University of Essex Online

MSc Artificial Intelligence

Literature Review

Topic: Gender Pay Gap in the Technology Sector in Switzerland

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1. Introduction

1.1 Gender pay gap in Switzerland

The gender pay gap *is* a persistent feature of the Swiss *labor* market despite decades of formal equality and relatively high female labor force participation in the country. According to the Federal Statistical Office, the overall wage gap between women and men in the Swiss economy was standing at around 16.2% in 2022, down from about 18% in 2020, while the median-based gap decreased from 11.5% in 2018 to 8.4% in 2024 (Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication, 2024). When the whole lifetime income is considered, women's cumulative earnings over their working life remains about 40% lower than those of men, reflecting differences in labor market participation, total working hours, and pay levels (Federal Statistical Office, 2025). These figures still hide significant variation between sectors, occupations and hierarchical levels. High-wage sectors such as technology and information and communication technology (ICT) exhibit high pay and gender disparities.

This literature review focuses on the technology sector in Switzerland, which is understood broadly as ICT specialists as well as tech-intensive occupations, and asks how far the gender pay gap observed in the overall economy is reproduced or mitigated within this domain. This review is guided by two main theoretical lenses. First, human capital theory which suggests wage differentials arise primarily from differences in education, experience and job characteristics. In this view, gender gaps in pay do largely reflect gendered educational choices as well as work histories (Kunze, 2017). Secondly, gender inequality frameworks emphasize structural as well

as normative factors like occupational segregation, unequal division of unpaid care, societal gendered norms around leadership and technical competence, and explicit or implicit discrimination. This means systematically disadvantage for women and other marginalized groups, even when their human capital is comparable (Federal Office for Gender Equality, 2023).

1.2 Literature Review Framework

The literature for this review was identified through a structured search strategy. Academic sources were retrieved via Google Scholar, the library of the university of Essex and other institutional repositories (e.g. ETH Zurich, University of Bern, University of Lausanne), using combinations of keywords such as “gender pay gap”, “gender wage gap”, “Switzerland”, “ICT”, “technology sector”, “STEM”, “salary statistics Switzerland” and “earnings structure survey”. Policy and industry reports were sourced from the Federal Statistical Office, the Federal Office for Gender Equality, the OECD, the ILO, and Swiss sector organizations such as Advance, swissICT, Women in Digital Switzerland and digitalswitzerland besides others.

Inclusion criteria were:

- empirical studies or official statistics with a clear methodology
- focus on Switzerland or allowing explicit comparison with Switzerland
- publication date primarily from 2010 onwards (with earlier seminal work included where necessary and only no newer sources could be found)
- relevance to gender pay, STEM participation or ICT/tech labor markets

Opinion pieces and non-transparent industry marketing documents were excluded to ensure academic integrity. Given the relatively limited number of peer-reviewed studies specifically on the Swiss tech sector, high-quality grey literature is included but treated critically in terms of methodology and potential bias.

The remainder of the report first outlines the gender pay gap in Switzerland and situates the tech sector within this context, before examining social and policy-related drivers of the gap and discussing limitations and gaps in the existing evidence base.

