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GENDER EQUALITY IN BUSINESS

IT'S NOT THE BOTS, IT'S THE JOBS

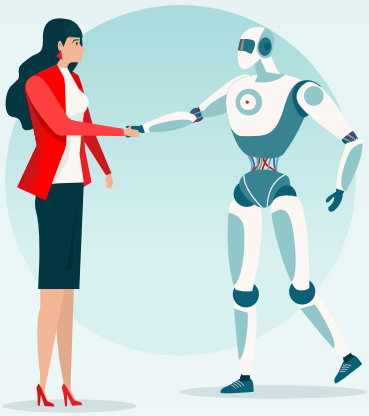
WHAT AI-DRIVEN WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION COULD MEAN FOR SWITZERLAND'S FEMALE LABOR MARKET POTENTIAL

AI's impact on gender is shaped primarily by the existing distribution of women and men across jobs.

The choices companies and individuals make as work is redesigned will help determine whether AI narrows or widens gender disparities in Swiss business.



Foreword



"We had never thought about this question — this interview was a wake-up call for us."

That reaction, from a Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) at one of Switzerland's leading companies, captures why this whitepaper matters. Across 26 structured research interviews with CHROs, people officers, and senior people leaders at Swiss companies across industries, we found that many organizations had not yet explicitly considered how AI-driven workforce transformation might affect women and men differently — and what this could mean for the composition of Switzerland's workforce.

This paper starts from three established observations:

1. The current wave of AI-enabled automation and agentification is driving a profound economic and societal shift. Estimates suggest that up to 76% of jobs may require significant redesign, including redesign of their task mix, capabilities, and human–agent collaboration.[1] While this technological wave promises gains in productivity, speed, growth and quality for many of us, its benefits and risks are unlikely to be distributed evenly across the workforce.
2. Women constitute roughly half of the available talent pool. Enabling women to participate, remain, progress, and lead is therefore a workforce-capacity, human-capital, and competitiveness issue, not simply a question of representation.[2]
3. AI can reproduce, amplify, reduce, or sometimes reverse existing human and societal biases. The outcome depends on factors such as the training data, model, task, instructions, implementation, and governance. Outputs, therefore, need to be tested and managed in each use case across a range of potential biases, including gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and disability.[3]

Against this backdrop, this paper explores how AI may change the Swiss workplace — with a particular focus on women — and what companies, individuals, and institutions could do to shape this outcome. Implications for men were captured where they emerged, but were not explored to the same depth.

Almost all interviewees raised questions of governance and ethics. 70% highlighted algorithmic or LLM bias as a tangible risk, while 40% raised concerns about potential gender bias.

One striking finding from our interviews was that almost no organization reported examining AI through a gender lens — for example, by measuring access, adoption, use or AI fluency by gender. This points to a potential blind spot: without measurement, organizations may not see whether gaps are emerging or widening.

Our labor-market analysis and 26 structured research interviews point to three potential asymmetries that may impact women and men differently:

1. the roles they hold today,
2. the emerging roles they may move into, and
3. their level of seniority.
4. Beneath the surface, one of the central issues identified is the structure of the labor market, rather than AI itself affecting women and men differently.

1 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots, and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026); McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots, and us: Skill partnerships in the age of AI (2025).

2 McKinsey & Company, Women in the Workplace 2025 (2025); Advance / HSG, Gender Intelligence Report 2025 (2025).

3 UNESCO, Recommendation on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021); McKinsey Global Institute, Notes from the AI frontier: Tackling bias in AI (and in humans) (2019).

Automation adoption is linked to the tasks that make up a job, not who performs them. What differs is the representation of women and men across jobs today. The impact of AI on women in Switzerland is therefore shaped primarily by the roles women occupy today, the pathways into emerging roles as employers redesign work, and the seniority levels at which women are represented.

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Nestlé	PwC	Ringier
Roche	SBB	SIX Group
STMicroelectronics	Straumann	Swisscom
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Anna Mattsson
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AI is reshaping work across job families

AI will reshape nearly all jobs, and it will not do so evenly.

Successive waves of automation unfolded over decades; AI has shortened that time horizon into years or months. Across ten economies in Europe, 58% of current work hours could theoretically be automated using existing technologies, including AI-enabled agents for cognitive tasks and robots for physical work.[4] The cumulative effect could be substantial: our research projects up to 12 million additional occupational transitions in Europe by 2030, close to double the pre-pandemic pace.[5, 6]

However, this is primarily a story of task redesign. Relatively few roles can be largely or fully automated by 2030 based on today's available technical potential. AI is more likely to recompose the mix of tasks within most roles — automating routine, repeatable tasks while leaving judgment, decision-making, interaction, and accountability with people. The pace of this redesign is what makes the distribution of women and men across jobs particularly relevant.

The three asymmetries

Asymmetry 1: The jobs gap — how today's occupational divide sets tomorrow's AI exposure

Leaders we interviewed were consistent on two points: in principle, AI can create value for women and men alike, while the degree of automation adoption depends primarily on the role a person holds today and the extent to which the tasks within that role can be augmented or automated. Interviewees across industries identified that repeatable, codifiable roles were most likely to be exposed to automation adoption.

We reviewed the Swiss workforce across five job clusters:

1. Office & Technical Support,
2. Knowledge & Creative,
3. Manual & Physical,
4. Care, Health & Teaching, and
5. Frontline & Services.

We mapped Swiss employment by occupation and gender to these clusters and applied McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) estimates of activity-level automation potential and occupation-level automation adoption by 2030 to assess how the different occupational distribution of women and men shapes their projected adoption of AI-enabled automation. This analysis projected that automation adoption is slightly higher for jobs held by men, with about 28% of male work activities and about 25% of female work activities being exposed by 2030.[7] Within each of the five broad clusters, however, male and female adoption rates are nearly identical — for example, both are roughly 31% in Office & Technical Support roles. The aggregate gender difference is therefore primarily structural, arising from the distribution of women and men across occupations.[8]

4 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026); McKinsey & Company, The economic potential of generative AI: The next productivity frontier (2023).

