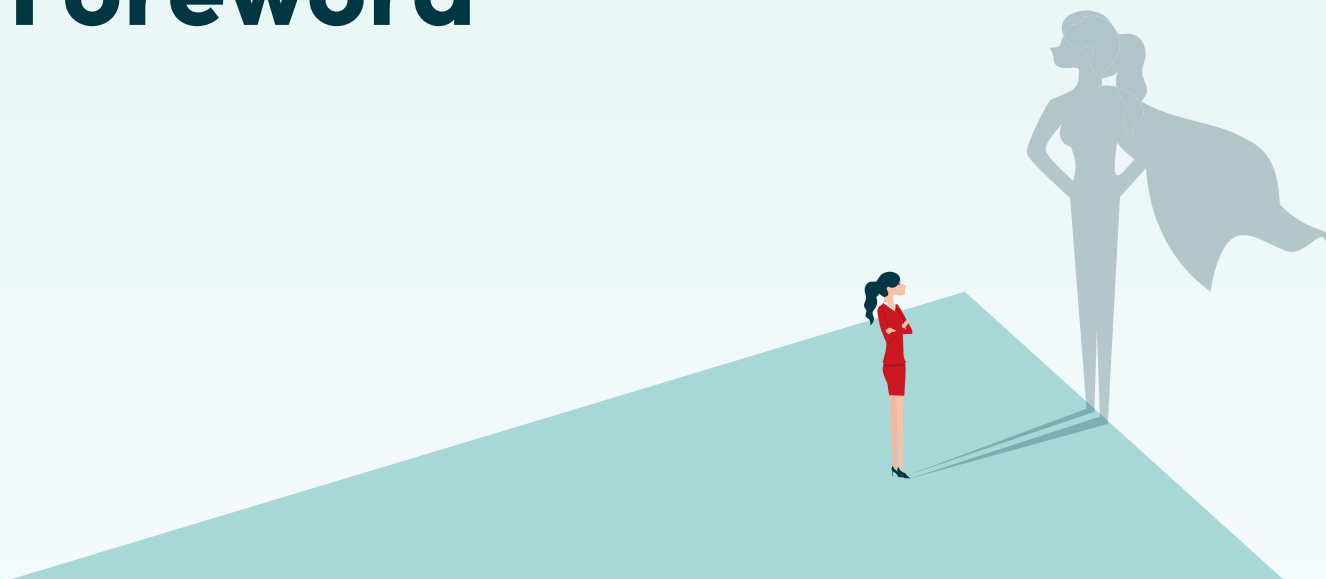


IT DOES TAKE A VILLAGE

**MOVING FROM THE FIXATION ON MOTHERS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS
TO SHARED PARENTHOOD AND MODERN CHILDCARE SOLUTIONS**



Foreword



Women make up 52% of tertiary¹ and 58% of secondary² education graduates in Switzerland, which represent increases of ten and nine percentage points (p.p.), respectively, over the last 30 years.^{3,4} Over the same timeframe, the proportion of women in the working population has risen by only five p.p. to 62%.⁵ The rest mainly focus on childcare and (unpaid) domestic work. While men are taking a more active role in caregiving and household tasks⁶ – women still shoulder most of these responsibilities. In Switzerland, women spend 50% more time (11 hours per week⁷) than men on unpaid domestic and family work.

For various reasons, including the expense of childcare and the lack of social endorsement, the less-earning partner – most often the woman – feels obliged to choose part-time work.^{8,9} In 2022, approximately 60% of employed women in Switzerland worked part-time, more than double the EU average.¹⁰ Fewer than 20% of their male counterparts chose to work part-time.¹⁰ This difference is rooted in traditional Swiss family planning: 78% of working mothers whose youngest child is under 15 work part-time, compared to “only” 47% of women without children. Conversely, fathers of children under 15 are less likely to work part-time than men without children.¹¹ Mothers who interrupt their career after giving birth take an average of five years off before returning to work.¹²

While the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) suggests that part-time work offers “additional flexibility” for managing childcare and household tasks, it often comes with downsides like precarious job conditions, fewer social security benefits, and limited opportunities for career growth. In this way, it further deepens entrenched gender roles and family structures.¹³

1 E.g., universities and universities of applied sciences

2 E.g., Matura and finished apprenticeships

3 % of women graduates from total graduates; <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/24345359>

4 % of women graduates from total graduates; <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bildung-wissenschaft/bildungsabschluesse/sekundarstufe-II.assetdetail.25745732.html>

5 % of working women from population of women aged 15+; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TL.F.CACT.FE.ZS?end=2022&locations=CH&start=1990>

6 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/society/women-still-do-50-more-unpaid-housework-than-men/46634772#:~:text=Women%20spent%20more%20time%20than,a%20week%20on%20such%20chores>.

7 <https://www.unisg.ch/de/newsdetail/news/gender-intelligence-report-2023-nachhaltige-auswege-aus-dem-fachkraeftemangel/>

8 According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office “a work-time percentage below 90%”; <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/work-income/employment-working-hours/labour-force-characteristics/full-time-part-time.html>

9 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html>

10 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/EDN-20230303-1#:~:text=In%20the%20EU%2C%20data%20shows,categories%20\(defined%20by%20ISCO\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/EDN-20230303-1#:~:text=In%20the%20EU%2C%20data%20shows,categories%20(defined%20by%20ISCO))

11 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/kataloge-datenbanken.assetdetail.24368916.html>

12 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/aktuell/neue-veroeffentlichungen.assetdetail.23329562.html>

13 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html>

Addressing this gender inequality through affordable and accessible (pre-)school childcare and day schools would mitigate long-term individual impacts and serve broader societal and economic interests. By reducing the disproportionate load on women, Switzerland could leverage its workforce more effectively, drive economic growth, and enhance its competitiveness. This would tap the substantial potential offered by a currently underutilized labor segment and benefit the nation's prosperity. As of late 2023, 60% of Switzerland's under- and unemployed population were women.¹⁴ The work shortage rate for women stands at over 12%, nearly twice as high as for men (under 7%), highlighting the potential gains that could be derived. Addressing this shortage is an opportunity to enhance women's psychological well-being¹⁵, financial independence, and even the development of their children¹⁶, making it a compelling case for action in economic and social terms.

