



Swiss Human Relations Barometer Autumn Newsletter 2023

Overview

Overview	1
«Where have all the skilled workers gone?»	2
Challenges for apprentices and the apprenticeship market during and after the pandemic	6
News.....	7

Editorial

The current skills shortage in Switzerland can be traced back to various causes. These include demographical changes, shifts in employee needs, the relatively good state of the economy overall and, in some cases, the follow-on effects of the pandemic. Companies are implementing a wide range of measures to mitigate shortages. For example, they are strengthening staff recruitment and retention processes, tapping into new recruitment methods and attempting to tailor and customise their incentive schemes.

But how does the situation look from an employee’s point of view? This question is what this newsletter is all about. The first article examines the current state of the labour market from the perspective of employees based on data from the Swiss HR Barometer and the Federal Statistical Office, paying particular attention to the retail and tourism sectors. The second article focuses on the future generation of employees – the learners of today – with reference to ETH Zurich’s LehrstellenPuls (Apprenticeship Pulse) project.

The Swiss HR Barometer is a joint project run by ETH Zurich and the universities of Lucerne and Zurich. It is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and has been collecting data on how workers in Switzerland experience their work situation since 2006. A representative survey of employees in Switzerland conducted at regular intervals is used to establish human resources policy based on the basic principles of occupational and organisational psychology.

The Swiss HR Barometer is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation:



FONDS NATIONAL SUISSE
SCHWEIZERISCHER NATIONALFONDS
FONDO NAZIONALE SVIZZERO
SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Through this newsletter, we hope to be able to contribute to the wider discussion surrounding the skills shortage.

Gudela Grote and Bruno Staffelbach, editors

«Where have all the skilled workers gone?»

Many companies are finding it difficult to recruit and retain skilled workers. At the same time, employees are facing fewer barriers when looking to change employer, job role and even sector. Has the number of job changes really increased in recent years, though? And what makes people decide to switch jobs? Delia Meyer, Lena Schneider and Anja Feierabend tackled these questions as part of the September edition of Personal-SCHWEIZ magazine. The key insights are summarised below and supplemented with findings from the retail and Swiss tourism sectors.

Expectations are increasing – and so are opportunities

According to figures from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, job vacancies have been on the rise again since 2021. Forecasts regarding demographic change point to the skills shortage becoming more acute. The new labour market situation means that employees' attitudes towards work have also changed. For instance, the 2022 Swiss HR Barometer reveals that employees' expectations towards their employers have increased – particularly in relation to fair payment. At the same time, how-

ever, employees also rate the opportunities offered by employers as better than in previous years. Furthermore, job insecurity has decreased in almost all sectors, whilst perceived employability has increased, possibly because it is now easier to change jobs, profession and sector.

No increase in the number of job changes

Perhaps surprisingly, the attractive state of the labour market at present, with many job vacancies available, has not led to an increased number of job changes in Switzerland. The gross turnover rate – i.e. the proportion of people changing employer – has ranged between 15% and 18% since 1995; at 15.5%, the figure in 2022 was nothing out of the ordinary (Swiss Labour Force Survey, SLFS, 2023, Figure 1).

Even if the gross turnover rate is proving stable, companies may still be interested in finding out why employees might choose to change jobs, particularly since talented workers who leave their posts are difficult to replace due to the current skills shortage. According to recent data from the Swiss HR Barometer and the Swiss Labour Force Survey, the most common reasons given for a self-initiated job change are unsatisfactory working conditions (14.4%) and a desire for change/progression (12.2%) (see Figure 2). Further reasons frequently mentioned are employment contracts expiring (13.9%), dismissal (9.3%) and ordinary or early retirement (8.2%). Other reasons include pursuing further training and education and military/civilian service (4.3%), health reasons (4.1%) and caring for (care-dependent) children, care-dependent adults or other family commitments (2.7%).

