

“The State can reduce stereotypes”



Labor market expert Mrs. Christina Felfe, assistant professor for labor markets and econometrics at the University of Sankt Gallen.

Mrs. Felfe, you are earning the same than your male colleagues?

Yes. Salaries at the universities are totally transparent.

In accordance to a current survey of the German Federal Office for Statistics about the salary structure, women earn 19, 3% less than men. Why?

This can be due to different factors such as personal qualification or requests from the employer for covering a concrete post. Furthermore, salary is adjusted to education, age, job performance and experience. Then, we must also consider requirements which are disposed by the employer and, as such, are being rewarded. All of these are measurable factors. But there are also non measurable reasons.

The Equal Opportunities Offices talk about “non explainable, discriminatory” reasons.

I hold that “non explainable” is incorrect. It should be “non observable” or even better “not yet evaluable”.

It's easy: Men feel a stronger necessity to make professional career and are more aggressive when negotiating- and both of these factors influence salary.

It's true that there are differences in terms of outcomes willingness, which are partially explainable with familiar requests. But there are also different preferences. The familiar and social environment is more important for women. Because of this women are more opened to take a time-out or to just work part-time. This lack of experience at their workplace has consequences on the final salary. It is also scientifically demonstrated that women easier accept compromises and faster agree with a job offer. Men like to fight with elbows, to expose themselves to risks and say: “I will come, but only if you pay 10% more”.

These are all explainable differences. Why people talk about “discrimination”?

I do not agree with this expression. This is being taught in universities in the introductory study period. Instead of talking about “discrimination” we try to analyze the non explained part, starting from reasons such as motivation or institutional conditions. But these factors are not easily measurable and it could be that it is partially real discrimination. But from a scientific

point of view this is very difficult to demonstrate.

The non discrimination propaganda of the Offices for Equal Opportunities obfuscates the real reasons of salary differences.

I can not say that discrimination does not exist. Strongly anchored and traditional role models can favor discrimination when, for example, a young woman is not employed because she could get pregnant and therefore be absent at work. The Offices for Equal Opportunities have the right to fight against these stereotypes. But even when these grievances are being eliminated salary differences, which are explained with different preferences from women and men, will still exist.

Salary equality, as promoted by Equal Opportunity Offices is therefore an illusion?

As long as men can not get pregnant, full salary equality will not be achievable.

But is not the real discrimination the fact that Equal Opportunity Offices treat women as victims who need help? In job offers sometimes women are being compared to disabled to be preferred.

In effect, in the past, women had not the same job opportunities even having the same qualifications than men. By establishing a preference for women or better supporting working mothers, the State can offer women the opportunity to work more and therefore contribute to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices.

If you speak to firms, lots of them really prefer women. They say to respect their family role, to never constrain them to make extra hours, to concede them part-time workload and to treat them very respectful.

And this is very important. If a child gets ill it is normally the woman who goes home to attend it. It can not be possible that women get punished in the business world because of this. Far from it: we should try to accommodate them with more support in order to make it possible for them to render the same achievements and performances than men.

But when women do not want this?

It is about providing the same opportunities for both genders. Then, to perceive these equal opportunities is a different thing.