5 McKinsey Global Institute, Generative AI and Future of Work in America (2023).

6 McKinsey Global Institute, A new future of work: The race to deploy AI and raise skills in Europe and beyond (2024).

7 Exposure means mid-point adoption by 2030.

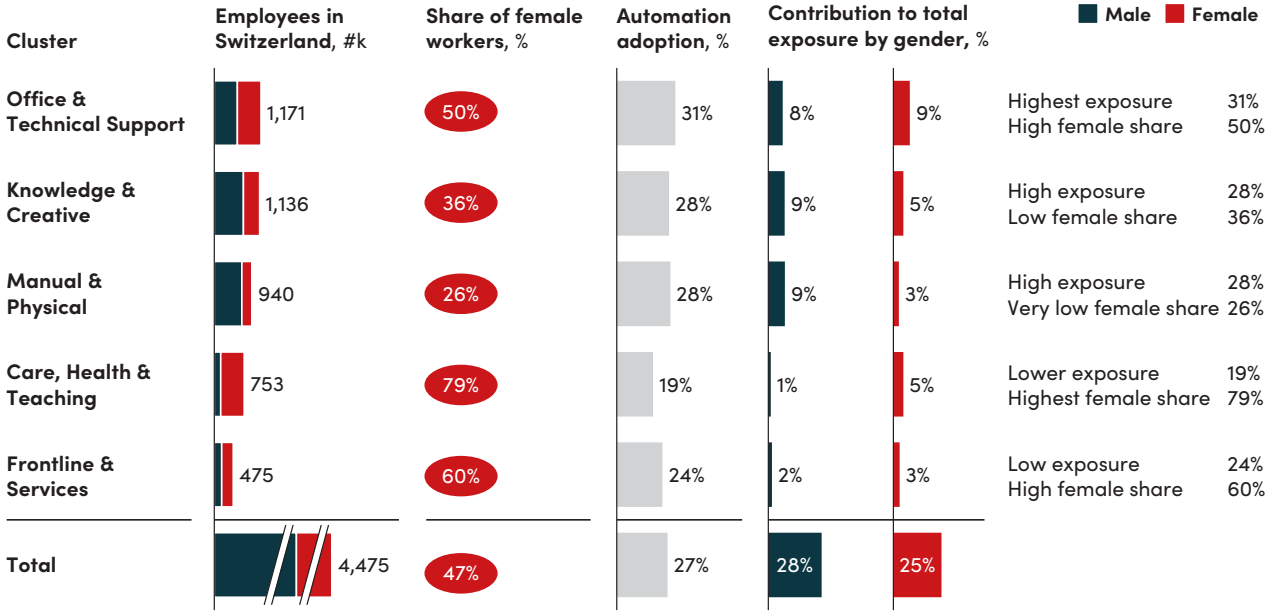
8 Automation Potential & Adoption model — Swiss 5-cluster analysis of MGI adoption forecasts as per May 2026; employment by occupation from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SAKE), BFS via Eurostat.

Across the five job clusters, projected automation adoption by 2030 lies within a relatively small range (19% to 31%). Larger differences exist at a more granular occupational level, as shown in the appendix.

It is important to note that this analysis focuses on projected automation adoption, rather than technical automation potential or eventual employment impact. The estimates reflect the share of work activities expected to adopt automation under the assumed adoption scenario and therefore indicate how work may change, but should not be interpreted as a prediction of job losses. In addition, this analysis does not fully capture differences in task allocation within occupations.

Feature 1

Assessment of share of work activities exposed to automation by 2030, by job cluster



Numbers rounded to nearest percentile; average refers to sub -category average

Source: Automation Potential & Adoption model — Swiss 5-cluster analysis of MGI adoption forecasts as per May 2026; employment by occupation from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SAKE),

I. Office & Technical Support

This cluster covers about 1.2 million people in Switzerland across occupations such as customer service clerks, business and administrative associate professionals, and IT technicians. It has the highest projected automation adoption rate by 2030, at about 31%. At a cluster level, women and men are represented roughly equally (50%).

The cluster contains two broad groups of occupations. The first has a stronger administrative and clerical focus, including clerks, customer service roles, and numerical and material-recording clerks. The second has a stronger technical-support focus, including science and engineering associate professionals, business and administrative associate professionals, legal associate professionals such as paralegals, and IT technicians. Women are overrepresented in typical office and clerical work (60%), while men are overrepresented in technical-support roles (62%). Projected automation adoption by 2030 is similar in both groups, at 32% and 30%, respectively, but the tasks affected differ: administrative and scheduling activities in the first group, and more numerical and technical activities in the second.

Several interviewees highlighted a risk of task consolidation, especially in administration, support, and coordination areas such as shared-service, call, or contact centers. This could disproportionately affect women. As an example, one of the interviewees observed that more than half of employees in their contact center are women, compared with about a quarter company-wide.

Office work is therefore the single largest contributor to projected automation adoption by 2030 for women in the Swiss economy.[9] How affected employees are supported to upskill and reskill, and where they move next, are therefore questions to be addressed today rather than tomorrow.

> ***AI hits hard where women are overrepresented — support, coordination, call centers, and similar roles.***

II. Knowledge & Creative

This cluster includes managers; science and engineering professionals; business and administrative professionals; legal, social, and cultural professionals, and information and communication technology (ICT) professionals. It covers roughly 1.1 million people in Switzerland, about one-third of whom are women.

People are expected to remain central in this cluster, with human capabilities increasingly augmented by AI. Employees will need to learn to guide, validate, and work alongside AI while agents handle more structured subtasks, especially administrative ones. Roughly three-quarters (72%) of the skills employers seek are described as being "shared" between people and AI, rather than replaced by it. For example, in one pharmaceutical company, AI produces clinical documentation while the medical writer's role shifts from manual drafting toward reviewing, refining, and ensuring compliance.[10]

Interviewees described a similar shift in professional services, finance, and technical-knowledge roles: AI can take on routine drafting and first-pass analysis, allowing people to focus more on interpretation, client interaction, and more complex judgment. One financial-services interviewee, for example, described how AI could support private bankers with tools and insights that enhance their core human-native skills to understand and serve clients, thereby strengthening relationships and trust.

As the table shows, projected automation adoption by 2030 in this cluster is around 28%, but much of that adoption is expected to involve augmentation and shifts in tasks rather than wholesale replacement of roles. General managers and specialists may increasingly delegate structured subtasks to AI while retaining responsibility for judgment, decision-making, and customer interactions. The opportunity therefore applies to both women and men, although women may capture less of the aggregate upside simply because they hold only about one-third of these jobs.[11, 12]

One occupational area highlighted by several interviewees may undergo more substantial disruption: information and communication technology. Projected automation adoption by 2030 is estimated at 35% in this occupation, with coding and software engineering among the activities affected. These roles are currently predominantly held by men (84%).