Figure 1

Gross turnover rate as a percentage from 2013 to 2022

(source: FSO – Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS), 2023)

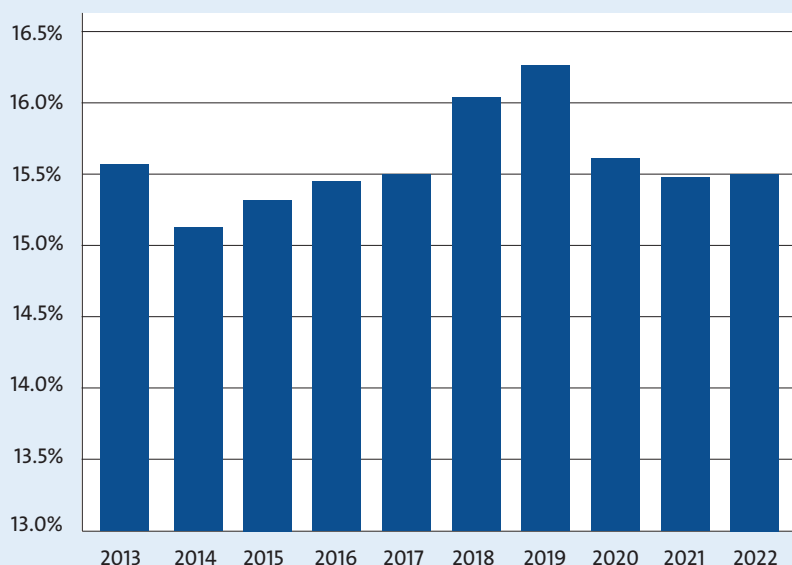
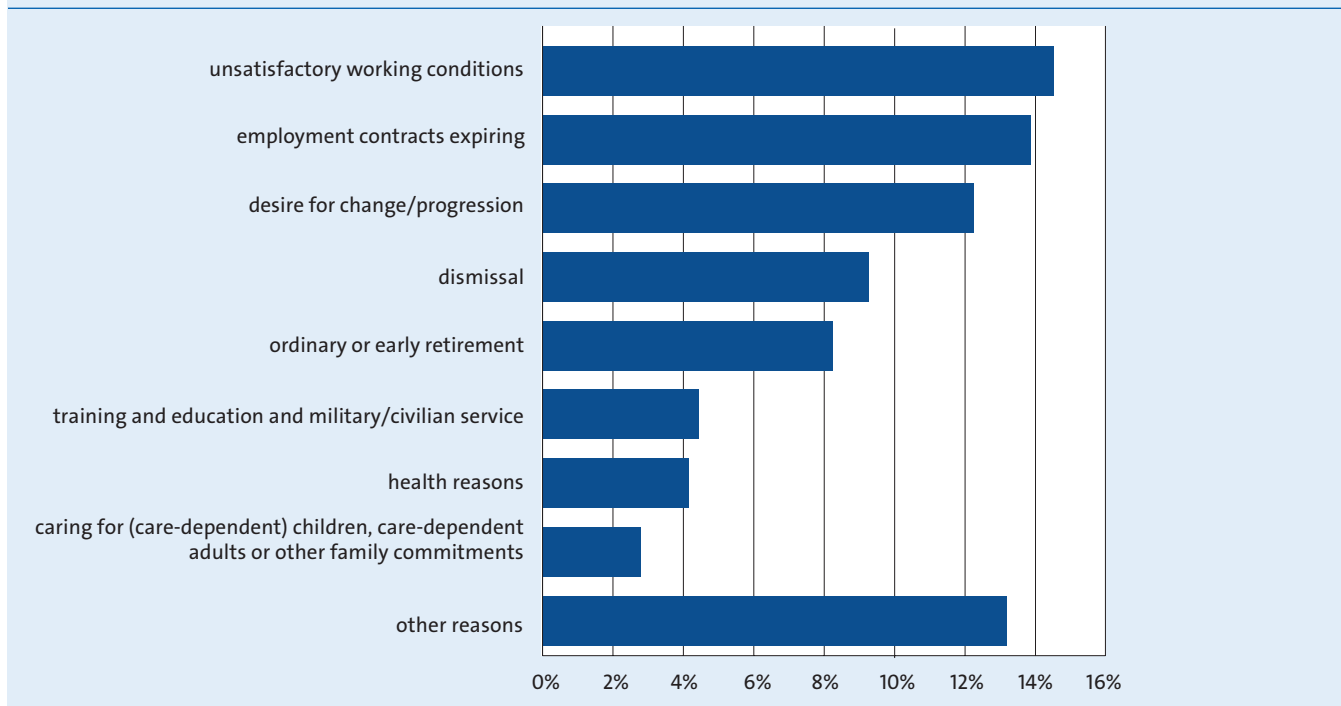


