

## SNSF Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC)

## Newsletter 2026/2

### Status of the study

After introducing a new focus on the diversity of career paths on a trial basis in the fall 2025 survey, it was implemented in the spring 2026 survey. The spring survey yielded a response rate of 46% across the three cohorts

(CTC-19, CTC-20, CTC-21) surveyed. We would like to thank all participants who took the time to answer the survey. We are looking forward to analyzing the data and sharing some of the results in a future newsletter.

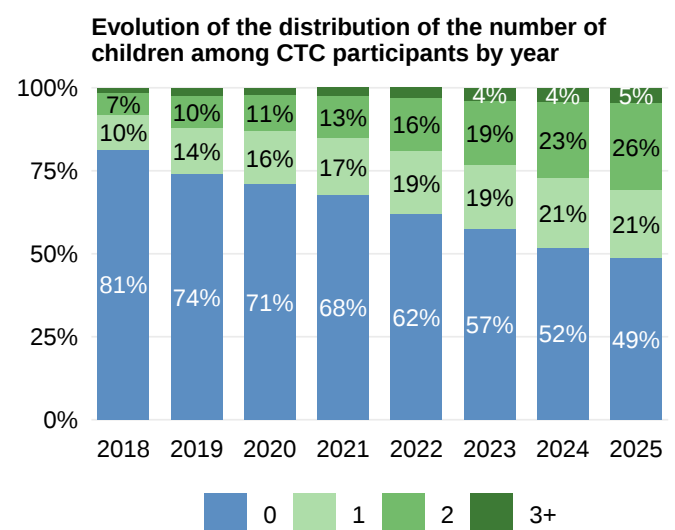
### Becoming a parent: the impact on work, values, and scientific productivity

In this newsletter, we take a closer look at what changes when participants have their first child during the CTC observation phase. We chose to focus on the first child because becoming a parent may have a significant impact on one's career path, and the first child is commonly considered to have the strongest impact on one's career trajectory. The longitudinal design allows us to compare, for each participant, data collected before and after the birth of their first child. Each person after the birth of their first child is compared to themselves before the birth. Concretely, for each participant, we pool all available observations prior to the birth and compare them to all available observations after the birth. Our main question, therefore, is whether the birth of one's first child alters key areas such as values and attitudes towards career development, how it affects actual working hours, and academic produc-

tivity. In the first graph, we show the distribution of the number of children across the four cohorts and over time to give an overview of the larger picture. From the second graph onwards we focus on the participants who had their first child during the CTC observation phase. Over all cohorts (CTC-18, CTC-19, CTC-20, CTC-21), 582 of them did so. We removed 162 participants who had their first child during their first data collection year, as there was no *before* comparison point for them; this left us with 420 participants in total. Not all 420 participants have data for every outcome; analyses are conducted on all available observations for each variable. All results presented below are descriptive; they document associations in the CTC data and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effects.

### Distribution of children across cohorts and over time

In the early years of the CTC study, the number of participants increased steadily as the cohorts (CTC-18, CTC-19, CTC-20, CTC-21) were gradually enrolled in the study. From 2022 onwards, all four cohorts were surveyed each year. From this point onwards, we observe an attritional decline in the number of participants (from 2'766 to 1'642). As in previous years, the proportion of childless participants steadily decreased (from 62% to 49% between 2022 and 2025), whilst the proportion of participants with one child increased only slightly (by 2% over the same period). From 2022 onwards, we also observe an increase in the proportion of participants with two children (+10% by 2025). The proportion of participants with three or more children remains very low in all years (5% in 2025). Percentages are calculated among participants with valid information on the number of children.