This whitepaper is part of a joint initiative by Advance and McKinsey & Company to explore ways to overcome the barriers to women's integration into the Swiss labor force. While the first two whitepapers in this trilogy explored ways to overcome the professional impact of career interruptions, part-time work, and the difficulties of navigating promotions, this whitepaper focuses on overcoming the challenges of balancing work and childcare.

We present a fact-based perspective on the status quo and highlight concrete measures to accelerate Switzerland's progress on gender equality in business. The findings are anchored in scientific research and expert interviews (e.g., with the founders of childcare centers, (day)school principals/teachers, and parents) and a survey of approximately 600 professional women in Switzerland conducted in 2022. The average age of the respondents was 42; most had a tertiary education (97%), held management positions (85%) and had children (77%).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to express our gratitude to the authors of this whitepaper: Annette Kick, Corina Stoenescu, Erika Stanzl, and Isabel Oechlin. We also thank the other contributors – Alexandra Rhiner, Holly Price, Lena Schneidewind, Mital Guttman, Martin Hartenstein, Nina Probst, Priska Burkard and Rosa Poetes – for their support in publishing this whitepaper.



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¹⁴ <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/work-income/unemployment-underemployment/underemployment-potential-labour-force.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2011/12/working-moms>

¹⁶ <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/kids-of-working-moms-grow-into-happy-adults>

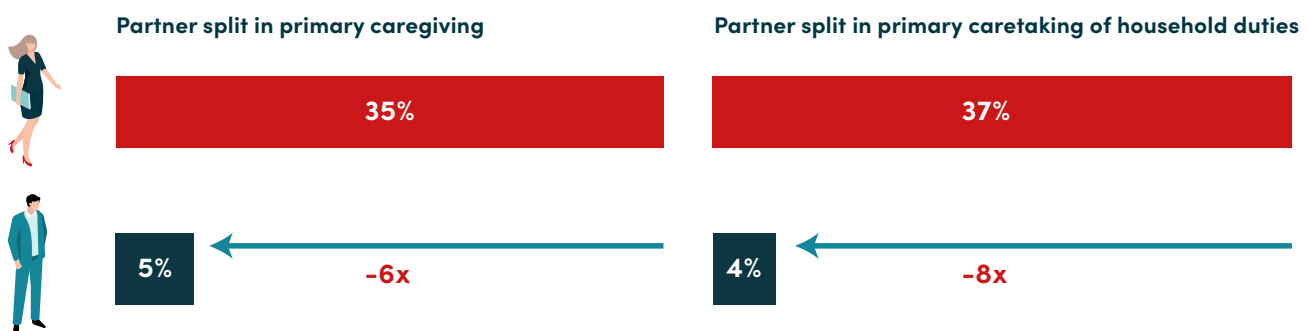
Status quo

In Switzerland, caregiving and household duties fall primarily on women.

Our survey shows that women are six times more likely than men to be primary caregivers and eight times more likely to be in charge of household duties. In 35% of the cases, the mother is the dedicated primary caregiver of the children. Over half of the respondents (54%) indicated that they have some sort of childcare support from their personal support network, i.e., their “village”. Six percent reported that someone other than their partner is the primary caregiver, and only five percent indicated that their partner is the primary caregiver. Similarly, regarding household duties, half of the respondents reported that they share the duties with their support network. Nine percent have outsourced household duties completely, 37% do it themselves, and in only four percent of cases, their partners are mainly in charge.¹⁷

Figure 1

Women are six times more likely than men to be primary caregivers and eight times more likely to be in charge of household duties



Source: Dedicated survey answered by approximately 600 working women in Switzerland, 2022

This setup creates hurdles for women professionally and personally. In our survey, 56% of the respondents find balancing their careers and childcare either very or extremely challenging. Fifty-eight percent of respondents cited time management as their biggest challenge and 50% of respondents mentioned the mental pressure that comes with managing their families.¹⁸

„After returning from maternity leave, I became a project manager twice over. I had to manage my work project and my home project. It was a lot to deal with!“

Mia (interviewee)

¹⁷ This situation is entrenched in Swiss culture, but also in the country’s legal system, which emphasizes women’s role as the primary caregiver through structural norms such as maternity and paternity leave (14 weeks for mothers versus two weeks for fathers) or custody and alimony rulings during divorces, which tend to favor a traditional childcare dogma (<https://www.demographic-research.org/articles/volume/35/16/>; <https://www.bsv.admin.ch/bsv/de/home/sozialpolitische-themen/familienpolitik/vereinbarkeit/elternurlaub.html>; <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/streit-um-die-kinderbetreuung-muetter-sollen-nicht-mehr-vorrang-haben-ld.1684646>).

¹⁸ Psychologists investigating the mental and emotional challenges faced by parents, particularly mothers, found the biggest influencing factors to be the pressure for perfectionism, the social isolation, and the insufficient opportunities for recovery from the constant sense of responsibility. Many women feel unable to carve out time for themselves, which further contributes to mental and emotional struggles. This “hidden load” is often overlooked but is one of the greatest challenges facing working women (<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210518-the-hidden-load-how-thinking-of-everything-holds-mums-back>).

