

New publication:

“When robots roll up – Preparing the labor market for digitization”

The latest study led by Avenir Suisse reveals that digitization is more of a constant development than a revolution in Switzerland. Until now, “atypical labor” forms, such as fixed-term jobs or teleworking, have remained limited. Employee qualification kept pace with technical development. The only certainty: digitization will generate more innovation. The best way to prepare is to promote mobility, both in terms of labor and training. To achieve this, it would be advisable to avoid a political regulation of employment and maintain the flexibility of the labor market.

Digitization is on everyone’s lips in Switzerland as well as in the media. There is no shortage of pessimistic scenarios. However, Avenir Suisse’s latest study reveals that there is little evidence of a “digital revolution” in the labor market: the unemployment rate remains low, teleworking is stationary (5.1%), as is independent labor (7.6%). The amount of open-ended contracts was 91.1% in 2016. The feared polarization of the labor market (which would put pressure on moderately skilled workers) has not occurred.

There is no evidence of a “robocalypse”, in which intelligent machines substitute humans on a large scale. Moreover, continuous digitization of the Swiss economy is a reality. For Avenir Suisse and two of its authors, Tibère Adler and Marco Salvi, the State should focus to a greater extent on the best framework-conditions for companies and employees. A reform in the domains of labor law and social insurance is necessary.

- With digitization, the borders between work and private life tend to fade. Outdated provisions on the regulation and recording of working time must be updated. The maximum legal time of a work week should be fixed on a yearly average.
- Linear and regular careers are declining. There is an increasing number of part-time employees and people undertaking multiple activities with different employers. Social insurances should improve their approach to occasional or irregular work. The need for adaptation is most important in occupational pension schemes.

- In Switzerland, the volume of platform-related work (“crowdworking”) is still relatively low. In the future, if the number of crowdworkers were to suddenly increase, it would be worthwhile introducing the status of “self-employed”, mainly for social insurance.

Training policy needs reforms at all levels, because a solid general education is the best insurance in times of constant change.

- In the dual system of professional training, the fields must be more broadly defined. The professional maturity diploma needs more support, as well as a higher allocation of general education, foreign languages and information technologies.
- In secondary schools (gymnasiums and general education schools), computer science should be a main discipline of the curriculum. Prior to that, the first computer lessons should be introduced as early as fifth grade, so that all students may acquire the principles of digital logic.
- In higher education (universities and UAS), STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) need to be strengthened in order to better meet the needs of the labor market.

In Switzerland, some political movements are continuously trying to restrain the development of the digital economy. Such involvements are the greatest long-term threat to prosperity. Avenir Suisse’s study shows that digitization is the best way to increase productivity and income, as well as create new jobs. Robots are therefore welcome. Switzerland needs more digitization, not less.



avenir debate : **“Quand les robots arrivent – Préparer le marché du travail à la numérisation”** by Tibère Adler and Marco Salvi, in collaboration with Jennifer Langenegger, 77 pages, Avenir Suisse.

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