Figure 2**Frequency of and reasons for job changes***(source: Swiss HR Barometer and FSO – Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS), 2023)***Fazit**

Despite a large number of vacancies in the job market, the job change rate in Switzerland has, up to now, largely remained stable. However, when employees do choose to change jobs on their own accord, they do so mostly because they are unhappy with their working conditions or because they are looking for a new challenge. To meet increasing employee expectations with regard to fair payment, development opportunities and varied work content, measures such as these may help to retain staff: a fair and transparent salary system with modern fringe benefits, innovative and flexible work models (e.g. workations), and regular career planning and training opportunities. Such measures can help improve employees' work-life balance and meet their needs from an early stage.

Delia Meyer, Lena Schneider & Anja Feierabend

Source: Meyer, D., Schneider, L. & Feierabend, A. (2023).
Wo gehen all die Fachkräfte hin? *PersonalSchweiz*, 09, pp. 38-40.

The retail perspective

Increasing employee expectations and the labour shortage in general are also posing challenges for employers in the retail industry. Work-life balance has always been a talking point for women in our sector; after all, retail attracts a lot of part-time workers. Recently, there has also been a push for employers to take leisure needs into account. Employers need flexible workers who take a hands-on approach, don't begrudge stacking shelves and can show empathy towards customers and provide them with sound advice. As a result of stationary trade becoming increasingly digitalised, the sector needs personnel who are capable of continually adapting to new customer needs. Finding a common denominator in this context has become challenging. An open discussion about expectations is required right from the first job interview. Employers know that applicants expect a decent salary, opportunities for development (variation or progression) and consideration of their individual needs within the wider context of working conditions. More and more, then, companies are incorporating intermediate steps into the career ladder, with interim references or certificates of performance, or enabling employees to undertake work placements in other departments. Benefits are also becoming more personalised: for parents, this could be a higher child allowance, whilst for others gym membership may have more of an impact. Businesses need to work on new models and concepts to increase employees' sense of loyalty towards them and to underline the appeal of the industry. As a federation, we support our members by providing a whole host of ideas and possible measures they can implement. Companies need to tailor working conditions to employee preferences on a more flexible basis, provided this is compatible with what is possible within the sector and business. Only those companies which attract and retain workers by employing a clear strategy are well set-up to deal with whatever the future throws at them.



Dagmar Jenni, Director of the Swiss Retail Federation

The **Swiss Retail Federation** (www.swiss-retail.ch) is a federation of retail companies in Switzerland – excluding the supermarket chains Coop and Migros – and represents 1,600 retail companies and a turnover worth CHF 23 billion. Its members employ around 58,000 workers and 2,850 apprentices. Examples of the types of business it represents include department stores, speciality markets and stores, supermarkets and cash-and-carry stores, independent retailers and kiosks. The federation represents political interests within the Swiss retail sector on the national stage and campaigns for liberal framework conditions and high standards in the industry.

The tourism perspective

The skills shortage is nothing new for the tourism sector. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, many companies in the industry found it difficult to find enough suitable staff. Trends in demographics and the race to find the top talent have made it harder still for companies to fill vacancies. As well as this, during the coronavirus pandemic reports that many workers were leaving the sector were commonplace. Uncertainty and bad press for the sector, brought about by the pandemic, have tempted many employees to switch to different industries, aggravating the situation further.



