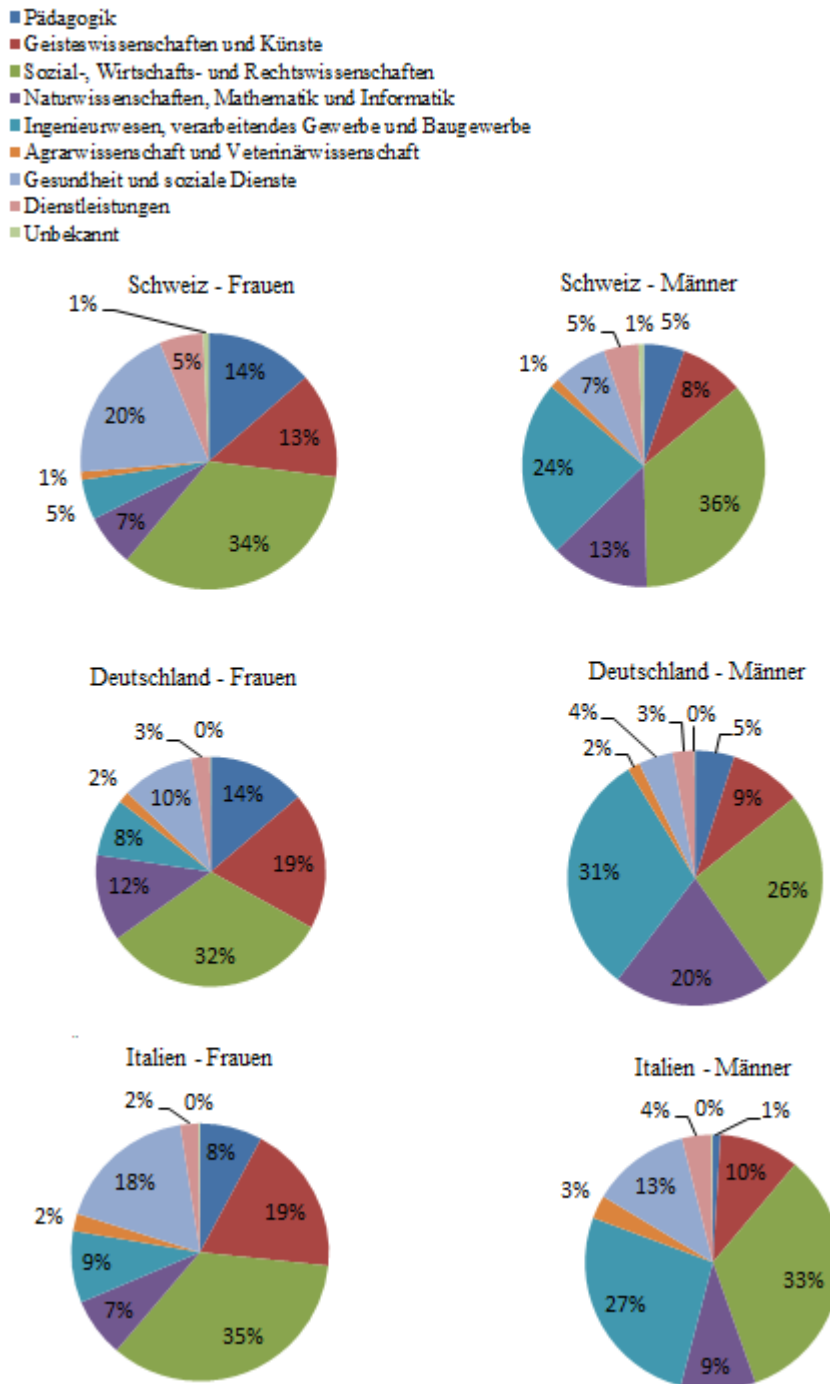
- ➔ So-called women's jobs are not as highly regarded or well-paid (helpful here are [job evaluations](#) and [wage complaints](#)).
- ➔ Talent potentials are unfulfilled: Women (and men) do not learn what they are especially good at doing or what they are particularly interested in. Here the remedy would be to make the career choice process consistently gender neutral (for MINT professions see Büro BASS 2010).

Gender segregation in the workplace is firmly established in Switzerland and there is little sign of this changing. There are several reasons for this. Young Swiss people have to make career choices at the age of about 15, an age at which the focus on gender stereotypes is strong and the expectations of parents, schools, and friends remain decisive. [Family planning](#) also tends to maintain traditional careers: Young women who would like to have children often choose typically female professions which allow them to take breaks and [part-time work](#), while men who want children look for careers that offer a good salary and career opportunities so that they can assume responsibility for the family income (Maihofer et al 2013).

What can be done to improve young people's access to gender-atypical professions? According to Schwiter et al (2014), positive feedback from families and teachers could do a lot to support young people's gender-atypical career aspirations. Schools and career advice services could also focus more on gender-atypical professions and family arrangements beyond the breadwinning husband-housewife model. Salaries and further training opportunities need to be improved in the case of traditionally female professions, and traditionally male occupations need to see increased opportunities for part-time work and flexible working hours.

