

No Talent, No Growth: The Business Case for Fertility Benefits in the Workplace

An Article of the Swiss Association of MBAs



Diana Neacsu
Author

According to the **World Health Organization**, **1 in 6 adults worldwide experience infertility**—a condition as common as diabetes. Crucially, all of them are of working age. In Switzerland, the implications are sharp: a shrinking talent pipeline, a persistent gender gap in leadership, and rising economic costs. These dynamics are no longer private matters—they're business-critical.

A recent study¹ by the University of St. Gallen projects that **800,000 jobs may go unfilled by 2030** - that's roughly one in seven positions. The Adecco Swiss Skills Shortage Index² further shows that this is affecting not only skilled professionals but labor in general. This shortfall could reduce **GDP by 0.66% annually**, costing the Swiss economy around **5 billion francs each year**.

The **gender leadership gap** compounds the problem. Women in Switzerland make up 47% of non-management roles, but only 22% of top leadership, shows the 2024 Gender Intelligence Report³. A key reason? Career and family are still seen as incompatible. Consequently, many women stall in the leadership pipeline.

¹https://www.advance-hsg-report.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Gender_Intelligence_Report_2023_Executive_Version.pdf

²https://www.adecco-group.com/-/media/project/adecco-group/switzerland/swiss-skills-shortage-2023/press-release_national_2023.pdf

³<https://www.advance-hsg-report.ch/en/>



But nothing compares to the impact of **aging population**. By 2100, most countries, including Switzerland, will have fewer than 2.1 children per woman. This means there will be fewer juniors to replace retired employees.

As *The Economist* points out, countries that fail to address these dynamics - such as South Korea⁴ and Japan⁵ - are already experiencing significant demographic and economic decline.

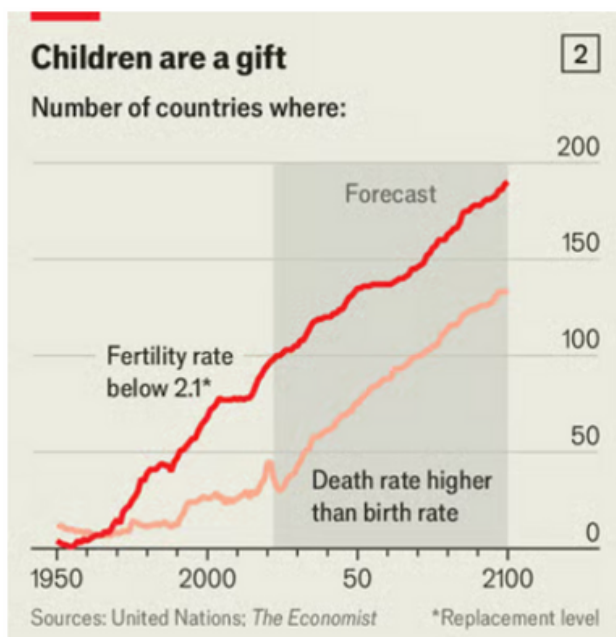


CHART: THE ECONOMIST

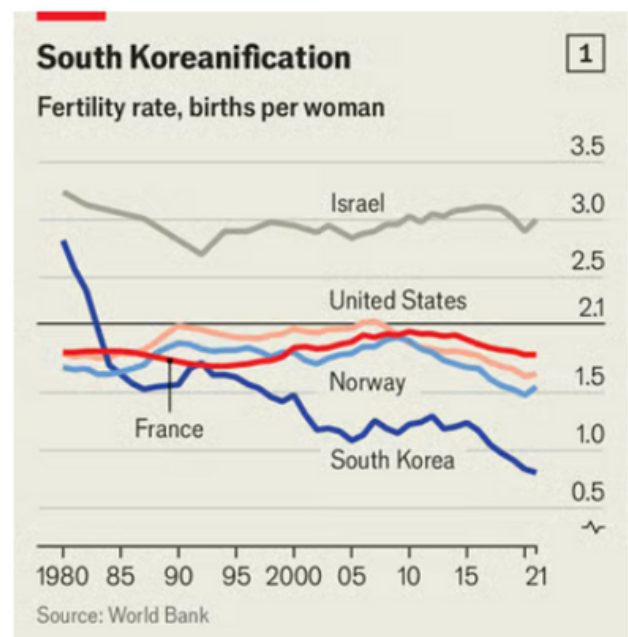


CHART: THE ECONOMIST

⁴<https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2024/05/23/shrinking-populations-mean-a-poorer-more-fractious-world>

⁵<https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/05/02/japan-and-south-korea-are-struggling-with-old-age-poverty>

Is the Swiss Clock Ticking?