Further, managing the household (38%), children's activities (33%), and childcare (32%), including finding childcare cover for business trips (19%), represent struggles for working women in Switzerland. The last point is consistent with a study by the Swiss National Council, which identified a positive correlation between the availability of childcare and the labor market participation of mothers, as such availability enables mothers to carve out time for professional or domestic work.¹⁹ Finally, balancing salary and childcare costs was frequently mentioned as challenging for working mothers.²⁰ On average, a couple in Switzerland with a mean income pays a third to a half of one person's salary to send two children to childcare.²¹ The reasons for the comparatively high cost of preschool childcare in Switzerland include lower state subsidies, higher wages and rents, and the high (quality) requirements for childcare.²²

It is important to note that many challenges women face balancing personal and professional responsibilities also extend to male primary caregivers. However, we see two notable aspects where the experiences of men diverge. Firstly, men who assume caregiving and household management duties in addition to their professional responsibilities frequently receive admiration for taking on these challenges without complaint.²³ This positive recognition highlights a double standard in how similar efforts by women are perceived. Secondly, a stigma often exists among male professionals associating a man's engagement in co-parenting – particularly to a 50% share – with a lack of career ambition.²⁴ Such attitudes underscore the need for a broader cultural shift towards valuing caregiving responsibilities irrespective of gender.

The value-add of supporting gender equality in the workforce and at home

Creating an environment where women can thrive professionally and personally would bring multiple benefits to Swiss society. Women's participation in the labor force and leadership alongside men boosts economic growth, tax incomes, organizational performance²⁵, and would help reduce the labor shortage in Switzerland. The nation is reporting record shortages of skilled workers, and many of the underemployed workers are young women.²⁶ According to the Gender Intelligence Report 2023 by Advance and the University of St. Gallen, women could spend almost six hours more time per week in the workforce if Switzerland had sufficient affordable external childcare options and/or if men took over half of the current "overtime" of unpaid work from women. Extrapolated to the population of women pursuing an occupation, this would result in an increase of 230,000 full-time equivalents.²⁷

In economic terms, Switzerland spends 0.1% of its GDP on childcare, which is comparatively little compared to the OECD average of 0.8%.^{28,29} A break-even analysis by the City of Zurich to evaluate the costs of its public day school pilot project – a (for Switzerland) relatively novel public childcare offer – against the economic outcome of increased labor participation found that the added spending on day schools clearly pays off.³⁰

19 National Council, Commission for Science, Education and Culture (WBK-N), meeting of 27 October 2022 / meeting of 17.02.2023 ([https://www.parlament.ch/centers/documents/de/Informationsnotiz%20des%20BSV%20\(Version%20before%20the%20publication\)%20D.pdf](https://www.parlament.ch/centers/documents/de/Informationsnotiz%20des%20BSV%20(Version%20before%20the%20publication)%20D.pdf))

20 The survey might be biased towards highly educated, tendentially higher-salary mothers, where costs are less frequently mentioned as a challenge than in the average Swiss population.

21 <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/where-do-rich-countries-stand-childcare>

22 <https://www.nzz.ch/finanzen/vereinbarkeit-familie-und-beruf-schweiz-kinderbetreuung-und-kitas-sind-teuer-ld.1777044>

23 https://www.blaetter.de/ausgabe/2021/november/die-erschloepfte-frau#_ftn6; <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/163469/umfrage/anererkennung-der-hausarbeit-von-maennern-und-frauen/>

24 <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/schweiz-vaeter-am-limit-zerrissen-zwischen-kind-und-karriere>; <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/fuersorge-und-karriere-welche-vaeter-braucht-das-land-ld.1640689>

25 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>

26 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/work-income/unemployment-underemployment/underemployment-potential-labour-force.html>

27 <https://www.unisg.ch/en/newsdetail/news/gender-intelligence-report-2023-sustainable-solutions-for-the-skills-shortage/>

28 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/wirtschaft/die-schweiz-macht-kinderbetreuung-zur-sache-des-staats/48336164>

29 https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_1_Public_spending_on_childcare_and_early_education.pdf

30 https://www.infras.ch/media/filer_public/b4/a2/b4a29931-5b42-48c1-8e90-8d6f65d41642/eval_ts_2025_hauptbericht_infras_fina_08_03_2021_def.pdf

Beyond the mere utilization of additional talent (women in Switzerland are just as educated as men³¹), women and mothers contribute to building trust-based and collaborative working cultures.³² The research found that managers who are committed to their life as parents performed better in reviews by their colleagues,³³ potentially because the skills required and practiced in caregiving such as, for instance, empathy, flexibility and fostering talent influence one's management style.

Undeniably, the active presence of both parents in their children's upbringing has developmental benefits. However, emerging research shows that these benefits strongly depend on the parents being actively engaged rather than merely present.³⁴ A study by Harvard Business School found that having a mother who is employed outside the home can benefit both the future career development and happiness of children.³⁵ Further, there is growing research supporting the positive impact of fathers on their children's upbringing, which is accompanied by men's increasing desire to co-parent – albeit at different speeds in different cultures.³⁶

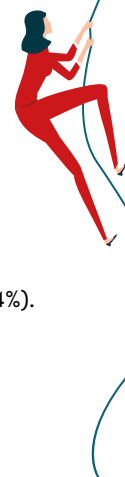
A study by Harvard Business School found that having a mother who is employed outside the home can benefit both the future career development and happiness of children.

How are women in Switzerland solving this challenge today?

Women's solutions to childcare management and their limitations often differ by the children's ages and the women's context. Most women rely on nursery schools for preschool childcare, but the choices differ.

In our survey, 64% of respondents had at least one child of preschool age (0-5 years old). Regardless of the number of children, income level, or working status of the respondent, the leading sources of care were nursery schools (53%), kindergartens (43%), and grandparents and other family members (34%). Only a minority of respondents relied on a nanny/babysitter (24%) or a childminder (4%).

Women with lower income levels were significantly more likely to rely on grandparents and other family members. In contrast, women working full-time were substantially more likely to rely on a nanny/babysitter. This effect is even more substantial for women in senior management positions (39% rely on nannies compared to the 13% average).



