



## **Experiences when trying to manage two ambitious careers and a family**

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I recently became Assistant Professor, while becoming a mother of two young kids (9 and 29 months). The last two-three years were challenging with us working full-time in different countries, raising a personal and academic family, and international moves. Through hard work and planning and with support from others we reached our desired situation. Before I had kids I hardly experienced differences between opportunities for male and female. Since many peers around me felt the same, and had equal relationships, I thought the struggle for equal gender opportunities passed and that “fixing the leaky pipeline” was merely a matter of time. After having two kids, I realized this is not the case; we are not nearly as far as I presumed and gender opportunities cannot be equal. At least not in the peak period of ~10 years post-PhD in which, if desired, an academic position and a family have to be secured. Females have to deal with pregnancy, absence in maternity leave without being replaced, the lion share of baby care, and being assumed to be first parent for child care. Such differences defined by nature have deep roots and cannot be corrected. Instead one can strive for equal roles in raising children after baby time, where it helps to be stimulated to take responsibility as early as possible. For careers those differences can be compensated in quantitative ways, as is being done by funding agencies for e.g., ERC grants. Similar measures of increasing age limits for starting professor positions, and comparisons for output, could smooth the difficulty of finding a tenure-track position and starting a family at the same time. To facilitate a female career a large role is played by the father and his work environment, which should – but often does not – allow for a significant family role. Besides regulated facilitation, I think it here - and in general - it is important to enlarge understanding through talking about the difficulties to create more support. In the successful cases I have witnessed, direct superiors were very supportive. However, creating this understanding is difficult, since it is difficult to understand the significance of the challenges without experiencing yourself (and even then, we are also programmed to forget). Academic careers are furthermore challenging, because a larger amount of mobility is asked from families. Fortunately, academics are not always tied to one location, so flexibility in working location can facilitate being with the family. Additionally, international mobility puts us in situation, where family is not near by to help. Instead, in moments of need, we received help from a family-friendly foundation of ETH Zurich (kihz). Besides regular day care, they e.g., provided flexible day care and last-minute nannies anywhere. Finally, I experienced it helps to a) not organize meetings before 9h or after 17h, b) thoroughly accept home office, c) facilitate shorter teaching periods for field work, and d) have dedicated coaching groups and role models for advice and creating an atmosphere that it can be done.