

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2013

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch

2013

Steering committee

Anriette Esterhuysen (APC)
Loe Schout (Hivos)

Coordinating committee

Janine Moolman (APC)
Monique Doppert (Hivos)
Valeria Betancourt (APC)
Mallory Knodel (APC)

Project coordinator

Valeria Betancourt

Editor

Alan Finlay

Assistant editor

Lori Nordstrom

Publication production

Mallory Knodel

Proofreading

Valerie Dee
Lori Nordstrom

Graphic design

Monocromo
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2400 1685

Cover illustration

Matías Bervejillo

Financial support provided by

Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW)



Global Information Society Watch

Published by APC and Hivos

2013

Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Licence
<creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0>
Some rights reserved.

ISSN: 2225-4625
ISBN: 978-92-95102-06-4
APC-201310-CIPP-R-EN-DIGITAL-197

SWITZERLAND

Women's rights, gender and ICTs



Comunica-ch

Wolf Ludwig and Therese Wüthrich
www.comunica-ch.net

Introduction

A casual observer of the country would assume that Switzerland figures well among its neighbouring countries in terms of women's rights and gender issues. Particular historical facts and shortcomings found in Switzerland are not as evident in the surrounding European countries. But a key event for women's rights is rather recent but meaningful: women's suffrage in Switzerland was introduced at the federal level for the first time after 7 February 1971, with the voting resulting in the exact inverse of that reported in February 1959 (when suffrage was rejected 2 to 1).¹ The principal reason for the long delay of the Swiss in granting women's suffrage relative to other European countries is the importance of direct democracy in the political system. The introduction of federal and cantonal universal suffrage necessitated the vote of the majority of the electors – men in this case – for a referendum. Moreover, any new federal constitutional reform must be approved by the majority of the cantons. Some comparisons for the granting of universal suffrage: Finland 1906, Germany and Austria 1918, France 1944, Italy 1946.²

Policy and political background

As the political system in Switzerland is based on strong federalism, the Swiss cantons have much freedom of discretion. It was necessary to wait for the 1960s for eight cantons to introduce women's suffrage at the canton level. Thirty more years were necessary for this right to be generalised for all the cantons. In a judgment on November 1990 the Swiss federal court declared the exclusive male suffrage as had been practiced in the half canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden unconstitutional; the principle of equality between men and women as was

guaranteed by the federal constitution ordered, in effect, an interpretation of the Appenzell constitution so that women's suffrage should be possible. The comparatively late granting of women's suffrage is only one important facet out of many.

It was in 1978 when women were granted the same rights when it came to parental care for their children. In 1981 the principle of equal treatment was introduced into the country's constitution, including the legislative duty to assure legal and practical equality in all laws and spheres of life. Furthermore, and by law, women received the constitutional right of equal pay for equal work. In 1988 the marital law which designated men as "sovereign of the family" and women as in charge of housekeeping was reformed, thus granting women the right to gainful employment without the explicit approval of their husbands. Full citizen's rights were finally granted in 1990. But it was not until 1996 that the Gender Equity Act came into force, removing all structural discrimination for employment.³

Women in Swiss policy

The number of women in the Swiss National Council (lower house) of the Federal Assembly of Switzerland went from 10 in 1971 to 50 in 2003, and from 1 to 11 in the 46-member Swiss Council of States (upper house) in the same period. In 2008 there were 59 women out of 200 members in total (29.5%) in the National Council.⁴ The first female member of the seven-member Swiss Federal Council was elected in 1984, serving until 1989, the second female member from 1993 to 1999, and the first president of the Swiss Confederation in 1999. Two women were elected to the Swiss Federal Council from 1999 to 2003. As of January 2008 the Federal Council had three female members. Since September 2010, the Federal Council changed to a female majority of four, which signifies a milestone in the political history of the country.⁵

1 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Switzerland#Women.27s_Suffrage_at_the_Cantonal_Level_-_1960s and de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

2 www.meinhard.privat.t-online.de/frauen/frauenwahlr_weltweit.html

3 www.humanrights.ch/de/Themendossiers/Gleichstellung/Frauenrechte-Schweiz/index.html

4 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Switzerland#Women.27s_Suffrage_at_the_Cantonal_Level_-_1960s and de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

5 Ibid.

Economic activity

At the end of the 1990s, women's economic activity increased slightly; since the beginning of the century it has stabilised at around 45%. During the same period, men's economic activity registered a slight but steady decline and since 2005 it has stabilised at about 75%. But it remains markedly higher than women's: 75% of the male population and 61% of the female population aged 15 and above are gainfully employed or are looking for a job. The economic activity rate gap between women and men is widest in the years preceding the legal retirement age (55-64 years) and during the family formation phase (30-44 years): as of age 25, women's economic activity rate is already markedly lower than men's. This is attributable to the fact that a large number of women of this age (temporarily) leave the labour market to devote themselves to raising their children.⁶