31 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/news/whats-new.assetdetail.8167562.html>

32 <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/beyond-the-glass-ceiling#introduction>

33 https://www.forbes.com/2007/02/27/parents-bosses-managers-leadership-careers_cx_hc_0227parents.html?sh=4391313d27de

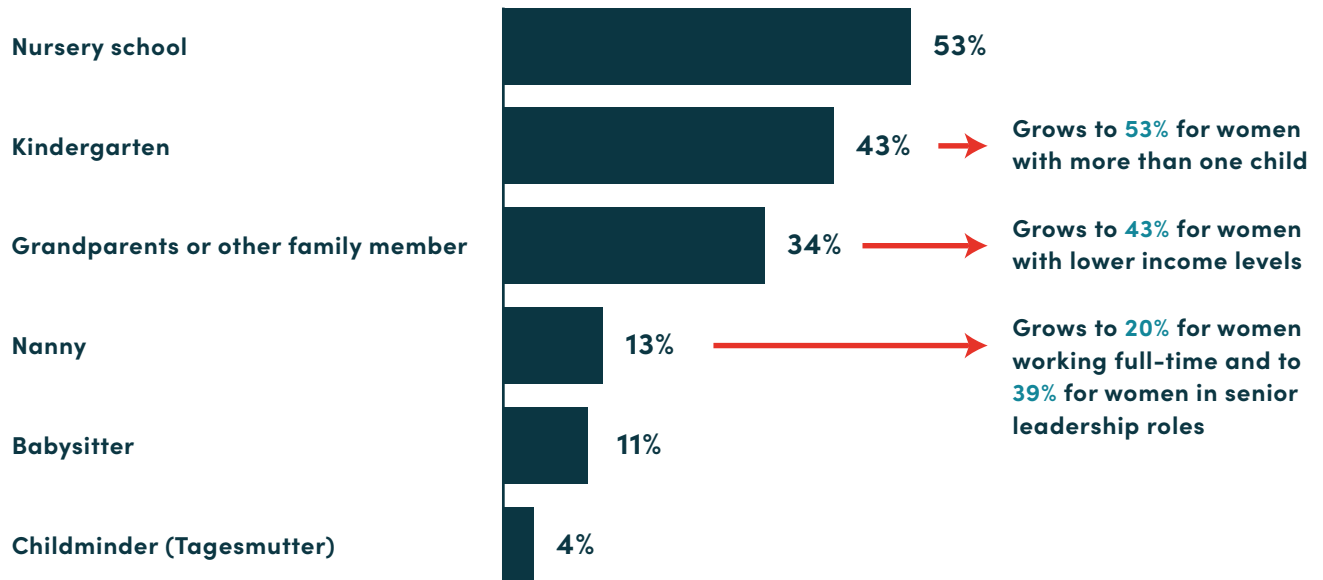
34 <https://archive.nytimes.com/parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/31/quantity-time-begets-quality-time-and-parents-spend-enough-of-both/>

35 <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/kids-of-working-moms-grow-into-happy-adults>

36 https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-75645-1_2

Figure 2

While most women rely on nursery schools for preschool children, choices differ between women



Survey question: "For your children at pre-school age (ca. 0-5 years old), which of the following sources of childcare do you currently use?"

Source: Dedicated survey answered by approximately 600 working women in Switzerland, 2022

The biggest concerns among mothers of preschool children related to the quality of childcare (74%), its convenience (64%), and its reliability (62%). Women who relied on nannies and grandparents/family members often expressed these concerns. However, it is difficult to infer if these concerns motivated their choices or continue to persist within their current setup. The concerns also varied depending on the women's professional seniority. Women in senior leadership roles were more concerned with convenience, while women with lower or no leadership roles were more concerned with accessibility.

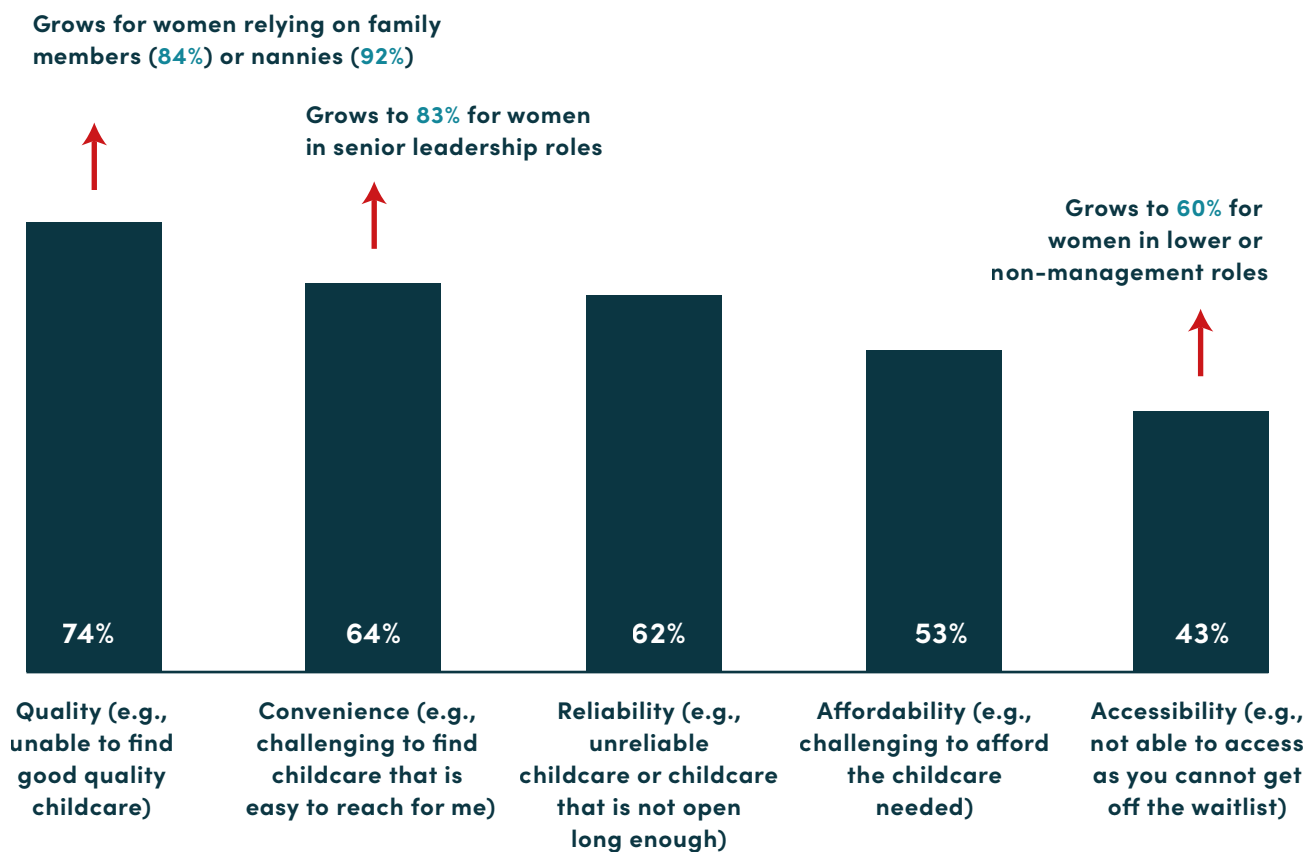
„To really help parents with preschool children, childcare centers need to be flexible and have long opening hours, happy teachers, and early learning. The right location, easy access, and safety must be a given.“

