

English translation of our article in the “Bündner Woche”, February 5, 2020

Research in Graubünden

Survey among female scientists

We can do more for gender equality

Long before women's voting rights were introduced at the federal level in 1971, a female figure of identification for the unity of the Swiss Confederation was created in the 17th century: Helvetia. Even today, she adorns part of the Swiss coinage and is an important element in art and literature. With so much feminine, century-old symbolism, one would assume that gender equality in Switzerland in the 21st century is largely complete. Since 1996,



Gender equality is not yet complete. Picture: Shutterstock

the Gender Equality Act has been aimed at eliminating structural disadvantages for women in the workforce. The Federal Statistical Office's figures for 2019 paint a different picture: there are still marked differences between the sexes in terms of wage levels, employment levels, share of domestic work, occupational pension provision and representation in company management and political institutions. Without exception, these differences are to the disadvantage of women.

Let us look at Graubünden: Annina Schweizer is a high school student at the Schweizerische Alpine Mittelschule (SAMD) in Davos. At the end of 2019, for her final thesis, she conducted an online survey of almost sixty female scientists at the Davos-based research institutes, asking them about their work situation. The research institutes, including the AO Research Institute, the Swiss Institute of Allergy and Asthma Research, the Physical-Meteorological Observatory and the WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF, conduct internationally recognized research. The internationality is also reflected in the composition of the respondents. Swiss women make up a quarter of the survey participants. Just as many are from Germany. Among the sixteen nations represented, Italian women represent the third largest group with fourteen percent. The age range of women ranges from 23 to 56 years. A good two thirds are between 28 and 39 years old.

It is encouraging that so many highly qualified female medical and natural scientists work in the research institutes in Davos. Three-quarters of the respondents are employed full-time. One reason for this is that the women scientists invest a lot of time in their research. On the other hand, the vast majority fear that part-time employment could have a negative impact on their scientific career. Mothers who work part-time feel particularly disadvantaged. There are a total of twelve female academics with children among the 59 respondents, only two of whom are younger than 37. What is the reason for the low maternal rate? Is family

planning increasingly being postponed until the fourth decade of life? Is it structural framework conditions that act as a deterrent? Women see a need for improvement in favor of family planning: They would like to see more men working part-time in favor of family work, significantly longer paternity leave, more flexible and cost-effective childcare, and the opportunity to work from home.

At least as important as structural improvements is a different and open-minded attitude. The survey has shown that women with female role models and mentors are significantly more likely to seek leadership positions than those without. Female role models for girls and women who do not allow themselves to be forced into outdated gender roles must become more visible: So that more women feel confident enough to take on a leadership position and are supported in their ambitions. This year's series of articles will therefore portray in particular successful women in the research institutes in Graubünden.

Find out more about research in Graubünden: www.academiaractica.ch, www.graduateschool.ch.

The author



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