> ***IT is one of the areas most likely to be affected, and it is skewed heavily toward men.***

III. Manual & Physical

Women are underrepresented in this cluster, accounting for 26% of workers. Manual and physical work mainly includes occupations such as plant and machine operators and assemblers; craft and trade workers; skilled agricultural workers; and construction workers. Projected automation adoption by 2030 is 28%, the same as in the Knowledge & Creative cluster. As with knowledge work, much of this automation is expected to augment or simplify selected tasks rather than replace entire roles.

9 Automation Potential & Adoption model — Swiss 5-cluster analysis of MGI adoption forecasts as per May 2026; employment by occupation from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SAKE), BFS via Eurostat.

10 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).

11 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).

12 Automation Potential & Adoption model — Swiss 5-cluster analysis of MGI adoption forecasts as per May 2026; employment by occupation from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SAKE), BFS via Eurostat.

Manual and physical work will remain important. The dividing line is likely to be between predictable, structured physical tasks that machines can perform, and work requiring adaptability, dexterity, judgment, or operation in changing environments.

> ***People who work outside in the field and maintain infrastructure are less exposed. 80% or more of activities involved will still need to be done by human beings.***

Some physical tasks, particularly in manufacturing and industry, may increasingly be performed by robots. Other tasks conducted by these workers — such as planning and scheduling, quality control, or ordering materials — may be partially enabled by automation.

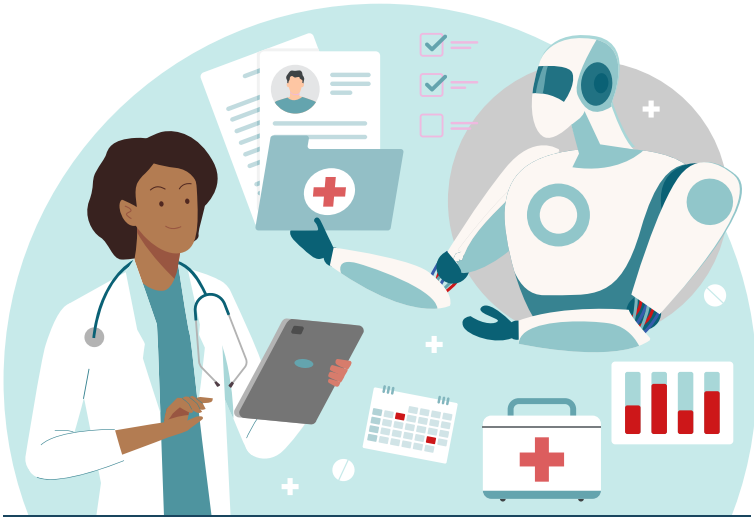
Some interviewees and experts suggested that the effect on some manual work might be smaller than the adoption figures imply. In Switzerland, substantial automation has already been introduced in many plants and operator roles, particularly using robotics. Several interviewees said that the current focus is shifting toward process technology and product development, where more standardized and repeatable work remains. The next wave of automation may also take longer to implement because it is more complex than some forms of augmentation and automation in other clusters, such as Office & Technical Support.

At the workforce level, this cluster contributes less to women's aggregate automation adoption by 2030 because women hold a smaller share of these roles.

IV. Care, Health & Teaching

This cluster covers about 0.75 million people, more than three-quarters of whom are women (79%). It includes occupations such as health professionals, personal care workers, and teaching professionals. This is some of the most people-centered work in the economy and has the lowest projected automation adoption by 2030, at 19%.

Tasks such as clinical decision-making and teaching are more likely to be supported rather than replaced by AI. Many hands-on care and teaching activities remain fundamentally human, while AI may increasingly support the administrative and monitoring tasks around them.



Interviewees in these fields made a similar point: AI can reduce administrative workload without replacing the human core of the role. Clinicians, for example, may be able to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time on judgment-intensive patient care.

Because women make up such a large share of the Care, Health & Teaching cluster, the comparatively low projected adoption rate for this cluster helps bring down the overall automation-adoption figure for women.

V. Frontline & Services

Women are also overrepresented in this cluster, accounting for 60% of workers. Frontline & Services includes occupations such as sales workers; personal-service workers, including hotel staff, hairdressers, and travel attendants; and protective-service workers such as police officers and firefighters.

Projected automation adoption by 2030 is at the lower end of the range, at 24%. Again, it is expected to come largely through augmentation, because human interaction and physical activity remain critical. Automation may reduce

time spent on administrative, tracking, and record-keeping, allowing employees to devote more time to customer interaction, contract negotiations, and the service experience. This could benefit both employees and customers.

Across the five clusters, one finding stands out: Automation adoption itself is not strongly gendered, but its effects can become gendered through the jobs women and men hold today. The first asymmetry is therefore structural rather than technological. The current distribution of women and men across occupations shapes where opportunities are concentrated and where workers may face a greater need to reskill. Deliberate action will be required from all stakeholders to ensure AI narrows, rather than widens, the gender gap.

Asymmetry 2: The next new jobs — who stands to benefit?

The AI transition is also likely to create new opportunities in the workplace. These may range from highly technical roles in data science and engineering to less technical roles in process design, business operations, training, governance and audit, and quality assurance. Many of these roles could emerge across several job clusters, perhaps with fewer new roles in the Manual & Physical cluster. How these roles will ultimately be distributed is not yet clear: the question is how well women and men will be positioned to access them.

Women remain underrepresented in some technical feeder pools: around 22% of Swiss science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates are women,[13] roughly 15–20% of ICT professionals are women, and 20–25% of engineering professionals are women.[14] Even within Swiss technology firms, women account for just 25% of professionals and 18% of senior leadership.[15] This gap starts early, already at the academic baccalaureate (Matura) level. Some of the research highlights that fewer than 25% of female graduates selected a STEM degree compared to more than 40% of their male counterparts in 2019.[16]

Interviewees echoed this imbalance in their own workforces, noting that men are more frequently represented in data-engineering, AI, and senior technical roles that may feed into some emerging opportunities.