Christina Mair

Founder of Globegarden, Private Childcare Centers

Figure 3

Quality, followed by convenience, are women's biggest concerns overall



Survey question: "Thinking about childcare for your pre-school children (ca. 0-5 years old), please rank the following in terms of how much of a concern each of them are."

Source: Dedicated survey answered by approximately 600 working women in Switzerland, 2022

Another concern for women is the cost-effectiveness of childcare: 53% need help with its affordability. For a family in which both parents work and earn an average income, dedicating a third to a half of one parent's salary to fund childcare for two children³⁷ often makes it seem more financially sensible for women to opt out of work and provide care for themselves.

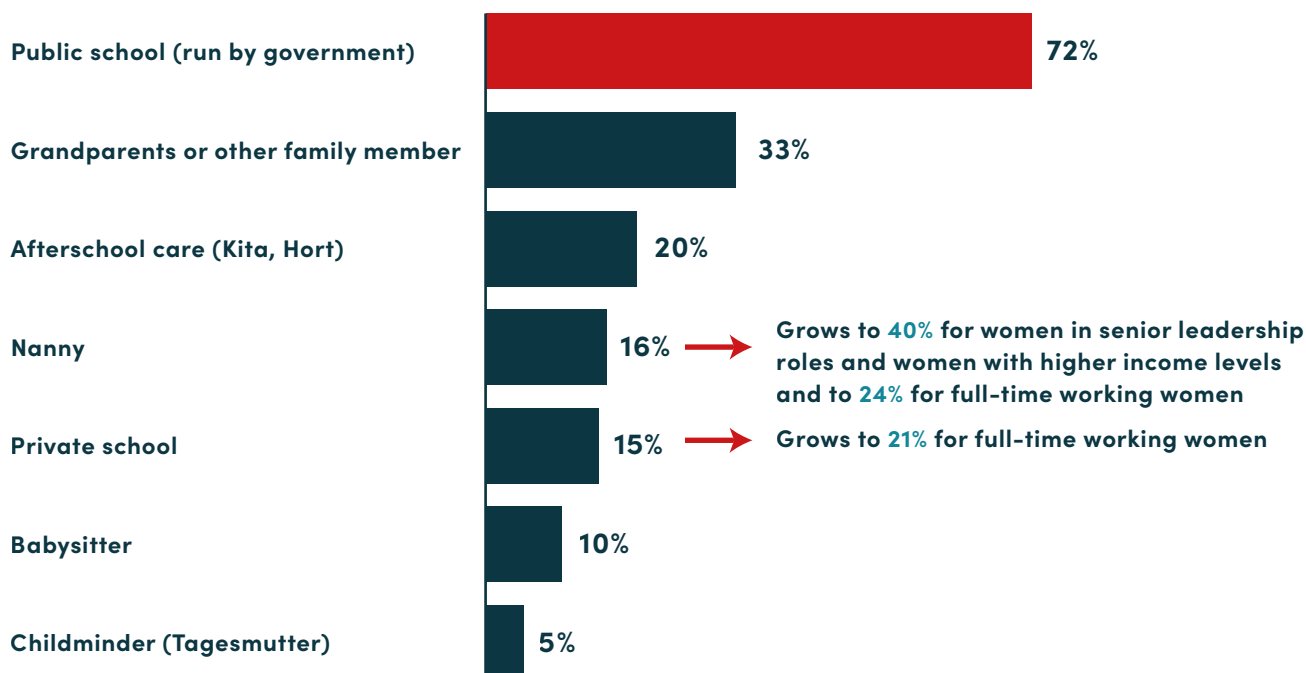
Finally, the accessibility of childcare is a major concern for parents in Switzerland. Forty-three percent of respondents are concerned about not having access to suitable childcare, which increases to 60% for women in lower or non-management roles.

„My husband once arrived at work at 8:30 a.m. after taking our daughter to school. He was asked: But what is your wife doing?“

Pia (interviewee)

Figure 4

For school children, most women rely on the public school system, yet many need to complement it with family or nanny support



Survey question: "For your children at school age (ca. 6-10 years old), which of the following sources of childcare do you currently use?"

Source: Dedicated survey answered by approximately 600 working women in Switzerland, 2022

„Parents choose our private school in part because of our approach to childcare, not just our bilingual approach. The (afternoon) care makes a big difference – especially for the families where both parents work.“

Elizabeth Suter

Principal of Terra Nova, Private Day School and Kindergarten

The distribution of public versus private schools or complementary care solutions remained the same with the number of children. Women with more senior leadership roles and higher incomes were more likely to complement the school schedule with a nanny (five times more frequently in the case of women with an income above CHF 150,000). The same trend could be observed for women working full-time. Women working full-time were more likely to rely on private school (21% compared to 8% for part-time working women), the same for women with higher earnings (two times more frequently for women with an income above CHF 150,000). This effect is likely due to the inconvenient schedules of most public schools and the respondents' relative ability to afford private schools with higher flexibility and, in some cases, alternative learning offerings.

When the children reach school age...