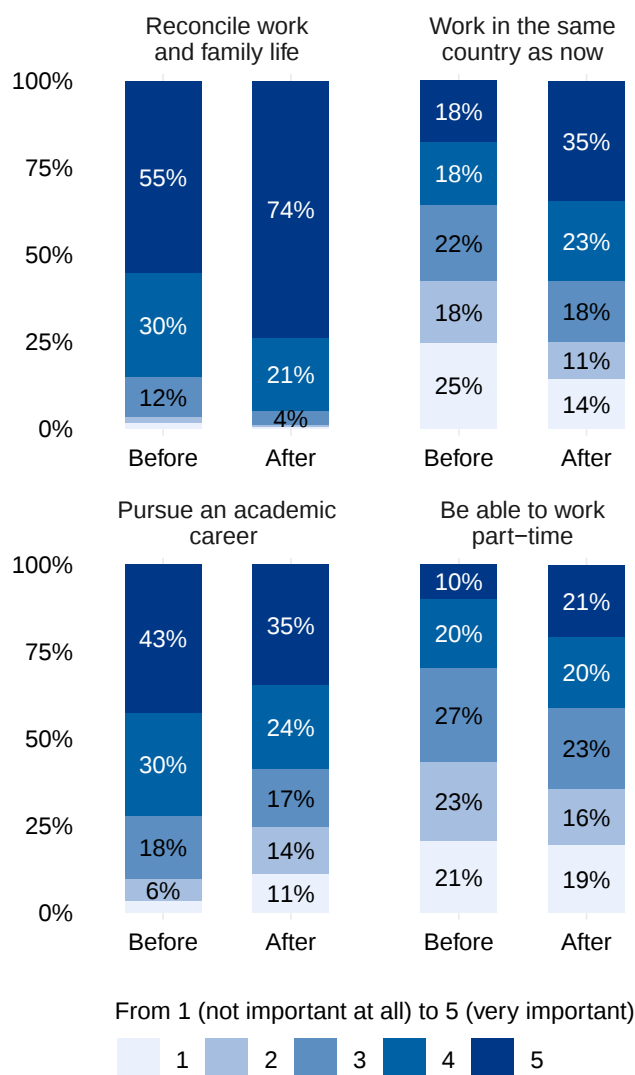


Percentages are computed among participants with non-missing number of children. N per year (2018–2025): 406, 1'641, 2'591, 2'766, 2'151, 1'976, 1'825, 1'642.

## The importance of career-related values

First, we look at how the birth of the first child affects the importance of various career-related values. All comparisons use a paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Reconciling work and family life was rated as significantly more important after the birth of the first child than before (mean before: 4.35 vs. after: 4.68,  $p < .001$ ). This pattern was observed in both women (before: 4.54 -> after: 4.80,  $p < .001$ ) and men (before: 4.22 -> after: 4.58,  $p < .001$ ), though women consistently rated reconciling work and family life as more important than men, both before and after the transition to parenthood. Working in the same country as now also became significantly more important (mean before: 2.94 vs. after: 3.50,  $p < .001$ ). This pattern was observed in both genders (women: 2.99 -> 3.67; men: 2.91 -> 3.36, both  $p < .001$ ), with a slightly larger increase observed among women. Pursuing an academic career became significantly less important (mean before: 4.11 vs. after: 3.60,  $p < .001$ ). This pattern was observed in both women (before: 4.18 -> after: 3.59,  $p < .001$ ) and men (before: 4.06 -> after: 3.62,  $p < .001$ ). Being able to work part-time became significantly more important (mean before: 2.71 vs. after: 3.05,  $p < .001$ ). This pattern was observed in both women (before: 3.01 -> after: 3.38,  $p < .001$ ) and men (before: 2.50 -> after: 2.78,  $p < .001$ ), though women consistently rated part-time work as more important than men, both before and after the transition to parenthood. These descriptive results suggest that the birth of the first child is associated with a slight shift in these career-related values, with increased importance placed on reconciling work and family life, working in the same country, and part-time work, while the importance of pursuing an academic career decreases.

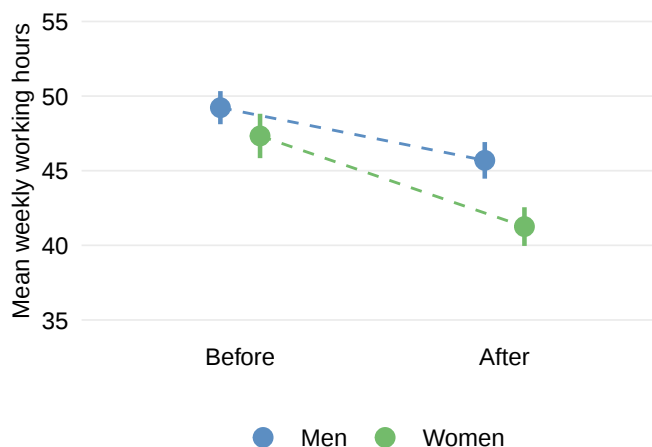
**Importance of work-related preferences before and after first childbirth**



## Actual working hours per week

In a second step, we examine how the birth of the first child affects reported weekly working hours. This question asks participants about the total number of hours worked per week, including weekends, and is answered on a continuous scale. Reported weekly working hours decreased significantly after the birth of the first child (before: 48.4h vs. after: 43.8h, a reduction of approximately 5 hours per week, paired t-test and Wilcoxon signed-rank test, both  $p < .001$ ). This decrease was observed in both women (-6.6h,  $p < .001$ ) and men (-3.6h,  $p < .001$ ), but was significantly larger for women (independent samples t-test on within-person differences,  $p < .001$ ). This decrease aligns with the increased importance of reconciling work and family life and the increased importance of part-time work after the birth of the first child.