Deep technical or ICT expertise is only one pathway into AI-related work, however, and is required for only some specific roles. Many emerging positions are likely to combine domain knowledge — in areas such as governance, law, or ethics — with AI fluency and human judgment. One interviewee noted that roles in governance, training, and ethics may draw on capabilities found in functions such as HR, Legal, and Compliance, where women are comparatively well represented. These functions could therefore provide pathways into new AI-related roles if organizations recruit and promote deliberately.

Some interviewees also said they had seen fewer women applying for certain emerging roles. At this stage, however, the evidence is anecdotal, and it is not yet clear whether this reflects a broader trend or what factors may be driving it.

Women may start from an existing disadvantage in some technical feeder pools, but the broader set of AI-related opportunities is not inherently male-skewed. Whether emerging roles narrow or widen the gender gap will depend not only on which roles emerge, but also on how organizations recruit, train, and promote people into both technical and non-technical AI career pathways.

The second asymmetry is therefore not simply a STEM gap. It is a question of whether women and men have equal access to — and are equally able to capture — the broader range of roles that AI creates and upgrades.

> ***Emerging data, engineering, and AI roles attract almost exclusively male candidates. In some recruitment processes, we had no female applicants, which could widen the gender gap in new emerging roles.***

13 KOF Swiss Economic Institute, ETH Zurich, Proportion of women in STEM subjects (2020).
14 Swiss Federal Statistical Office; KOF Swiss Economic Institute (ETH Zurich); Advance & University of St. Gallen, Gender Intelligence Report (2024).
15 digitalswitzerland, The unseen code: Unlock Switzerland's female tech potential (2024).
16 KOF Swiss Economic Institute (ETH Zurich), Proportion of women in STEM subjects (2020).

Asymmetry 3: Seniority — when the leaky pipeline meets AI

The role lens shows where automation might have the highest impact across job clusters. Automation adoption by 2030 may also vary vertically by seniority, and this pattern could compound the horizontal one. A majority of the leaders we interviewed expected junior and some middle-management roles to change more substantially because they often contain a higher share of routine, codifiable work, while senior roles remain more centered on judgment — at least for now.

Interviewees also raised an interesting question about entry-level roles, affecting women and men alike. If organizations reduce entry-level positions without redesigning development pathways, they may remove the apprenticeship through which employees build expertise, learn to work with new technologies, supervise agents, and potentially progress to more senior roles. This needs to be consciously assessed to avoid creating a long-term talent shortage and leadership pipeline challenge. This issue goes beyond the scope of this whitepaper and warrants further research.

70% of interviewees expect entry-level — and some middle-management — work to change materially as these roles often contain a higher share of routine, codifiable work. The traditional talent pyramid could therefore be disrupted.

According to the Gender Intelligence Report 2025 published by Advance, in Switzerland women hold close to half of non-management positions but only around one-fifth to one-quarter of top-management roles, reflecting a persistent "leaky pipeline."[17] Across all management levels, women's representation was around 37% in 2025 — an increase of just 3.7 percentage points (from 33.3%) over the past decade.[18]

Women's lower representation at leadership levels could therefore create a third asymmetry if lower-level roles experience greater change than senior positions.

> ***Gender diversity looks stronger at lower levels than at the top. If AI impacts more lower-level positions, the risks disproportionately affect women.***

Conclusion

Taken together, the analysis points to three potential structural asymmetries:

Existing roles: Aggregate projected automation adoption by 2030 is similar for women and men, and slightly higher for men. However, the occupational distribution creates different patterns of risk and opportunity. Responses therefore need to reflect the specific clusters and occupations affected — for example, clerical work, where women are overrepresented, and information and communication technology, where men are overrepresented.

Emerging roles: Technical feeder pools remain more male-skewed, but many emerging opportunities extend beyond traditional STEM profiles. Who ultimately gains access to technical and non-technical new roles will depend on how pathways are designed.

Seniority: Women's lower representation at senior levels may increase their exposure to changes in lower-level work and create an additional pipeline risk.

None of these outcomes is predetermined. Each will be shaped by workforce design choices.

Call to action: Target reskilling and transition support now toward those occupations undergoing the greatest change, such as female-heavy clerical work and male-heavy technical support or information technology work.

17 Advance / HSG, Gender Intelligence Report 2025 (2025) — gender distribution by management level.

18 University of Zurich, Swiss Job Market Monitor; Advance, The Demand for Digital Skills: Gender Gaps Across Occupations and Management Roles (2026).

Working models and career states

For women, the impact of AI on work cannot be considered separately from the structural realities that already shape their careers. In Switzerland, women remain far more likely than men to reduce their working hours or step out of the workforce for a period.

The 2025 Advance Gender Intelligence Report, drawing on HR data from 376,000 employees across more than 90 organizations in Switzerland, shows that women account for 46% of non-management employees but only 23% of top management. A critical factor behind this "leaky pipeline" is working time: women are considerably more likely than men to work part-time, particularly during the "family prime" years, which overlap with a critical career-progression window between ages 31 and 40. Advance also finds that an unwritten expectation that employees must work full- or near-full-time to progress in their careers can remain a barrier for women, compounded by the fact that women still perform 12.1 more hours of unpaid work per week than men.

AI introduces an important new dimension to this longstanding challenge. As roles, skills, and ways of working evolve more rapidly, will employees working reduced hours or spending extended periods away from work face a greater risk of missed learning opportunities, exposure, and pathways for advancement? Or could AI become an important equalizer — supporting greater flexibility, productivity and faster re-entry, and potentially making nonlinear careers more viable?

Whether AI ultimately reinforces or reduces the career penalties associated with part-time work and career interruptions will therefore be an important dimension of its gender impact.

The flexibility question: Will AI expand or reduce part-time opportunities?

Interviewees were divided on what AI could mean for part-time work. The question is particularly consequential in Switzerland, where, in 2024, 58.4% of employed women worked part-time, nearly three times the male rate of 21.1%[19] — one of the widest gender disparities in part-time employment in Europe. About nine in ten returning mothers work part-time.[20]

Given the importance of part-time work to women's employment in Switzerland, the way organizations redesign jobs could determine whether AI makes part-time work more accessible or less viable.

Career progression has often been associated not only with performance but also with presence and availability — a perception that can disadvantage part-time employees and, in Switzerland, disproportionately affects women.

Part-time work may amplify both the risks and opportunities: 65% of interviewees see a potential risk, 31% see an opportunity, and the remainder sees both.