...the lack of good-quality childcare offerings and the stigma of working drive women to drop out of work. Some of the women interviewed felt that the childcare solutions available had significantly worsened between their children's preschool and school ages, directly hindering their ability to continue their careers. They attributed this to the rigidity of the public school system and the prohibitive cost of trying to work around it.

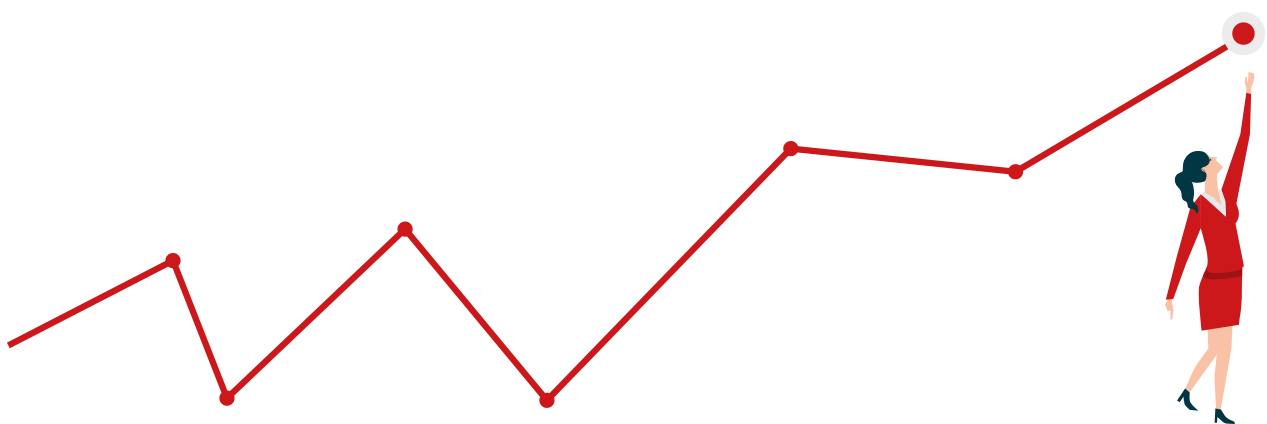
„Having to pick up my kids for lunch every day makes it practically impossible for me to have a job. Some schools are starting to offer lunch, but it's not available where we live – not to mention quite expensive and badly regarded.“

Andrea (interviewee)

On top of this, 70% of respondents felt there was a stigma attached to being a working mother, which often manifested itself in the school and daycare environment itself, with many families being told that the additional hours of childcare beyond school were not a five-days-a-week solution but for select days only. Working mothers of children aged between 6 and 10 felt more stigmatized than those of children aged between 0 and 5 – potentially because daycare is more accepted for younger age groups. For this reason, the City of Zurich's day-school pilot project made lunch at school obligatory for all students to avoid stigmas and exclusion.³⁸

„I really felt like a bad mom for putting my children into childcare 100%. I've been judged at work and in the school environment. But I'm more concerned when this type of judgment happens at school and can get to my children.“

Lena (interviewee)



Development snapshot: evolution of the Swiss childcare system

Official steps are being taken to enhance preschool childcare and the (public) school system.

Improving the childcare system should undoubtedly be a priority for Switzerland, which, according to UNICEF, ranks 38th out of 41 developed countries in terms of overall childcare solutions.³⁹ This will require a multi-faceted approach involving all stakeholders (parents, teachers, children, and governments) to create a more suitable environment that supports gender equality in the workforce and at home.

One obvious measure is to increase the possibility of fathers participating in childcare, starting with more extended leave at birth. Incentivizing the use of the two-week paternity leave for fathers in Switzerland should be further promoted to prevent employers from subtly letting fathers know that paternity leave may hinder their careers and/or informing male workers of their rights.⁴⁰

Improving the affordability of childcare would also enable its broader accessibility, especially for low- to middle-income parents. A financial mechanism was introduced in 2023 to increase tax deductions from the direct federal tax for childcare from CHF 10,100 to CHF 25,000 per child and year.⁴¹ However, tax regulations still vary widely at the cantonal level.

Development in preschool-age childcare

While the share of available preschool external care in Switzerland has increased over recent years⁴², further expansion is necessary to minimize the number of families who would like to use it but cannot. Several different initiatives are underway to address the issue of state support for childcare subsidies.⁴³ The main federal impetus program to promote family-complementary childcare was extended until 2026 when a corresponding law will replace it.⁴⁴

One of the most oft-cited challenges regarding preschool childcare is its need for more convenience and flexibility. Not only the availability of childcare but also its family-friendly design is relevant, e.g., in the form of flexible drop-off and pick-up times.⁴⁵

³⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/where-do-rich-countries-stand-childcare>

⁴⁰ <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/papizeit-in-der-schweiz-harziger-start-fuer-den-vaterschaftsurlaub>

⁴¹ <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/alle-news-in-kuerze/hoeherer-steuerabzug-fuer-extern-betreute-kinder-ab-2023/47281696>

⁴² <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/familien/familienergaelzende-kinderbetreuung.html>

⁴³ <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/die-schweiz-stimmt-ueber-700-millionen-fuer-kitas-ab-103549906442>