In a high-performance economy like Switzerland, where labor shortage and the gender leadership gap are already posing challenges to employers, **overlooking the aging population compounds the challenge**. No company runs without people.

With 1 in 6 people of working age struggling with infertility, HR strategies that address this could be a solution for future-proofing the Swiss competitiveness. They help companies retain skilled labor, reduce costly turnover, and unlock a critical, underutilized leadership pool.

“Why on Earth Would You, as a Company, Engage in Such a Personal Matter?”

When **Merck Switzerland** introduced a five-figure fertility treatment subsidy for both women and men, President **Florian Schick** was frequently asked why a company would involve itself in such a personal matter.

“If you make a taboo out of it, you’ll prevent female leadership in your company, I’m 100% convinced,” he explained at a Family Forward panel in Bern.

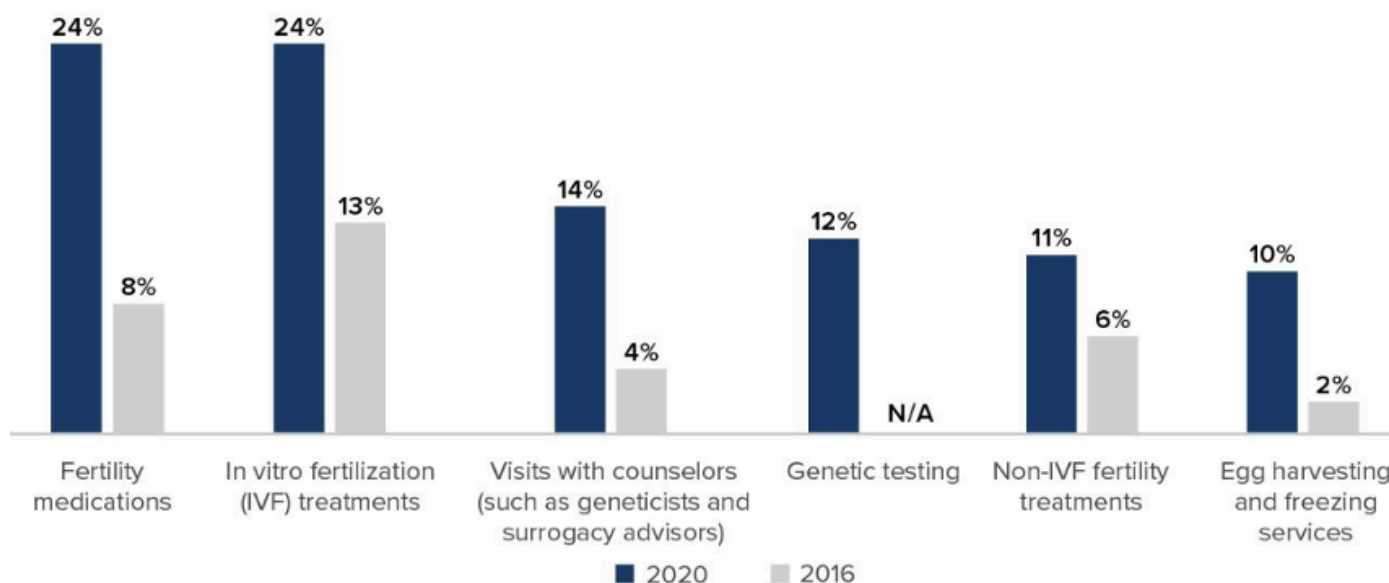
Fertility-related benefits are increasingly becoming a strategic tool for long-term talent engagement and retention. These offerings are no longer standalone perks - they’re often embedded within broader systems such as HR policies, manager training, employee resource groups (ERGs), and networks of infertility allies and ambassadors. All five of the world’s largest companies by market capitalization - **Microsoft, NVIDIA, Apple, Amazon, and Alphabet (Google)** - now provide fertility-related benefits.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management⁶ (SHRM), nearly **24% of the employers in the U.S. cover IVF**, with growing numbers also supporting adoption, surrogacy, and egg freezing. While **Merck** may be leading in Switzerland, it’s far from alone in recognizing the business case for supporting employees on their fertility journeys.

At **Salesforce Switzerland**, another trailblazer in the Swiss market, the approach includes manager training, employee resource groups, special leaves of absence and caregiver benefits. As **Barbara Weiss**, Equity Lead at Salesforce Switzerland, said at the same panel: *“Sustainable companies depend on balanced employees who can be productive.”*

⁶<https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/benefits-compensation/family-forming-benefits-serve-diverse-workforce>

The percentage of organizations that are covering fertility benefits has grown significantly, with more expansive plans covering egg-freezing services.