And yet AI offers a potentially more optimistic scenario. If AI enables employees to complete certain tasks faster, access knowledge more efficiently, and automate lower-value activities, it could begin to loosen the traditional link between hours worked and value created. Emerging evidence points to meaningful productivity gains from AI, although their size varies considerably by task, worker, and context.

19 Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2024).

20 Advance, Kids or Career? (2022) and From Career Break to Breakthrough (2023); Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2021).

For part-time employees, this raises an intriguing possibility: with strong AI literacy, access to the right tools, and work designed around outcomes rather than presence, an employee working reduced hours could deliver a level of impact that previously required substantially more time. Given that women make up a disproportionate share of Switzerland's part-time workforce, such a shift could have important implications for gender equality — helping organizations retain female talent through different stages of life without requiring a choice between flexibility and career progression.

> ***AI could create an opportunity for part-time employees by reducing time spent on lower-value activities.***

By reducing routine tasks and enabling more asynchronous, location-flexible work, AI could extend that flexibility to more roles. However, this effect has not yet been established.

Whether AI will make part-time work easier or harder remains an open question. Interviewees pointed to competing effects. By automating routine and time-consuming tasks, AI could reduce the hours needed to perform some tasks and shift the focus toward higher-value activities, potentially weakening the traditional link between time spent at work and value created. On the other hand, automation may leave behind work that is more complex, cognitively demanding and dependent on judgment, collaboration or continuous availability — or lead employers to consolidate responsibilities into fewer, more full-time roles — potentially making some work harder to perform part-time.

> ***I could envisage greater risks in some roles held by part-timers, particularly in customer care, call centers, shared-service centers, and administrative functions.***

Which outcome prevails will depend largely on how organizations redesign work and translate productivity gains into new working models. Handled well, however, AI could create new opportunities for part-time work.

Call to action: Redesign work so that AI reduces low-value tasks while preserving part-time roles, helping employees who need or prefer reduced working hours — including women.

Career breaks: Will AI raise or lower the barriers to re-entry?

Career breaks, which are common among professional women in Switzerland, create another potential asymmetry. According to an Advance and McKinsey survey of approximately 600 professional women in Switzerland, 83% experience a career interruption of more than three months, and more than 70% of these breaks are related to maternity leave. Mothers who leave the labor market re-enter, on average, after a little more than five years.[21]

This is where AI raises the stakes. At a time when roles, tools, and skill requirements are changing quickly, a multiyear break can increase the challenge of re-entry. Research shows that the relevance of some skills can decline substantially over a five-year period, while around 39% of core skill requirements are expected to change between 2025 and 2030.[22]

Interviewees stressed two challenges. First, returners need structured opportunities to update their skills as tools, workflows, and roles evolve. Second, several interviewees observed that rebuilding confidence after a career break can be just as important as updating technical capability.

21 Advance, Kids or Career? (2022) and From Career Break to Breakthrough (2023); Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2021).

22 McKinsey & Company, The skills revolution and the future of learning and earning (2023); World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025 (2025).

> ***What once took weeks to catch up on after a career break could now take days with AI coaching.***

Interviewees also reframed this moment of re-entry as an opportunity. AI-enabled coaching may help returners refresh knowledge and accelerate learning. The opportunity, however, depends not on the technology alone, but on whether returners have access to the tools, training, and support needed to use it effectively.

AI could make career breaks more consequential as skills and ways of working evolve faster. At the same time, it could lower barriers to re-entry by helping returners rebuild confidence, refresh skills, and accelerate learning. Which effect prevails will depend largely on how organizations support returners in adapting to an AI-enabled workplace.

Call for action: Provide structured AI catch-up opportunities for returners and, where appropriate, desired, and permitted, ways to connect during career breaks.

Lifting the potential from beneath

The skills needed going forward

AI is changing the skills required in the workplace. As routine work is commoditized, the premium shifts to human capabilities. This was the single strongest point of convergence in our interviews. Respondents consistently highlighted two complementary sets of capabilities: AI fluency and digital and analytical skills, including data literacy and analytics; and distinctly human capabilities such as judgment, empathy, communication, collaboration, and adaptability. Recent research reinforces this: an analysis of over 1,000 occupations suggests that foundational skills such as collaboration and adaptability are becoming increasingly important for long-term careers,[23] while leadership, communication, and empathy are among the skills least exposed to automation.[24]

Human skills are the new hard skills. 96% of interviewees said human or "soft" skills would become more important in the AI era, while almost 90% emphasized that employees will need both AI fluency and human capabilities—not one or the other.

The mix of skills demanded in the market is shifting accordingly. Research projects declining demand for basic data-processing and routine cognitive work, while demand for social-emotional and technological skills increases. By 2030, demand for empathy is projected to rise by around 20%, leadership by around 14%, creativity by around 12%, and advanced IT skills by around 34%.[25]

Approximately 25% of interviewees mentioned that the growing premium on empathy, collaboration, judgment, and relationship-building could create opportunities for women. However, any potential advantage is neither inherent nor automatic. Interviewees also noted that capabilities such as empathy may be increasingly valued without necessarily determining final hiring or promotion decisions. Rather, two factors may be relevant:

First, occupational representation. Women are strongly represented in occupations that require interpersonal and coordination skills, including human resources and communications. This may provide a foundation in some human capabilities expected to become more valuable. Here again, the potential advantage stems primarily from the jobs women hold rather than from gender itself.

Second, perceptions of human skills. There is a perception that women benefit from greater training or socialization in soft skills such as empathy. Some research also suggests a slight female advantage on some measures of empathy and social cognition,[26] although the differences are small and depend on how these capabilities are defined and measured.