Whilst the number of people working in the tourism sector was around 184,000 in 2019, today this figure is less than 160,000. The hotel and catering industries were the main casualties of the staff exodus. This issue has therefore been a top priority for companies and federations for quite some time. Various joint measures, designed to mitigate staff shortages, have been adopted.

Moreover, as an umbrella organisation, the Swiss Tourism Federation (STV) is taking steps to revamp the sector's beleaguered image and to highlight its qualities. The tourism sector offers many interesting jobs with lots of variety. Working in tourism means working with people. The chance to engage with different people from all over the world is appealing and rewarding. It is also important for companies to work on new work models in order to strengthen staff loyalty and to enhance the sector's appeal.

Philipp Niederberger, Director of the Swiss Tourism Federation

The **Swiss Tourism Federation** (www.stv-fst.ch) is the umbrella organisation for the Swiss tourism sector. It is supported by over 500 members and, as a network organisation, represents the interests of Swiss tourism in dealing with authorities, on the political scene, in the media and in public. Thanks to the broad support it receives within tourism, the STV represents the interests of the value creation chain in the industry.

Challenges for apprentices and the apprenticeship market during and after the pandemic

Stable apprenticeship market during the pandemic – difficulties recruiting thereafter

Overall, the apprenticeship market remained stable during the pandemic and processes for filling apprenticeship vacancies were not significantly impacted. Despite this, recruitment in 2023, in the aftermath of the pandemic, has proven increasingly tricky: teaching institutions claim that it has become more and more difficult to find suitable apprentices since the start of the pandemic. One reason for this could be a shift in the skill set offered by applicants over the course of the pandemic. Potential apprenticeships have demonstrated improved computer skills according to the companies surveyed. On the other hand, many skills such as German and maths, as well as soft skills, have deteriorated. Companies are particularly lacking in applicants with a strong sense of resilience. The reduced appeal associated with pursuing vocational training may also have contributed to the difficulties facing recruiters; according to businesses, this has also suffered in comparison with general educa-

LehrstellenPuls Project

LehrstellenPuls (apprenticeship Pulse) is a project set up by the Chair of Education Systems at ETH Zurich in collaboration with the apprenticeship platform Yousty. As part of this project, we have been regularly monitoring all things relating to vocational training since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. To find out what makes teaching institutions and apprentices alike tick, we carried out online surveys of teaching institutions across the whole of Switzerland over the course of three years. Initially, around 2,000 teaching institutions took part in the monthly, and later quarterly, surveys. Due to the weighting system we used, the results are representative of teaching institutions across Switzerland.

On the whole, basic vocational training in Switzerland has proven astonishingly resilient, remaining in good health even during the pandemic. Nevertheless, our surveys also reveal challenges that teaching institutions and apprentices will no doubt still encounter in the future. This is also illustrated by our research on the apprenticeship market, on apprentices currently in the middle of their training and on career entry.

tional institutions (e.g. secondary schools) since the beginning of the pandemic.

One interesting trend in the apprenticeship market is the increase in inequality between different occupational fields. Whilst some have not had any problems filling their apprenticeship vacancies, others have had to go to great lengths to find suitable applicants. The occupational fields «education and social affairs», «planning, construction», «economics, management and tourism» and «computer science» were amongst the winners, whereas «construction», «hospitality» and «building technology» were at the lower end of the spectrum.

Rocky path for entry-level workers – but with a happy ending

Our surveys show that entering into the world of work as an apprenticeship graduate was, for a long time, a great challenge during the pandemic. Many companies initially indicated that it had become more difficult to enter the workforce for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The situation did, however, improve over the course of the pandemic. In the end, the tables turned: businesses stated that entering the workforce in 2022 was easier for apprenticeship graduates than it was before the pandemic. This trend is good news: it shows that those who have completed an apprenticeship are in a good position and that they have improved their chances of succeeding in the labour market.