At present, more than half the women in employment have a part-time job, compared with one-seventh of men in employment. Consequently, part-time work is a typical characteristic of women's working life. A part-time job often entails precarious working conditions, insufficient social security (e.g. pension fund) and fewer opportunities for further education and training and career advancement. On the other hand, part-time work does provide the opportunity to pursue other activities, such as caring for one's children, helping other people and doing housework. Since 1991, part-time work has increased among women and men in employment. Since the beginning of the 1990s, more than half of women work part-time, but among men the share does not exceed 14%.⁷

Leadership functions

While legal barriers for women's gainful employment were removed in 1988 and the economic activity rate over the last 15 years has stabilised at around 45%, the share of women in executive positions is still as marginal as lamentable: from 1990 to 2000 it only increased from 11% to 15%. There are significant differences between the country's regions and economic sectors. In health and social services women reached an employment rate of 80% but are only represented in 31% of leadership

positions. Similar high employment shares and comparably low managerial functions are typical for gastronomy, personal services and in the education sector. Even when women have a high rate of employment in a sector, this does not translate into leadership positions.⁸

Gender pay gap

A similar, persistent discrimination is found when it comes to the gender pay gap. Despite constitutional enshrinement (Art. 8.3, 1981) and the Gender Equity Act (1996), there are still great gender-based differences in pay in Switzerland. On average, women earn 20% less than men. Discriminatory behaviour accounts for about 40% of this difference. Women in managerial positions even earn up to 30% less than men – the EU average is 15%. There are still typical female and male professions in the world of work. The pay level in typical male professions is considerably higher than that in female professions. If women and men within the same company and with the same qualifications and experience receive different amounts of pay for the same work, pay discrimination within the context of the Gender Equity Act can be said to exist.⁹ In other words: "Women need to work 14 months to earn the same as men do in 12 months," says the president of the Business and Professional Women Club in Zurich.¹⁰ The gender pay gap is less significant in the public sector than in private enterprises.

Women and ICT

In the information and communications technology (ICT) sector the participation of women is still remarkably low – around 13% – while the pay difference is around 18% (21.4% in 2003). The pay level in the IT sector is among the highest in Switzerland after insurance, banking and telecommunications.¹¹ According to a study into ICTs in Switzerland, 72,500 new professionals will be needed in the country by 2020 – with a predicted shortage of 25,000. And all efforts to increase the share of women and school-girls in this sector have failed so far. The Swiss

6 Gender equality – Data, indicators, Economic activity rate, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, April 2013. www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/erwerbsbeteiligung.html

7 Gender equality – Data, indicators, Part-time work, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, April 2013. www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html

8 Frauen in Führungspositionen, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Neuchâtel, 2013. www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/regionen/thematische_karten/gleichstellungsatlas/erwerbsarbeit_und_beruf/fuehrungspositionen.html

9 de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Pay_Gap and www.ebg.admin.ch/themen/00008/00072/index.html?lang=en

10 Der Stichtag der Lohngleichheit zwischen Mann und Frau, Tagesanzeiger, Zürich, March 2013. www.tagesanzeiger.ch/wirtschaft/karriere/Der-Stichtag-der-Lohngleichheit-zwischen-Frau-und-Mann/story/31896948

11 Hohe Löhne in der Schweizer ICT, Computerworld.ch, August 2013. www.computerworld.ch/marktanalysen/studien-analysen/artikel/hohe-loehne-in-der-schweizer-ict-64015

telecom giant Swisscom launched an initiative called “ICT Week for Girls” in 2012 to attract more female interest in the sector. First results were reported to be promising, but structural problems in the education system are still persistent.¹²

Access and use of the internet

Age, gender and education were listed as key variables and barriers in the country’s digital divide in 2008 (see the Swiss country report for GISWatch 2008). While women were still considered among the “problem groups” when it came to internet access and usage,¹³ the situation has significantly changed since then. According to recent figures from NetMetrix (which conducts the most regular and comprehensive surveys in the country), around 2.6 million women are regularly using the internet, or 81.3% of women (compared to 2.8 million men or 88.9%).¹⁴

According to other sources, the usage pattern among women is very different from that of men. Women are said to be more selective and less present and outspoken on social media platforms and, for example, are still marginal among Wikipedia authors.¹⁵ This disparity corresponds with female under-representation in the Swiss media system, where women still account for less than 25% of media workers and are continuously ignored as social and political actors by the media.¹⁶

Conclusions

Denying basic rights and equality for women over more than a century is one of the darkest sides of Switzerland’s political history. From 1860 onwards the first traces of a feminist movement fighting for equal rights were recorded. And Switzerland’s women’s struggle is just further proof that fundamental rights are not conceded by men or any

third party but must be hard-won.¹⁷ Furthermore, traditionalism and conservative values are pronounced in the country and changes, always based on broad consent, usually take enormous time – critical observers complain about the snail’s pace of any reforms. Nordic equality standards (such as those in Sweden, Norway, etc.) in terms of representation in leadership positions or equal pay, amongst other issues, will conceivably take many more years to be implemented.