Source: *Employee Benefits Survey: 2020 Results*, International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans.

Graph: SHRM's Data on Fertility Benefits in the US

Beyond Sick Leave: Building Smarter HR Policies for Fertility Journeys

For employees, infertility is far more than a medical issue—it's a deeply emotional, time-consuming, and financially draining journey that often unfolds in silence and ends, all too often, in disappointment. Many navigate this experience while juggling demanding careers, feeling the pressure to keep up appearances at work even as they cope with physically and emotionally exhausting treatment cycles.

Yet in most workplaces, fertility-related HR policies still fall into a grey zone. There is little clear guidance around flexible working or time off for treatment, which leaves both employees and their managers unsure of what support is appropriate or available. In the absence of clear HR processes, **employees frequently overcompensate** - working longer hours or pushing themselves harder to 'earn' flexibility for appointments and recovery time.

This disconnect is often made worse by a **general lack of understanding** about what fertility treatment actually involves, including the high likelihood of miscarriage and the mental strain of prolonged uncertainty. Without awareness and education, even well-intentioned HR responses can backfire, leaving employees feeling isolated or even hurt by processes that don't reflect the reality of their situation.



A recent report by Manchester Metropolitan University, *Complex Fertility Journeys and Employment*⁷, captures this gap in lived experience and organizational response:

"Basically, after the miscarriage... you tick a box on a sickness form and it says, 'Is it pregnancy related?' And then you write down 'miscarriage'. And then you get an email two weeks later from HR going 'Oh, congratulations.'" (Female Project Coordinator)

"I sort of threw myself into work because I took the view that if I want flexibility at work then I had to make sure that I was on top of everything I was doing. So, it actually drove me probably to work a bit harder and work a little bit longer in the evenings and do a bit more above and beyond what I needed to so that work would give me a bit more flexibility." (Male Consultant Engineer)

"I think that half the problem with things like this, is that nobody has a fertility treatment section of their HR policies. There's stuff about 'illness' in inverted commas but because fertility isn't really seen by a lot of people as an illness that needs treatment, I think it's hard to see where it fits with HR [...] It's always at manager's discretion." (Female in a Management role)

⁷ <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/ComplexFertilityJourneysResearchProjectReport.pdf>

It Doesn't Have to Be Expensive to Work

Best practices go beyond financial support and don't necessarily require large investments. Leading companies are adopting simple, scalable practices to ensure retention, engagement and workplace equity. Below are a couple of best practices:

- Include fertility treatment in line manager training
- Support line managers in making temporary, reasonable adjustments for employees undergoing fertility treatment - such as flexible hours, remote work, or reduced workload.
- Ensure HR and senior leaders apply a consistent approach to logging time off and pay related to fertility treatment or pregnancy loss.
- Promote awareness of fertility issues through initiatives like awareness weeks, posters, or intranet blogs, and provide clear signposts to further support. Normalize open conversations - if the employees concerned choose to have them.
- If there's interest, explore a peer-support network for staff going through fertility challenges.

What's at Stake for Swiss Business?

In Swiss culture, fertility and parenthood are seen as strictly personal. But when career success and family are seen as incompatible, businesses lose out - on talent, loyalty, and leadership.

Companies that act now will gain a long-term advantage by retaining top performers and building resilient, future-ready teams.

Start by asking:

- Do we support fertility and family formation - logistically, emotionally, or financially?
- Are our managers equipped to lead with empathy and discretion?
- Do we have bereavement policies for pregnancy loss or failed treatment outcomes?
- Are we building a workplace where no one must choose between family and career?

If your answer is "not yet," then the time to act is now.

About the Author

Diana is a certified coach and counsellor based in Switzerland, and a member of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). With 15+ years in senior corporate communications and consulting roles, she now supports individuals and organisations in navigating fertility-related challenges - through coaching, training, keynote speaking, and consulting that help create more inclusive workplaces.

Her award-winning coaching practice serves clients of all genders, backgrounds, and stages of the fertility journey - from parenthood indecision to navigating treatment after infertility or health setbacks.

A published author and speaker, Diana advocates for inclusive, sustainable workplace policies around reproductive and mental health. Blending personal insight with professional depth, she brings a distinct and timely voice to the conversation about blending careers and wellbeing.

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/diana-n-mba](https://www.linkedin.com/in/diana-n-mba)