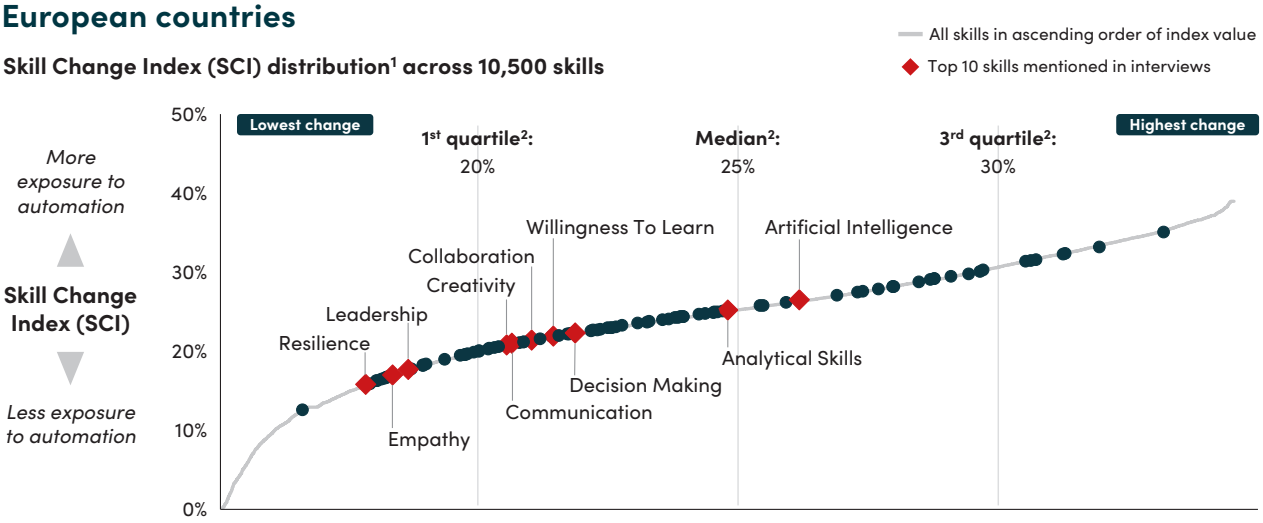
23 Harvard Business Review, *Soft Skills Matter Now More Than Ever* (2025).
24 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).
25 McKinsey Global Institute, *A new future of work: The race to deploy AI and raise skills in Europe and beyond* (2024).
26 Greenberg et al., Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Sex and age differences in "theory of mind" across 57 countries using the English version of the "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" Test (2022).

The more important question, however, is whether a gap emerges on the AI side. Human capabilities and AI fluency are increasingly complementary sources of advantage. As AI takes on more tasks, employees will need the human capabilities to direct and exercise judgment over AI, collaborate with it, communicate its outputs, and apply contextual understanding. They will also need the fluency to move beyond prompting: integrating AI into workflows, interpreting its outputs, and judging when and how to use it.[27] Demand for AI-fluency skills has grown roughly fivefold in Europe since 2023, and around one-fifth of occupations now require AI-related skills.[28]

Feature 2

By 2030, some skills will be more exposed to automation than others across European countries

Skill Change Index (SCI) distribution[1] across 10,500 skills



1. Based on projected 2030 midpoint scenario of automation adoption of activities associated with skills, aggregated across occupations using employment-based weighting
2. Based on around 10.5k skills. We excluded skills that could not be linked to detailed work activities within occupations

Source: Lightcast, National statistical offices, McKinsey Global Institute analysis

What this could mean for upskilling and adoption among women

Interviewees were candid about the limits of current measurement. Many acknowledged that they do not yet track access to or use of AI by gender. The interviews themselves prompted some to reconsider this: several CHROs said they intended to start tracking gender differences in AI training and usage. With so little measurement currently in place, the risk is that emerging gaps could develop unnoticed and become more difficult to address over time.

AI training is widespread, but gender-based tracking is not. 90% of interviewees said their organizations were rolling out AI training, while fewer than 5% systematically tracked AI adoption or use by gender. Several said the interviews prompted them to consider doing so.

Interviewees shared mixed perceptions of differences in initial adoption, confidence, and experimentation. Most interviewees perceived little or no difference in AI adoption and use once employees had access and support. Where enablement was deliberate and often mandatory, any perceived gap narrowed or disappeared, and some interviewees reported women among the heaviest users.

However, no organization interviewed had gender-disaggregated usage data with which to test that perception, beyond self-reported

Could confidence become a new skills gap? 50% of interviewees said they perceive a potential confidence gap around AI among women.

27 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).
28 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).

AI-readiness questions in engagement surveys. Robust measurement would therefore be needed before drawing conclusions about gender differences in daily adoption and use.

Call to action: Build AI fluency and human capabilities across the organization, developing and rewarding both together rather than assuming either would suffice on its own. Provide universal, role-appropriate AI enablement, with baseline training and clear expectations for safe use where relevant. Measure access, adoption, and use across demographic groups so that any emerging gaps can be identified and addressed.

Call to action

AI is expected to reshape work across the Swiss economy. Whether that transition narrows or widens the existing gender gap is not simply a property of the technology; it will also reflect the choices being made now by companies, individuals, and institutions. Interviewees were clear that any potential gaps are not innate and can be narrowed or eradicated through deliberate enablement.

80% of interviewees saw at least some potential for AI to create opportunities for women in some form or another if the transition is managed well. They cited faster re-entry, greater flexibility, a more level playing field, and the potential for fairer talent decisions among the possible benefits.

Opportunities for companies

One idea recurred in nearly every interview: deliberate, universal enablement can help to close the gap, while voluntary training or adoption leaves it open. Companies could therefore act on five fronts.

- **Ensure inclusive access and enablement:** Make AI training a baseline expectation rather than relying solely on opt-in participation, so employees with less discretionary time, limited digital experience, or personal hesitancy are not left behind. Inclusive outreach, role design, and recruitment can also broaden the pool of women considered for emerging AI-related roles.

> ***Where we made adoption deliberate and universal, some of the biggest users of AI turned out to be women.***

