

# Gender equality: child daycare is the key <sup>[1]</sup>

Swiss NSF study recommends action

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## AVAILABILITY

Summary online (full report only available in German) <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS:

The key to gender equality is clearly a matter of providing affordable child daycare outside the home, shows a study published Monday 28 October by the Swiss National Science Foundation (NSF).

Switzerland lags behind other countries in providing daycare, and it's time for action, at all political levels, to redress the situation, the broader study, National Research Programme 60, suggests.

The background: Switzerland lags

"Many European countries are currently expanding childcare provision for preschool and school-age children: nurseries, crèches, school-based daycare, lunch clubs and other forms of formal childcare. The objective is to provide mothers with greater opportunity to work outside the home at higher employment levels and to achieve greater equality in the employment levels of mothers and fathers. While 77% of mothers of children under 15 in Switzerland work, most of them are in part-time positions. In contrast, the majority of fathers are in full-time work (89%)."

The level of daycare varies hugely from one part of Switzerland to another, however, the first-ever nationwide statistical survey of childcare options makes clear, although overall

"provision in Switzerland is weak compared with that of other countries. On average 11 percent of preschool children and 8 percent of school-age children have access to a place in childcare. Compared with the EU's employment and equality objectives (the Barcelona objectives 2002), which recommend a level of 33 percent for preschool children and 90 percent for those of school age, Switzerland is therefore lagging a long way behind."

French-speaking Switzerland, notably Neuchatel and Geneva, offers the most options, along with canton Basel-Stadt: over 20 percent for preschool children with provision for school-age children in Geneva and Basel-Stadt at 43 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Zurich and Zug greater urban areas follow.

Central and eastern regions have a weak offer:

"The least well developed provision for preschool children is to be found in Appenzell Innerrhoden, Uri and Graubünden, whilst for children of school age the cantons of St. Gallen, Uri and Graubünden are the worst. The level of provision in these cantons is between 1 percent and 3 percent."

Remarkable finding: fathers will reduce their work time

The influential NSF itself describes one of the findings as "remarkable", that with accessible, affordable daycare, fathers reduce their employment while mothers increase theirs and couples re-think the family model, leading to greater equality.

"Conducting an econometric comparison of several municipalities, the researchers found that in German-speaking Switzerland the increase in childcare availability has an effect on fathers' and mothers' employment. Their findings demonstrate that were the availability of childcare places per child to rise from an average of 3% to 11%, the percentage of mothers in full-time employment would increase from 4% to 12%. In contrast, they could also show that fathers would reduce their employment levels if more childcare places were available for their children - a remarkable result. The researchers were able to show that improved childcare services create a new situation in which couples rethink the classic distribution of paid and domestic work in the family and are able to create more gender-equal models.

The researchers conclude from this data that childcare has a positive effect on gender equality. The reason is that mothers in full-time employment have greater career opportunities than those who work part time: they are able to develop their professional skills and improve their opportunities in the job market, approaching equality with those of men. If fathers reduce their working hours, this will improve the distribution of paid and domestic work, which will also have a positive influence on working mothers' career opportunities."

The study was carried out by the Infrac research agency and consultancy, together with the Swiss Institute for Empirical Economic Research at the University of St. Gallen, in a project under the auspices of the National Research Programme "Gender Equality" (NRP 60), with two principal investigators, Susanne Stern and Christina Felfe. "But does childcare actually have any impact on the employment situation of fathers and mothers?" as the question investigated.

-reprinted from Geneva Lunch

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[4]</sup>

work/life balance <sup>[5]</sup>

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