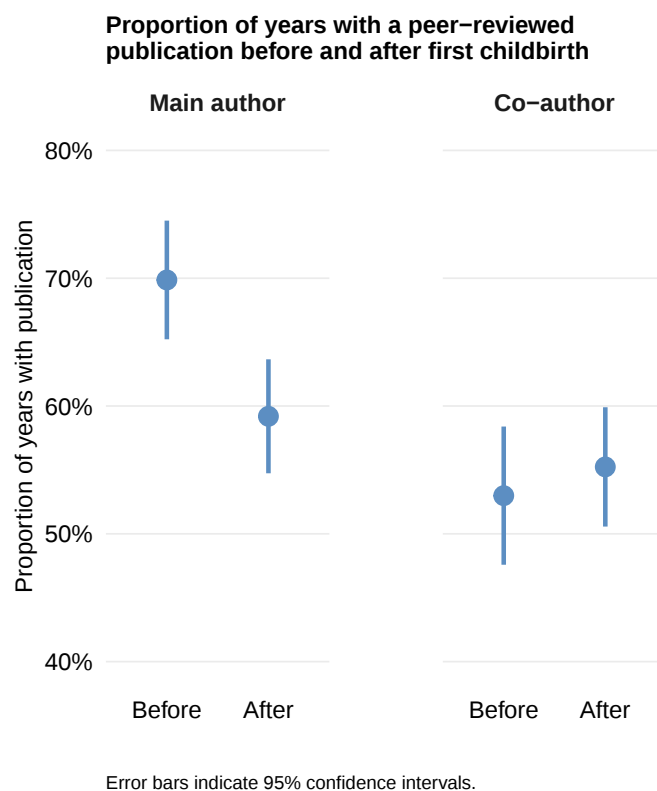
**Reported weekly working hours before and after first childbirth, by gender**



Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

## Scientific productivity as main author and co-author

Lastly, we examine how the birth of the first child affects scientific productivity, measured by the proportion of years with at least one peer-reviewed publication as main author or as co-author. The proportion of years with a peer-reviewed publication as main author decreased significantly after the birth of the first child (before: 70% vs. after: 59%, Wilcoxon signed-rank test  $p < .001$ ). When stratified by gender, the decrease was significant for men (73% → 61%,  $p < .001$ ,  $N = 124$ ) but not for women (65% → 57%,  $p = .089$ ,  $N = 97$ ), though the direction is consistent. The proportion of years with a peer-reviewed publication as co-author did not change significantly after the birth of the first child (before: 53% vs. after: 55%, Wilcoxon  $p = .531$ ). This absence of effect was consistent across both women (48% → 55%,  $p = .451$ ) and men (57% → 55%,  $p = .094$ ). We observe a significant decrease in the proportion of years with a peer-reviewed publication as main author only for men after the birth of the first child. This decrease may be due to a general trend of decreasing publication rates over time as main authorship is often concentrated in the early years of a research career.



### Up next

We are currently in the process of compiling the scientific use files (SUF) for the 2025 CTC surveys, along with the accompanying documentation. The eighth wave from the CTC-18 cohort, the seventh from CTC-19, the sixth from CTC-20 and the fifth from CTC-21 will be published. This long observation period provides an opportunity to

analyse interesting questions regarding the career paths of (former) researchers. We would be delighted if more researchers were to analyse the CTC data. The SUFs will be available for download from [SWISSUBase](#) from the beginning of October.

### About

The Career Tracker Cohorts (CTC) project is hosted at the University of Bern and administered by the Interfaculty Centre for Educational Research (ICER). The CTC study is being conducted on behalf of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It is a longitudinal panel study with four cohorts (CTC-18 to CTC-21). It aims to track

the diverse career paths of researchers who have once applied for SNSF career funding schemes at the postdoctoral level (Early Postdoc.Mobility, Postdoc.Mobility, Ambizione, Eccellenza, and PRIMA) irrespective of their success in obtaining the funding.

For more information, see: <https://careertrackercohorts.ch/>

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