⁴⁴ <https://www.bsv.admin.ch/bsv/de/home/finanzhilfen/kinderbetreuung.html>

⁴⁵ Expert interview with Christina Mair, founder of Globegarden

Development in school-age childcare

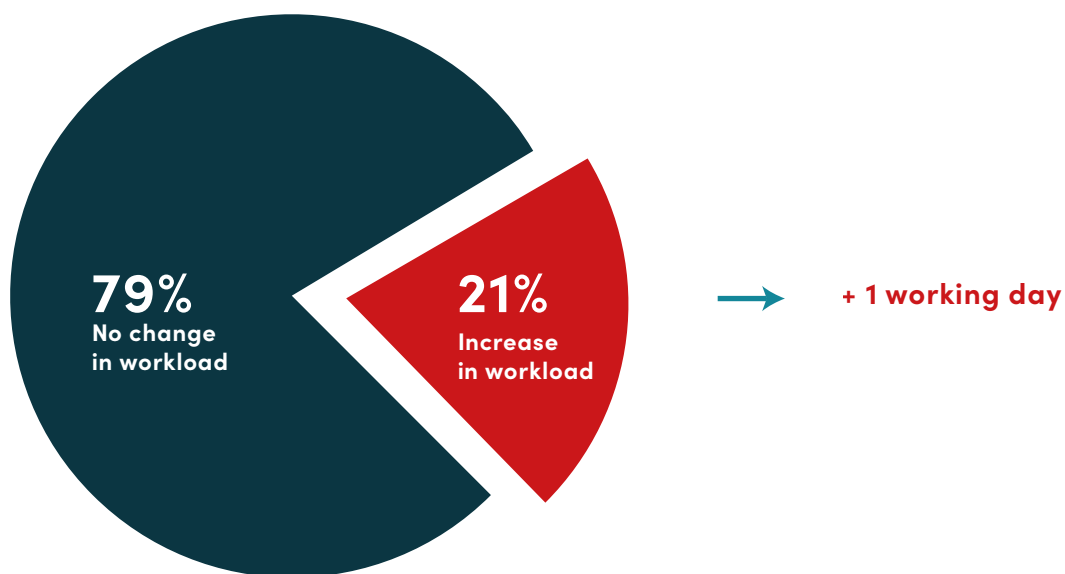
Optimizing childcare for schoolchildren has long been a topic of debate in Switzerland.⁴⁶ Afternoon care, in particular, is a challenge for many parents, as in most cases, the children come home at lunchtime. However, changes have so far mainly taken place on a smaller and/or regional scale because certain parts of the education system are in the hands of the cantons and municipalities⁴⁷, each of which applies its politics and budget to decisions about the development of its school system.

The City of Zurich provides a pioneering example of (afternoon) childcare. The municipality voted to transform their primary and secondary schools and second-year kindergartens into day schools that offer lunch as well as afternoon and early-evening childcare until 2030.⁴⁸ Thirty schools have already transitioned as part of a pilot project. A report by the City of Zurich's Department of School and Sport analyzing the project's outcome showed high advocacy among teachers, supervisors, students, and parents.

Over half of the parents of day-school children surveyed use day schools with fixed lunches to better reconcile work and family life. In fact, over 20% of parents have increased their workload or are planning to do so (on average, one more working day).⁴⁹

Figure 5

Share of surveyed parents of day-school children at Zurich's pilot schools that increased their workload or are planning to do so



Source: Report by the City of Zurich's Department of School and Sport

Other municipalities have announced plans to follow, some even within a short timeframe.⁵⁰ While public day schools are still rare⁵¹ on a national level, the City of Zurich's pilot project is a showcase example for other regions.

These developments show that policymakers have recognized the issue and that progress is heading in the right direction, even if the speed of implementation is critical.

⁴⁶ E.g., <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20050432>

⁴⁷ <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/de/home/bildung-wissenschaft/bildung.html>

⁴⁸ <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/ssd/de/index/volksschule/tagesschule2025/elterninformation.html>

⁴⁹ https://www.infras.ch/media/filer_public/b4/a2/b4a29931-5b42-48c1-8e90-8d6f65d41642/eval_ts_2025_hauptbericht_infras_final_08_03_2021_def.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://www.zsz.ch/ende-2026-soll-die-tagesschule-in-kuesnacht-starten-627303088569>

⁵¹ <https://www.profamilia.ch/familien/familienratgeber/stichworte/tagesschulen-und-tagesstrukturen#:~:text=Gebundene%20Tagesstrukturen%2C%20genannt%20Tagesschulen%2C%20gibt,wie%20an%20anderen%20C3%B6ffentlichen%20Schulen.>

What else can be done to improve Switzerland's childcare and support gender equality?

Change the narrative and debunk myths

Our interviewees indicated that one of the main challenges is deeply held societal beliefs about the role of women and men, which are reflected in institutional setups and cause day-to-day microaggressions. These manifest themselves, for example, in the scheduling of work meetings at school pick-up times or the judgmental comments received by working mothers in the workplace, the nursery, or school.

A UNICEF study found that almost 40% of Swiss citizens believe that preschool children suffer when their mothers work. This belief is far less common in Sweden and Denmark, where less than 15% and 10%, respectively, share this sentiment.⁵² These two countries have higher rates of formal childcare enrollment and also score higher in the Gender Diversity Index.⁵³

Swiss citizens' beliefs are often grounded in tradition rather than science. In German-speaking countries, the old-fashioned term "Rabemutter" is still used when a mother is perceived to neglect her children because of work. While emerging research shows that mothers' involvement in the workplace has a positive impact on their children's development and wellbeing⁵⁴, there is still a need for longer-term, larger cohort studies, including in a Swiss context.

Particularly in a country such as Switzerland, whose population is deeply involved in decision-making processes, developing a compelling, fact-based narrative and engaging progressive and more traditional-leaning cantons in the public debate could drive faster and more sustainable change. Governments and companies can spearhead change by introducing concrete structural initiatives and offerings.

Improving the affordability and quality of childcare

Private institutions make up a large share of childcare centers⁵⁵, especially for preschool childcare. Therefore, stakeholders such as employers and private organizations must also enhance childcare services.

On the government side, the experts we interviewed identify levers (besides financial support) such as removing administrative hurdles and standardizing regulatory requirements for childcare centers.

An additional hurdle is the shortage of childcare professionals within Switzerland, which results in one preschool teacher having to look after 18 children. This ratio places Switzerland 25th out of 41 countries.⁵⁶ However, the ratios differ between private and public institutions and according to age groups. For daycare centers that care for children before kindergarten age, the number of children per caregiver is regulated by canton and varies from 5-8⁵⁷, which would be relatively low in comparison to other OECD countries.⁵⁸ However, the ratio increases sharply at kindergarten age, as the average class size in Swiss kindergartens is over 19 children.⁵⁹

Further investment should be made in improving the quality of the offering, including enhancing the teacher-child ratio. Levers to relieve this burden include updating apprenticeship programs and increasing the attractiveness of the childcare profession.