Apprentices unable to catch up on missed content

Results from current apprentices indicate that basic vocational training in Switzerland is on a strong footing: not long after the first wave of the pandemic in April 2020, the majority of apprentices returned to their placements in accordance with safety measures issued by the Federal Office of Public Health. Only a tiny proportion of apprentices had limited opportunities to work on site or received no practical training. Despite this, the pandemic meant that apprentices missed some learning content, some of which they were not able to catch up on during the rest of their course, according to the companies surveyed.

Apprentices' motivation and resilience has decreased

One possible reason behind apprentices having missed content is their decreased levels of motivation and resilience during the pandemic. The prevalence of working from home may have exacerbated this trend. After all, for most apprentices – particularly those in the «computer science» and «economics, management and tourism» fields – working from home during the pandemic, and

afterwards too, become the new normal. Our surveys show that working from home causes many soft skills to fall by the wayside. According to the business surveyed, the motivation and resilience of those who worked from home suffered the most. It is possible that this is related to the increase in the number of apprenticeship contracts cancelled during the pandemic: companies cited apprentices not being able to meet requirements for soft skills as the most common reason for cancelling contracts.

Notwithstanding, there is another aspect to the effect working from home had on apprentices. For example, our surveys reveal that working from home required apprentices to be more flexible and organised. Attainment figures also uncover contrasting trends: grades achieved by the stronger apprentices improved slightly when working from home, whereas weaker apprentices performed worse.

Thomas Bolli, Lena Dändliker & Ursula Renold, Chair of Education Systems, ETH Zürich

Chair of Education Systems, ETH Zürich

The Chair of Education Systems at ETH Zurich carries out relevant, theoretical, empirical and translational research. Its aim is to generate meaningful research which can then influence the education and employment systems adopted by countries across the globe.

News

In the September 2023 edition of the magazine *Personal-SCHWEIZ* and in cooperation with Dagmar Jenni, Director of the Swiss Retail Federation, Delia Meyer, M.Sc., Lena Schneider, M.Sc. and Dr. Anja Feierabend have published an article entitled «Where have all the skilled workers gone?».

In May 2023, together with practice partner Hans-Christoph Six from Dätwyler, Delia Meyer, M.Sc. and Dr. Anja Feierabend reported on the subject of «psychological security and error behaviour» at a ZGP (Zurich Society for Personnel Management) online event.

In May 2023, the NZZ published an interview with Dr. Anja Feierabend in which she discussed potential generation myths as well as findings from the Swiss HR Barometer on the topic of generations (see link).

In March 2023, Dr. Anja Feierabend examined «the change in the workers' market – findings from the Swiss HR Barometer» at an event hosted by the Swiss Retail Federation.

Lena Schneider, M.Sc., presented a study in collaboration with Julian Pfrombeck and Gudela Grote on «staying employable when being close(r) to retirement: the importance of job autonomy for the use of action regulation strategies». The presentation used HR Barometer data and was delivered at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management (AOM) in Boston, USA as well as at the Congress of Work, Organisational, Economic and Engineering Psychology (AOW) in Kassel, Germany.

Delia Meyer, M.Sc., presented a study on the topic of «exploring the mediating role of social capital: the impact of leader-member exchange on career sustainability» at the EIASM workshop on strategic human resource management in April 2023

In the 2023 spring semester, 17 Masters students from the Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Business Administration and nine BA students from the University of Lucerne drafted a paper based on the open access Swiss HR Barometer data.

Publishing notes

The newsletter of the Swiss Human Relations Barometer is published twice in 2023. It provides information on current research projects based on the data of the HR Barometer. You can subscribe to the newsletter free of charge or download it from the website www.hrbarometer.ch.

Authors: Delia Meyer, M.Sc., Dr. Anja Feierabend, Center for Human Resource Management, University of Lucerne; Lena Schneider, M.Sc., Professorship for Occupational and Organisational Psychology at ETH Zurich; Dr. Thomas Bolli, Lena Dändliker, M.Sc., Prof. Dr. Ursula Renold, Chair of Education Systems, ETH Zürich

Editor: Dr. Anja Feierabend, Center for Human Resource Management, University of Lucerne;

Graphics and layout: Sara Ribeiro

Original language: German