

2021 - 50 years women's vote in Switzerland

This year Switzerland is commemorating the introduction of women's right to vote that was finally granted to the women of Switzerland on February 7th 1971, much later than in the other countries of the European continent.

This achievement was a major victory over the deeply anchored swiss mentality, that women should stick to the three K « Kinder, Kirche, Küche » (Children, Church, Kitchen).

Things did neither come easily, nor swiftly: the first initiative handed over by a group of women from Zurich to the local government was made in 1868. It was argued that the swiss constitution of 1848 had granted the right to every swiss citizen to vote and to be elected. Women though were disregarded in that matter and would be for another 123 years!

As Switzerland's political system of universal suffrage offers the unusual possibility of anybody to deposit a constitutional and/or national initiative, provided that it receives enough valid signatures, and that would be then submitted to the citizens vote, the women of Switzerland made many cantonal attempts that were rejected repeatedly. One of the principal reasons was of practicability in three original rural cantons of Switzerland where cantonal votes were still taken by the physical counting of lifted arms in the center of the cantonal capital.



Photo SRF

It was very much feared that women would take too much space!



Photo Illustré

Swiss women had to wait until 1959, when women finally received the first cantonal right to vote in the Canton of Vaud. The last Canton to adopt was to be Appenzell Rhodes Interior in 1991 after a judgement of the Federal Court of Justice.

On the national level, one initiative was attempted and rejected by the people in 1959. It had been triggered by the introduction of mandatory civil service for all citizens, including women.

During the sixties women's equal rights movements became increasingly stronger, culminating in the march of 5'000 women in 1969 to the capital Bern and a quite large Women's strike.



Photo : Keystone

Swiss women finally made in in 1971 when Swiss men finally accepted women's right to vote on federal basis.



Photo Labs Le Temps

The first woman to enter the «sacred temple» and to become one of the seven governing federal councilors was Elisabeth Kopp in 1984.

But still, equality for the women in Switzerland is not factual. Statistics in Switzerland showed in 2019 an average salary gap of 19%! The gap is even larger in leader positions and the very rich city of Geneva, hosting many banks and the headquarters of many international companies.

Also, there are not many women yet in leading positions in the private sector. The schooling system for young children forces women to stay at home. Most part time jobs are for women only. Not enough men have access and want to take part time jobs. Very rarely men stay at home dealing with childcare. The proportion of women in the unpaid work is enormous, letting them in precarious situations once in retirement.

There are very many things to do! But now we are stronger and we are united in order to achieve what is long overdue.

In 2019 women gathered all over Switzerland in a historic women's strike on June 14th. In the city of Lausanne only, 40'000 people, including many men, joined the march blocking the complete city center in one joyful and noisy meeting. It was an incredible moment of solidarity!



Photo Alencontre

Let's see what happens this year!

Annette di Rosa January 21st 2021