Switzerland has amongst the best conditions in terms of education, infrastructure, the labour market, wealth and all legal prescriptions since the early 1990s for attaining high gender equality standards. New technologies such as the internet have helped to bridge the gender gap and can promote further female empowerment. Usage of these technologies (mobiles, computers, etc.) is very common among digital natives of the country, and girls are generally more self-aware, skilled and demanding compared to their grandmothers’ generation. The education system, vocational education and the labour market are important factors to facilitate further improvements and to fulfil the legal prescriptions when it comes to gender equality.

However, traditional thinking patterns and all sorts of structural deficits are still to be overcome: there is a lack of day-care centres; all-day schools are the exception; and there is almost no transparency in salaries compared to other countries (and even if pay discrimination is evident, people – particularly women – do not sue offending employers). Unions are also weak in the country. Even more important, a longstanding demand from the feminist movement is still pending: men taking over an equal share of child care and housekeeping are far more the exception than the rule. Consequently, it is mostly women who hold back in their career planning, which explains the high share of female part-time jobs (more than half). Labour market experts – and particular female experts – suggest that another form of work organisation is needed, including a reduction of working hours. Without substantial changes of such deficits and thinking, the best intentions, concepts and even equality laws will remain on paper only. New technologies can provide useful and important tools and means for social and political change, but are not at the centre of it. And men can still be among the enabling factors – or part of the solution – rather than continuing to be part of the country’s problem.

12 Das IT-Land Schweiz braucht diese Frauen, Computerworld.ch, October 2012. www.computerworld.ch/news/it-branche/artikel/das-it-land-schweiz-braucht-diese-frauen-61546 and Zu wenig Frauen und Männer wählen einen Informatik Bildungsgang trotz besten Job Perspektiven, Medienmitteilung ICT Berufsbildung, July 2012. www.ict-berufsbildung.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumente/Geschäftsstelle/de/ICT-BBCH_Medienmitteilung_2012-07-03.pdf

13 www.giswatch.org/country-report/2008/switzerland

14 netmetrix, Aktuelle Zahlen, Internetnutzung nach Geschlecht, March 2013. www.net-metrix.ch/produkte/net-metrix-base/publikation

15 Warum Frauen im Internet nicht mitreden, Swiss radio DRS3, February 2011. drs.srf.ch/www/de/drs3/themen/panorama/242052.warum-frauen-im-internet-nicht-mitreden.html

16 Frauen sind in den Schweizer Medien untervertreten, Medienheft.ch, June 2011. www.medienheft.ch/index.php?id=14&no_cache=1&tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=668&cHash=96f77a607462e4aa502b3aa602363423

17 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_Switzerland#Women.27s_Suffrage_at_the_Cantonal_Level_-_1960s and de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frauenwahlrecht#Europ.C3.A4isches_Nord-S.C3.BCd-Gef.C3.A4lle and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

Action steps

Switzerland has ratified the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. In 1997 the country finally ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in doing so took on all related responsibilities and obligations. The Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE) published an action plan in 1999 in line with the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) which is still far from being implemented.¹⁸ A national NGO group is calling for its recommendations to be made binding and for the introduction of appropriate control instruments to enforce gender mainstreaming.¹⁹ In its third report, the FOGE made comprehensive assessments of the situation and listed various needs for further implementation.²⁰

Further action steps necessary include the improvement of transparency of salary systems to bridge the gender pay gap and to strengthen monitoring in the private sector. Moreover, effective enforcement of legal prescriptions to guarantee

gender equality in leadership positions according to employment shares is needed. Systematic and sustainable efforts have to be made in the country's education system and incentives offered to increase the share of girls and women in ICTs and related professions.²¹

As in other European countries, pension systems for a high share of women who devoted many years to child and house care need to be better balanced. In 1997 regulations for the splitting of pensions were introduced in the country. On the other hand, the retirement age for women was increased from 62 to 64 years, which is still much contested and perceived as inappropriate without related compensations.

When fundamental rights enshrined in the country's constitution and related laws are not respected and properly granted over years, public authorities need to improve monitoring mechanisms and must develop effective instruments for legal enforcement. The provision of fundamental rights is not a self-service store where anybody can avail themselves at their convenience. ■

18 Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann, Aktionsplan der Schweiz, Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), June 1999. www.humanrights.ch/upload/pdf/070326_aktionsplan.pdf

19 www.humanrights.ch/de/Themendossiers/Gleichstellung/Frauenrechte-Schweiz/index.html

20 Dritter Bericht der Schweiz über die Umsetzung des Übereinkommens zur Beseitigung jeder Form von Diskriminierung der Frau (CEDAW), April 2008. www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/topics/intla/cintla.Par.0041.File.tmp/CEDAW_Bericht_10_04_08_Internet.pdf

21 Publikationen zu International/Umsetzung in der Schweiz, Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), August 2013. www.ebg.admin.ch/dokumentation/00012/00198/index.html?lang=de