52 <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/where-do-rich-countries-stand-childcare>

53 Composite indicator assessing approx. 650 listed companies across 19 European countries based on the absolute share of women in leadership, the share of women on the Board, the share of women at executive level, and the share of women in all committees

54 <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/kids-of-working-moms-grow-into-happy-adults>

55 <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/swiss-government-takes-childcare-in-hand/48368708>

56 <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/where-do-rich-countries-stand-childcare>

57 <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/zu-wenig-betreuerinnen-kantoenligeist-gefaehrdet-qualitaet-von-kindertagesstaetten>

58 <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/where-do-rich-countries-stand-childcare>

59 <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bildung-wissenschaft/bildungsindikatoren/themen/ressourcen-betreuung/klassengroesse.html>

„We could save on administrative work and potentially charge parents less if the official regulation of childcare wasn't so administratively complex and diverse between municipalities.“

Christina Mair

Founder of Globegarden, Private Childcare Centers

Expanding the childcare solutions offered by employers

Employers also have an essential role in improving the balance between family and career in Switzerland. Flexible working hours or home-office arrangements can support mothers and fathers, but companies are also taking further-reaching measures to support childcare. The following employer initiatives should serve as an inspiration to organizations:

► Provision of daycare places for employees' children

Several companies have started to offer daycare places to their employees near the office location, either by partnering with local daycare facilities to get higher priority for their employees (e.g., Siemens) or by opening their own childcare facility on site.⁶⁰ ABB was one of the first Swiss companies to open its own daycare center for employees in 1966.⁶¹ Nowadays, several companies, such as Roche Diagnostics, have followed its example.⁶² This increases the accessibility and convenience of daycare facilities for their employees and their attractiveness to talent.⁶³

► Partnering with childcare networks

Some companies offer partnerships with child- and elderly-care networks (e.g., profawo⁶⁴, Globegarden), where employees can choose their preferred option and receive service discounts. This allows employees to choose a daycare center closer to their home than their workplace. Some of these networks also provide counseling services to parents and often an emergency nanny agency to support parents if their regular daycare falls through.

► Flexible childcare on demand

At its headquarters, Swiss Re, in collaboration with Tadah⁶⁵, launched the Swiss Re Kids House, an internal childcare facility that employees can book on demand via a booking system when they need flexible childcare. In addition, Swiss Re has set up a dedicated workspace nearby so that parents can work close to their children.

⁶⁰ <https://www.zentralplus.ch/wirtschaft/eigene-kitas-bei-zuger-unternehmen-fehlanzeige-785631/>

⁶¹ <https://www.abbkinderkrippen.ch/leitbild-2/ueber-uns-geschichte/>

⁶² <https://www.zentralplus.ch/wirtschaft/eigene-kitas-bei-zuger-unternehmen-fehlanzeige-785631/>

⁶³ <https://www.handelszeitung.ch/management/betriebliche-kinderbetreuung-zahlt-sich-aus-756301>

⁶⁴ <https://www.profawo.ch/angebote>

⁶⁵ <https://www.swissre.com/careers/vereinbarkeit-von-beruf-und-familie-neu-denken.html>

▶ Onsite kids' room for emergencies

Lidl and Nestle Suisse, among others, have set up a parent-child office at their headquarters.^{66,67} Employees can use these offices if emergencies prevent their planned childcare from taking place.

▶ Providing coaching services to optimize the compatibility of work and family

ETH Zurich has launched a pilot project to help employees and students plan their childcare according to their needs.⁶⁸ Employees or students can register free of charge for two consultation sessions, during which a specialist office will support them in creating an optimized childcare program. In addition, private childcare providers and enablers have expanded their services to advance the accessibility and flexibility of childcare in Switzerland.

▶ Coworking spaces with integrated daycare

Certain coworking spaces combine childcare with workplaces (e.g., Tadah⁶⁹, The Village Coworking⁷⁰). Parents can book a workspace online while childcare professionals look after their children, enabling them to remain close to their children while conducting their work in a productive atmosphere.

▶ Childcare consulting for companies

A variety of childcare providers (e.g., Tadah⁷¹, Globegarden, Familizy⁷², Fachstelle UND⁷³) are now offering consultation to companies and municipalities and supporting them to develop customized solutions that help their employees improve the compatibility of family and work.

This list provides examples of further actions that various stakeholders could implement. At the same time, we look forward to the emergence of further innovative business models to improve the childcare system and gender equality in Switzerland.

Our findings show that mothers and fathers and the Swiss economy would benefit from further improvements to the childcare system. Be it the introduction of family-friendly childcare regulations by policymakers, innovative solutions by companies and schools, or the end of the stigmatization of working mothers by society, positive change can only occur if all the different stakeholders work together.

66 https://www.focus.de/finanzen/news/unternehmen/lidl-im-news-ticker-lidl-fuehrt-diese-revolution-fuer-eltern-im-schweizer-hauptsitz-ein_id_10564019.html

67 <https://www.handelszeitung.ch/unternehmen/bei-nestle-durfen-die-kinder-mit-ins-buro-623026>

68 <https://ethz.ch/en/the-eth-zurich/working-teaching-and-research/working-environment/family/childcare.html>

69 <https://coworking.tadah.ch/en/>

70 <https://thevillagecoworking.org/>

71 <https://www.vereinbarkeit.tadah.ch/>

72 <https://familizy.ch/en/>

73 <https://www.fachstelle-und.ch/>



About Advance

Advance is the leading business association for gender equality in Switzerland, a network of over 140 Swiss-based companies committed to increasing the share of women in management.

It's a proven fact that gender-mixed teams perform better, are more innovative and likely to generate more profit.

With a concrete program, Advance supports companies to turn diversity into a competitive advantage. Because a gender-equal and inclusive workplace is a win-win for all genders, business and society.

Find out more here

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