



Kanton Zürich
Bildungsdirektion

Swiss Union of Arts and Crafts

EU Project Women in SME: Using full potential

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Project Appraisal by Government Councillor Dr. Silvia Steiner,
Head of the Department of Education, Canton Zurich
“Conclusion and Perspectives”

Ladies and Gentlemen, conference participants,

Thank you very much for the invitation. I am delighted to be here with you today – and I must confess: I am enthusiastic about the project “Women in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME): Using full potential”. I am here with you this evening to admire and to support your effort. Moreover, my position as Head of the Department of Education officially allows me to be enthusiastic about new projects in education and training: In fact, this is particularly true for this pioneering and ground-breaking project.

To begin with, I would like to thank you: My thanks go to everyone involved in the project, and to everyone who has played a part in tapping into this new and neglected source of qualified professionals. First of all, I would like to thank the supporting institution, the Swiss Union of Arts and Crafts, as well as the network “Women in SME – Switzerland”. Particularly, I want to highlight the fantastic achievement of the first 18 candidates. These women were true pioneers, being the first ones successfully completing the validation procedure in its pilot phase.

Once again, I am enthusiastic, primarily because this project is useful and simple, and secondly, because it offers an effective way to recognise female working achievements.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I grew up in a family that ran its own SME. My mother always worked in our family business. Like countless other women, she played an essential part in making the business flourish. In some areas, she was even better qualified than my father. However, only we recognised her work - while the job market did not. On the contrary, with her curriculum,

she would not have found a job.

Still today, many women share my mother's experience: They contribute decisively to family and small businesses – but without a salary and without formal recognition. Doing this, they help to reduce the marginal costs of small or young enterprises, which could barely survive otherwise. In Switzerland, this particular role of female workforce has a typical and long history. Let me briefly outline some of its landmarks:

The first female collective work organisations in Switzerland date back to 1870. In the 1890s, women's rights organisations became active in the major Swiss cities; these organisations promoted better educational and working chances for women. Moreover, they claimed stronger female civil and political rights. By the time of the First World War, most of the existing Swiss women's organisations were already active. They campaigned for a better female access to political decision-making. However, without the right to vote, they did not have enough political power. Since the vote in 1971 introducing women's suffrage on a federal level, female legal rights have improved significantly. However, action is still needed: the classic gender gap became smaller, but women continue to occupy significantly less influential positions than men. This is true for the public and the private sector, for politics, research, administration and the economy. At the same time, women continue to do the major part of unpaid work in households and families.

Today, more than ever, Switzerland needs qualified workforce. In fact, we want women to increase their employment level. Therefore, for career and family to be compatible, the government and the job market must face the needs of women and their families: We need to improve day-schools and childcare arrangements - and we should implement flexible working models and trainings.

With all this in mind, the new qualification "Management Expert SME" is crucial for various reasons: Firstly, on a very personal level:

The qualification certifies the Know-How that women acquire in their everyday lives. It therefore offers protection. Moreover, it stands for social recognition and personal appreciation. Doing this, the certification opens doors for women in a job market increasingly defined by formal criteria.

Secondly, from an educational politics perspective:

The certificate represents an innovative element in the Swiss education and training system, which is famous for its strong cooperation between economy and state. In particular, this is true for vocational training. Here, the economy trains students on the job and according to its own needs. In addition, students take classes in vocational schools for some days a week. Doing this, the economy also takes the responsibility to define which specialists the market needs. Therefore, the supply of skilled personnel provided by the public education system follows demand. I am convinced that the new qualification that we are honouring today meets the market demand, too.

Moreover, the Swiss educational system is permeable: every qualification leads somewhere. However, our educational system can only be permeable, if we acknowledge skills, regardless whether acquired formally or informally. This is particularly important for women, as their careers are still not as linear as the male ones. With the new qualification, we can achieve acknowledgement.

Thirdly, from an economic perspective:

At first glance, it does not seem to be too important: in the Canton of Zurich the share of qualifications acquired by the new validation procedure is currently around 1.4% of all professional qualifications leading to a Federal Certificate of Higher Vocational Education and Training. However, ladies and gentlemen, on the backdrop of the enormous challenge to train enough qualified personnel, the validation procedure is of utmost importance. The validation procedure makes it possible to efficiently use existing female management experience, and to recruit more qualified employees. From this perspective, the current job market situation positively creates incentives to promote women's potential.

Validation procedures in professional training were introduced by the Vocational Training Act of 2004; they are therefore a relatively new development. However, they have established themselves firmly and have met with acceptance, by and large. The main task now is to develop these procedures and to discuss them within a national or - as in your project - within an international forum.

I hope very much that your pioneering project encourages many qualified, professionally experienced women to complete the validation procedure in management and to obtain the Federal Certificate of Higher Vocational Education and Training.

Many thanks for your attention!

Wann und Wo
Datum, Zeit, Ort?

Form der Rede, Länge
Welche?

Publikum
Welches?

Ablauf
z.B. Vorredner/in?

Technische Einrichtungen
z.B. Mikrofon?

Andere Anmerkungen
Welche?