[European comparisons](#) suggest that the gendered segregation of careers in Switzerland is similar to that elsewhere. A look at students in tertiary education in Switzerland, Germany and Italy shows, as in the graph below, that certain courses of study are chosen by many more men (for example, engineering) or women (for example, humanities and the arts) on an international basis. In some fields of study (e.g. the natural sciences), gender segregation varies from one country to another (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Students in higher education according to area and focus of training programmes, gender, and area of study, 2014**



Source: European Commission – Eurostat, 2017

### **Gender-segregated Appointments and the Allocation of Tasks**

As well as careers themselves, tasks are also allocated on highly gender-segregated basis in many companies. This is in part because of the training received by women and men, but it can also be ascribed to the idea, still prevalent in many companies, that some work could be done better by women and some better by men (Lanfranconi 2014: 98). In a study involving twenty interviews with male and female employees at different levels in a medium-sized industrial company, almost all the respondents had some notion of so-called "women's work and men's work" (Lanfranconi 2014: 98-99, see also Acker 1990, Wilz 2013). Women are considered suitable for "light, fine, repetitive and boring work", while men are suited to "hard, physical and dangerous work", for example in manufacturing. This image of male and female tasks pertains in the administrative field as well, where men are regarded as "suitable for technical work and contact with the clientele", and women are more suited to "working in the background, in internal networks, and communication with suppliers". This assignment can be seen in the field of accounting, where men tend to manage the accounts of the customers (debtors) and women the accounts of the suppliers (creditors). Such attitudes about gender and specific tasks are reflected in gender-specific recruitment practices: "You are male, [...] good with your hands, and have a spatial imagination. Mathematics is one of your favourite subjects" (posting quoted by Lanfranconi 2014: 99, translated into English). Such gender-specific recruitment practices are discriminatory because they exclude both women and men from certain activities (Lanfranconi 2014: 98-99). Gendered career choices therefore tend to be reinforced by such practices of gender-specific recruitment and the assignment of roles.

### **On What Basis Can Gender Segregation in the Labour Market Be Reduced?**

The GEA makes provision for the financing of programmes and advisory bodies to promote equality between women and men in working life (Articles 5-7 and 14-15 GEA). Such measures include fostering equality in terms of recruitment (Eidgenössisches Büro für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann 2014) by formulating and implementing guidelines for writing gender-responsive job advertisements. The canton of Basel-Land has produced [guidelines](#) on the use of non-gendered language including the drafting of job advertisements.

In 2013, the Bern University of Applied Sciences conducted [WimIN](#), a project researching young women (and men) who have chosen careers in ICT. The content of the courses, students' preconceptions and images of the field, the working practices of ICT professions, and questions of the work-life balance in the field were examined and, in conjunction with the project's working partners, recommendations for the later phases of training and transition to the working world were drawn up on the basis of the results.

In order to mitigate gender-typical career choices, the [Nationaler Zukunftstag](#) ("national future day") was initiated in 2001 by the [Swiss Conference of Gender Equality Delegates](#). The day was first set up as "national daughters' day", and is aimed at girls and boys on the one hand, and companies on the other, with the aim of providing children with an insight into working areas which are traditionally chosen by the opposite sex: girls in computing, for example, or boys in hairdressing salons. Today, the project is supported by the equality bodies or commissions of 19 cantons, the

city of Bern and the Principality of Liechtenstein, and is financially supported by the [State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation](#).<sup>3</sup>

Because preconceived gender roles and a lack of positive role models still mean that girls continue to show little interest in the technical professions (Gianettoni 2015, Solga & Pfahl 2009), further awareness-raising projects for young people choosing careers are aimed specifically at inspiring young women to enter these fields. Examples are information events such as [WinPACE](#), educational materials like [explore-it](#) or [KIDSinfo](#), workshops such as those from [tüfteln.ch](#), various work-experience schemes such as the [technical work-experience days](#) ("Technik Schnuppertag") at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, and project weeks like [AVANTI](#) at the University of Teacher Education in Bern.

A [study](#) of careers in the environmental field conducted by the Department of Social Work at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Fuchs 2016) suggests however, that individual awareness-raising projects are no substitute for the structural measures needed to achieve gender equality in gender-specific professions: At the structural and political level, there is a need for action in the area of [parental leave](#) and statutory measures on [equal pay](#). It also seems that broader cultural change is necessary in many areas before real equality can be achieved. Many respondents observed the need for extensive further action in the areas of career choice and recruitment. This also relates to attitudes towards women in the environmental field as well as preconceived ideas about career and leadership positions which are rarely discussed, and suggests that any long-term change to the environmental sector would require work on the broader cultural level (Fuchs 2016: 45).

<sup>3</sup> An evaluation (Stern et al. 2015) found that the "Zukunftstag" is a valuable project and recommended its continuation. Its organisational and financial structures are appropriate, and the goals are relevant and clear. The evaluation also found that in practice, the goals are often watered down: the gender aspect, namely the broadening of the spectrum of career choices without gender stereotypes, is less prominent, and there is a tendency for the day to be treated by parents and companies as a completely normal work experience day on which children accompany parents for a working day. Only a quarter of school children take part in special projects. Participation is higher in cantons where the gender theme is institutionally well-established and where various cantonal bodies are engaged. More participation is vital if the project is to be more effective; while the feedback is positive, this is not an indication that the day leads to any actual changes in career choices (Stern et al. 2015: vii).

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