2. The gender pay gap issue

2.1 The broader Swiss context

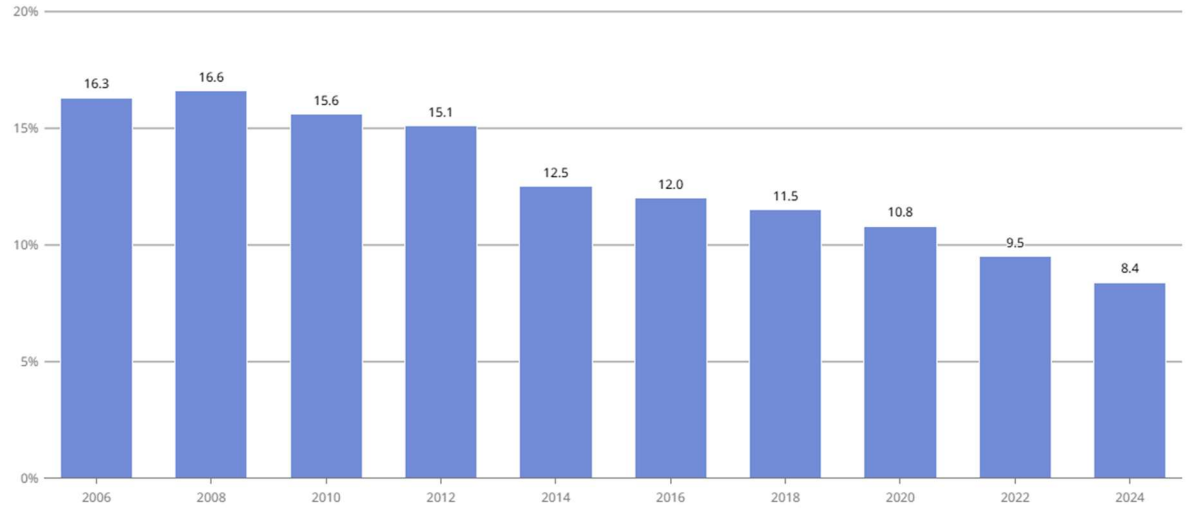

Figure 1 - (Federal Statistical Office, 2025)

According to the Federal Statistical Office's Earnings Structure Survey, the median gender pay gap for private and public sectors combined fell from around 16–17% in

the mid-2000s to 8.4% in 2024 (Figure 1). This means that, in 2024, women's median gross monthly wage was still 8.4% lower than men's (Federal Statistical Office, 2025). Although the direction of change is clearly downward, the FSO's detailed analyses and related decomposition studies indicate that a sizeable share of the remaining gap cannot be explained by observable characteristics such as education, age or professional position and is therefore linked to structural and discriminatory factors as clearly described by Schmid (2016) while she analyzed the wage gap with Swiss Household Panel data and found that women still earn less than men with the same endowments, with occupational segregation and structural factors as key drivers.

2.2 The STEM area

The technology sector sits at the intersection of high wages, high demand and deep gender segregation. Women are still systematically underrepresented both in STEM education and in ICT occupations overall. KOF ETH and related studies show a pronounced gender gap in choosing STEM majors in Switzerland, comparable to Germany, Austria and France. The choice has a causal impact on later earnings because STEM occupations tend to be better paid compared to other areas (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, 2020). At the labor market level, women make up only around 16.6% of ICT specialists in Switzerland, and in tech companies they represent about one-third of non-management staff but only around 20% of mid- and top-management which means they are even more underrepresented in management (Advance & Bain & Company, 2025).

Pay levels in ICT are relatively high compared to many other sectors, as evidenced by swissICT salary benchmarks. If women are underrepresented in these occupations, they miss out on these higher earnings, which in turn contributes to the overall gender earnings gap (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, 2020). Moreover, emerging sector-specific evidence suggests that even within tech, women may face additional pay disadvantages making the gap even larger. Women in Digital Switzerland estimate that women in Swiss tech roles earn on average around 20% less than male peers, after accounting for role and seniority, although the underlying methodology is not fully transparent (Mota, 2024). At the international level, ILO analyses show gender pay gaps of at least 5% among ICT professionals in most countries, with gaps exceeding up to 25% (El Achkar 2023). Older OECD/EU tech-industry analyses similarly show that, while tech pay gaps are sometimes smaller than national averages, they rarely disappear and can even be larger in some contexts (Honeypot, 2018).

Taken together, the literature suggests that the tech sector in Switzerland is characterized by strong horizontal segregation, with women making up only around 15–20% of ICT specialists, and overall underrepresentation in leadership, where women account for roughly one in five management roles. While this means women are not necessarily less represented in management than in the tech workforce, both levels remain far from gender parity.

3. Causes and Contributing Factors

3.1 Social Causes

From a gender inequality perspective, the Swiss gender pay gap reflects a combination of gendered education pathways, occupational segregation, unequal sharing of unpaid care work and discriminatory wage-setting practices. Hupka-Brunner and Meyer show how things start very early on and stay for the whole life-path. Gendered transitions from school to work, combined with higher rates of part-time work and career interruptions among women, generate cumulative disadvantages over the life course that manifest as large earnings and pension gaps (Hupka-Brunner and Meyer, 2023). Women in Switzerland undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid care work and are more likely to work part-time, which reduces both hourly wages and opportunities for promotion (Federal Office for Gender Equality, 2023).