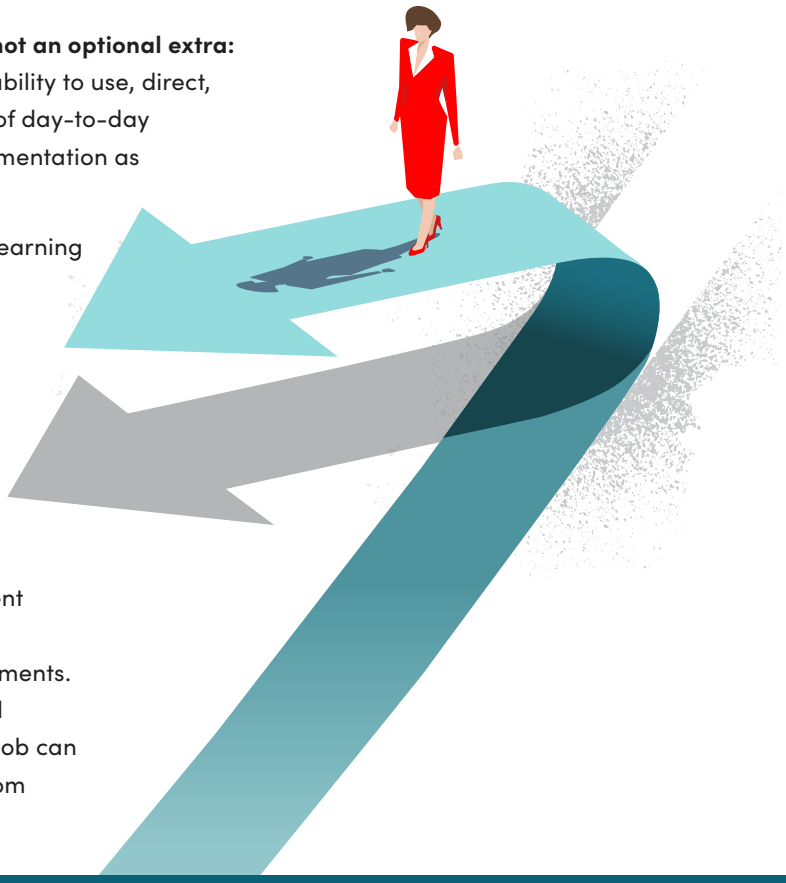
- **Measure access and outcomes by gender:** Track access, adoption, use, skill-building, outcomes, and progression by gender. It is useful to understand not only whether employees use AI, but what for — routine drafting and email, for example, provide a different signal from analysis and decision support.
- **Govern and address bias in AI use:** Put governance mechanisms in place so that when AI is used across the employee lifecycle — including recruitment and promotion — organizations can identify and reduce potential bias rather than inadvertently amplify it. This includes designing and implementing systems thoughtfully, identifying and addressing potential bias in the underlying data, and calibrating, auditing, and testing their outputs, and retaining human oversight for consequential decisions.
- **Redesign exposed roles as tasks are AI-enabled or automated:** When AI can take on a meaningful share of a role, redesign the job before simply removing automated tasks. Employers can identify which tasks AI is likely to augment or automate; determine which human responsibilities should remain, grow, or be added; and then redesign and upskill the role accordingly. If AI reduces time spent on scheduling, document preparation, and routine inquiries, for example, an administrative role could shift toward client interaction, coordination, and quality assurance. Employers should also test whether redesigned roles remain compatible with part-time and flexible work.
- **Support reskilling, redeployment, and career re-entry:** Help employees transition into changing roles through structured reskilling, redeployment opportunities, and targeted support for career returners, including AI fluency development and re-entry pathways.

> ***We need to track it so that we don't suddenly get a surprise in two years.***

Opportunities for women — and men

The interviewees' message to individuals was consistent: engage early, stay curious, and remain aware of how roles and career pathways are changing. Individual action cannot substitute for employers and institutions providing equitable access, training, and fair pathways into emerging opportunities, but it can support career resilience. Three practical habits can help:

- **Treat AI fluency and digital skills as career hygiene, not an optional extra:** Deliberately pair human strengths with the practical ability to use, direct, and critically assess AI. Where possible, make AI part of day-to-day work; confidence and fluency develop through experimentation as well as formal training.
- **Stay adaptable and keep learning:** Adopt a lifelong-learning mindset and continuously refresh both AI/digital skills and human capabilities as roles evolve. Experiment with new AI tools and ways of working and stay close to developments in your field — including, where appropriate, during career breaks, when maintaining skills and professional connections can make re-entry easier.
- **Be intentional about career choices and transitions:** Actively explore how your role and adjacent opportunities are changing, and dare to move toward emerging roles even when they include unfamiliar elements. As new roles emerge at the intersection of human and technological capabilities, willingness to learn on the job can be as important as meeting every skill requirement from the outset.



> ***Be open to changing the way you work — try it out. Stay curious and build confidence with the technology.***

Opportunities for institutional stakeholders

Interviewees repeatedly linked Switzerland's advantage to the strength of its dual education and apprenticeship model, while also warning that AI could change some of the junior, hands-on work through which apprentices traditionally learn. Switzerland therefore starts from a position of strength, but one that will need to evolve with the changing workplace.

In education, one opportunity may be to strengthen digital skills and AI fluency early, embedding critical thinking and AI literacy from the start while maintaining strong vocational pathways so that the workforce is equipped for future transitions.

Another opportunity is to continue widening women's participation in STEM education, not only at university but also earlier, at the academic baccalaureate (Matura) level, while supporting access to other AI-relevant career pathways, including roles that combine human-centered expertise with AI fluency. AI is likely to become a component of almost every career pathway.

At the policy level, the transition raises broader questions about how workplace changes, occupational transitions, and related reskilling and upskilling needs can be understood and addressed nationally.

Toward an inclusive future of work that strengthens Switzerland's competitiveness

Switzerland can use the AI transition as an opportunity to draw on more of its talent, not less. The question is not simply whether AI will affect gender equality, but whether the transition reinforces existing inequalities or helps reduce them. By redesigning work thoughtfully, widening access to AI skills, and preserving pathways into emerging and senior roles, organizations can help ensure that technological progress is accompanied by progress in participation. The impact of AI on gender equality is therefore likely to be shaped less by the technology itself than by how organizations redesign jobs, develop talent, and allocate opportunities.

The choices made today can help build a workforce in which women and men are equally equipped to contribute, advance, and lead — strengthening Switzerland's competitiveness and its commitment to equality.

Appendix: Methodology

Assessing the impact of AI on gender requires distinguishing between several concepts that are often conflated. This paper examines how AI may affect women and men differently in Switzerland by analyzing projected adoption of potentially automatable work activities.

Automation adoption reflects the extent to which tasks within an occupation could technically be automated or augmented by AI; it should not be interpreted as a prediction of job losses. Actual employment outcomes will depend on factors including technology adoption, workforce redesign, productivity effects, demand growth, and the creation of new tasks and occupations.

For the quantitative analysis, we obtained detailed Swiss employment data by occupation and gender from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO), based on ISCO-08 occupational classifications. Occupations were mapped to analytical categories to enable comparison across broader segments of the labor market. We then applied MGI estimates of the occupation-level measures of automation adoption by 2030. These occupation-level estimates were applied to the number of women and men employed in each occupation in Switzerland to calculate their exposure to automatable or augmentable work activities. We then synthesized these findings to assess potential differences in automation adoption between women and men.