Sociocultural expectations and stereotypes influence both the perceived attractiveness of STEM jobs and women's sense of belonging in technical domains. Osikominu and colleagues found that sociocultural background and gender norms are still strongly associated with the choice of STEM majors, even when academic ability between women and men are comparable (Osikominu, Grossmann & Osterfeld, 2019). KOF ETH's analysis of STEM participation by canton suggests that local initiatives and role models can make a difference, but national progress has been slow (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, 2020).

Career-entry analyses show that, even controlling for education, occupation and other observable characteristics, women tend to start their careers with a wage around 7% lower than men, suggesting that discriminatory pay-setting or negotiation dynamics are already present at the first job (Gender Campus, 2014). In the tech sector specifically, international evidence points to workplace cultures that can be exclusionary or even hostile to women, including stereotypes about technical competence, biased evaluation of performance, and a lack of female role models (El Achkar 2023).

While these sources are not always methodologically rigorous, they align with broader international research on gender in STEM and suggest that cultural and organizational factors interact with structural ones to sustain pay inequalities.

3.2 Policies and politics

Switzerland has a formal legal framework prohibiting gender-based pay discrimination through the Federal Act on Gender Equality, and the Confederation funds projects promoting workplace equality (Federal Office for Gender Equality, 2023). In recent years, policy measures have increasingly focused on pay transparency and mandatory equal-pay analyses for larger firms. Companies with 100 or more employees are required to carry out pay-equity analyses using tools such as Logib, and some obtain external certifications such as the “we pay fair” label when unexplained pay differences remain below defined thresholds (digitalswitzerland, 2024).

Research on pay transparency in other contexts indicates that such measures can reduce unexplained pay gaps. Bennedsen and co-authors show that a 2006 reform of equal-pay reporting reduced the unexplained gender wage gap by around 3.5 percentage points in affected firms (Bennedsen, Larsen & Wei, 2023).

Political debates have also targeted gender quotas on company boards and leadership positions. Swiss parliamentary decisions on quotas aim to increase women's representation in corporate governance, which may indirectly affect the tech sector by shifting expectations and role models (Le News, 2024).
Overall, the policy and organizational literature indicates that formal equality and pay-analytics tools are necessary but not sufficient. While they can reduce overt discrimination in base pay, they have limited reach over structural drivers such as part-time norms, career interruptions, occupational sorting and informal power structures which are all highly relevant in the Swiss tech ecosystem.

4. Limitations and gaps of the Literature Review

Despite substantial research on the Swiss gender wage gap, several limitations remain, particularly regarding the technology sector:

1. Most of the Swiss wage-gap analyses rely on national surveys that provide limited granularity for ICT occupations.

2. The most detailed accounts of gender pay in Swiss tech come from advocacy or consultancy reports which may use proprietary methods and are not peer-reviewed.
3. Most existing Swiss studies rarely examine how gender pay gaps intersect with other axes of inequality such as migration status, race or class despite evidence that these factors may play an important role.
4. Qualitative studies on tech workplaces in Switzerland are rare, limiting our understanding of how everyday practices reproduce pay gaps.

5. Conclusion

This literature reviewed shows that Switzerland has made some progress in closing the gender pay gap but it is still considered limited. Unadjusted gaps remain and lifetime earnings differences even amount to around 40%, even as female employment rates in Switzerland are high by international standards (Federal Statistical Office, 2025). In the technology sector specifically, women are severely underrepresented. Only around one in six ICT specialists in Switzerland is female and their representation in management is as low (Advance & Bain & Company, 2025). International and Swiss sector reports suggest that women in tech are often paid less than male peers and face structural barriers such as biased evaluation, limited access to leadership roles and exclusionary workplace cultures (Mota, 2024).

Future research should prioritize tech-sector specific, intersectional analyses that combine detailed survey data with qualitative insights into workplace practices. Methodologically rigorous evaluations of pay-transparency reforms and

organizational interventions in Swiss tech firms are also needed to move beyond descriptive diagnosis towards evidence-based policy design.

For practitioners and policymakers, the current state of knowledge implies that efforts to close the gender pay gap in Swiss tech must go well beyond just complying with equal-pay legislation. The policymakers must find a way to tackle the full pipeline from STEM education and hiring practices to promotion, working-time norms and leadership cultures that include women fairly.

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