The analysis focuses on projected automation adoption by 2030, rather than technical automation potential or eventual employment impact. The estimates reflect the share of work activities expected to adopt automation under the assumed adoption scenario and therefore indicate how work may change, but should not be interpreted as a prediction of job losses. Adoption depends on economic, regulatory, organizational, and societal factors. Most occupations are expected to be reshaped through task augmentation and redesign rather than fully replaced.

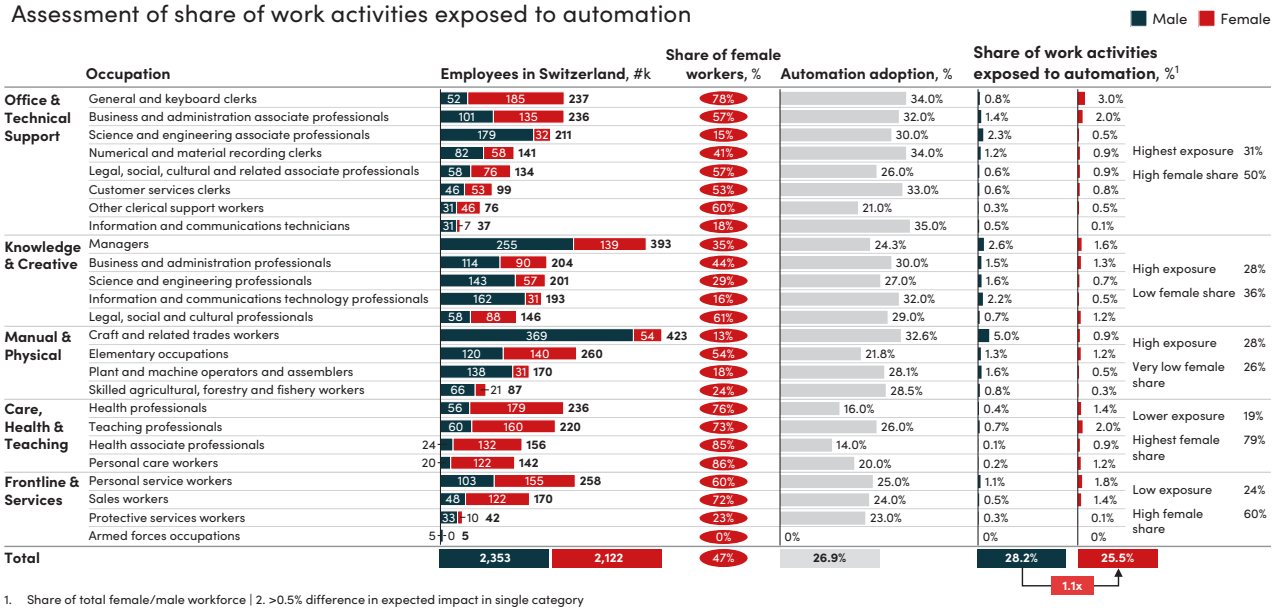
The paper draws on data available as of May 2026. Given the pace of change, this data will need to be updated regularly.

The quantitative findings were complemented by 26 structured interviews conducted between May and August 2026 with CHROs, people officers, and senior people leaders from 26 different organizations across industries in Switzerland. These interviews provided qualitative perspectives on automation adoption, workforce transformation, and potential implications for gender equality in the workplace. The interviews followed a structured set of questions and were recorded. Quotations have been edited and reconstructed from notes and recordings for clarity.

Feature 3

Overall automation is similar for men (28%) and women (25%) — but concentrated in different occupations

Assessment of share of work activities exposed to automation



1. Share of total female/male workforce | 2. >0.5% difference in expected impact in single category

Source: Automation Potential & Adoption model — Swiss 5-cluster analysis of MGI adoption forecasts as per May 2026; employment by occupation from the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SAKE), BFS via Eurostat.

Glossary[29]

Concept	Definition
Adoption	The deployment of AI and automation technology into real work activities and workflows within an organization or labor-force context, determining how much of the automation potential is captured, how fast, and how broadly.
Agents	Machines that perform work in the digital world, augmenting or substituting a person's nonphysical capabilities (for example, natural language generation, social and emotional reasoning, creativity).
AI-powered agents	Agents with AI embedded, allowing them to act more autonomously and orchestrate workflows; also known as agentic AI.
AI-powered robots	Robots with AI embedded, allowing them to act more autonomously and orchestrate workflows.
Artificial intelligence (AI)	The ability of software to perform tasks that traditionally require human intelligence, potentially augmenting or substituting people's capabilities.
Capabilities	Physical or nonphysical abilities that support the application of skills, assessed based on human levels of performance required to perform work activities. Nonphysical capabilities include cognitive (for example, natural language, logical reasoning, creativity, navigation) and social and emotional capabilities.
Generative AI	Applications of AI that take unstructured data as inputs and generate unstructured data through foundation models (large artificial neural networks trained on vast amounts of varied data).
Nonphysical work	Work that involves cognitive or social/emotional capabilities rather than physical movement, such as problem solving, information processing, creating, and collaborating with others.
Occupations	A set of jobs that share similar tasks or work activities that can be described in terms of their skills, work contexts, and other qualifications. We use the United States' formal classification of occupations, maintained by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupations can be synonymous with "roles" and are not to be confused with employment.
Physical work	Work that involves direct interaction with the physical world, requiring motion-based capabilities such as gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and mobility. These tasks typically include operating or moving objects, tools, or machinery; assembling or positioning materials; and performing actions that depend on human strength or dexterity.
Robots	Machines that perform work in the physical world, augmenting or substituting a person's physical capabilities (that is, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, or mobility).
Skills	Knowledge, competencies, and attributes that people deploy to perform work activities, often acquired through formal education, training, or work experience. Lightcast and ESCO provide market-driven classification systems for skills.
Technical automation potential	The share of work hours that theoretically could be automated with certain levels of technical capabilities. We assessed economies' technical automation potential through an analysis of the detailed work activities of each occupation, completed for about 800 occupations in each of the ten European countries.
Work activities	Observable work behavior that represents what people do to accomplish the objectives of an occupation. In the United States, activities are formally classified by O*NET into detailed work activities (DWAs).
Workflows	A structured sequence of work activities that collectively advance work toward a defined goal, guided by processes (for example, rules, dependencies, information flows) and involving people and technologies.

29 McKinsey Global Institute, Agents, robots and us: How AI reshapes work and skills in Europe (2026).



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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