

List of issues and questions in relation to the sixth periodic report of Switzerland under the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Report by alliance F

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This report was prepared by alliance F - the federation of Swiss women's organisations, which represents 150 non-party organisations and several hundred thousand women in Switzerland. alliance F actively promotes equality and equal opportunities for women, better conditions in gainful employment, and better participation in politics. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), Switzerland has actually regressed in terms of gender equality since the last CEDAW reporting cycle in 2016.¹ Within one year, Switzerland declined 10 places on WEF's Global Gender Gap Report world ranking. The following report reflects the urgency of systematically addressing the deep-rooted structural gender inequality in Switzerland. In agreement with other Swiss women's organisations, alliance F will herein focus on the following five core issues: Participation in political and public life; stereotypes; economic empowerment and equal pay; parental leave; and gender mainstreaming.

1. Participation in political and public life

General

With reference to Concluding Observation (COB) 2016 par. 31 a – c, and Art. 7 of the Convention

Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of Swiss politics.² Although representation in most political institutions has steadily increased since 2016, it has generally still not risen above 35%. Particularly worrying is the continuously falling representation of women in the Council of States, which has reached an all-time low (13%) since 1991.³ This underrepresentation cannot be attributed to a lack of education or qualifications of women.⁴ The underrepresentation of women in Switzerland continues to be a structural issue, which needs to be addressed in depth and requires far-reaching action.

- ⇒ Which proactive measures has Switzerland adopted and implemented to address **structural obstacles** impeding substantive equality of women and men in political and public life?
- ⇒ What specific measures have been taken to accelerate and increase the **number of women in political and public positions**, in particular in elected decision-making bodies at all levels?
- ⇒ Which **benchmarks** and specific timetables have been set to achieve these goals?
- ⇒ How has Switzerland intensified **awareness raising campaigns** to enhance the understanding that the participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life is a requirement for the full implementation of women's human rights?

¹ World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Reports from 2016, 2017, and 2018.

² See <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/politik/wahlen/frauen.html>.

The Federal Council has recently elected two women. Now three out of the seven Federal Councillors are women (42%).

³ Ibid 3.

⁴ On the contrary, currently more women than men successfully earn university degrees.

<https://www.bmbf.de/files/eag2018%20finale%20fassung%20mit%20links1.pdf>

Psychological Violence

With reference to COB 2016 par. 37 (e)

A serious issue preventing women from actively participating in politics and public life is sexual harassment, bullying, and hate speech, to which they are disproportionately subjected. According to a study by the Council of Europe, 85 % of women parliamentarians, who took part in the survey, suffered psychological violence, whether through sexual harassment, assault, physical threats, or sexist images.⁵ Almost 47% of the respondents were threatened with death, rape, or beatings.

- ⇒ Has Switzerland **investigated the issue of sexual harassment** and psychological violence amongst women in politics and public life?
- ⇒ Which **preventative measures** is Switzerland taking against psychological and physical violence in politics and public life?
- ⇒ How is Switzerland **protecting women** holding a public office from psychological violence and physical threats?

Temporary Special Measures

With reference to COB 2016 par. 21, Art. 4(1) of the Convention, and the Committee's general recommendation par. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures

Switzerland traditionally uses quotas for segments of its population, the so-called principle of concordance. Such concordance, however, is still widely rejected by Switzerland concerning gender. By a close vote in June 2019, the national parliament decided in favour of gender parity on boards of directors (parity of 30%) and on executive boards of large public limited companies (parity of 20%). These measures, however, are lenient, as companies – with transition periods between 5 and 10 years – will not be penalised for failing to achieve them.

- ⇒ Please indicate **which temporary special measures**, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation par. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, have been adopted to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men.
- ⇒ How will Switzerland continue its efforts to ensure an equal representation of men and women on **boards of directors and public limited companies**?
- ⇒ What is Switzerland's position on **extending the concordance** of language and region to the concordance of gender in political bodies?
- ⇒ Are any **other special measures** envisaged to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men in all areas covered by the Convention?
- ⇒ What kind of **awareness raising** has Switzerland undertaken concerning the concept of temporary special measures to accelerate the full and equal participation of women in all areas in which they are disadvantaged or underrepresented?

2. Stereotypes

General

With reference to COB 2016 par. 23 a, COB 2009 par. 26, as well as, Art. 2 (f) and Art. 5 (a) of the Convention

Gender stereotypes are one of the root causes for discrimination, abuse, and violence and can lead to violations of a wide array of rights. Entrenched patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes about the roles of

⁵ See <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/Page-EN.asp?LID=NotInMyParliament>

women and men in society are continuously impeding gender equality in Switzerland. Gender stereotyping leads to significantly less women in managing roles, more women taking up unpaid caring duties, less women in traditionally male occupations, and, equally, less men in traditionally female occupations, which moreover contributes to the gender pay gap.

- ⇒ What progress has Switzerland made with **eliminating discriminatory stereotypes** regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, workplace, and society?
- ⇒ Has Switzerland **investigated the effects** of gender stereotyping on its population, and especially on women in society, in the workplace, and in leadership?
- ⇒ What action plan does Switzerland have to **uproot gender stereotypes** in the foreseeable future?
- ⇒ How does Switzerland ensure that employees are hired, challenged, and promoted according to talent and competence, and not according to **role stereotypes**?
- ⇒ How are **HR managers sensitised to prejudices** about the difference in the characteristics attributed to women and men and the demands for leadership?

Women and Traditional Media

With reference to COB 2016 par. 23 b – c, COB 2009 par. 26, as well as, Art. 2 (f) and Art. 5 (a) of the Convention

The image and role of women in the media are heavily influenced by existing social and cultural norms. Equality between women and men in Swiss media continues to fall short in terms of structure, as well as, content. In 2019, the national TV and radio company SRF reported that the percentage of men in their programmes lies between 60%-94%.⁶ The media have a wide-ranging impact and opportunity to create a different, alternative image to the classic role models, or to play a decisive role in cementing gender stereotypes.

- ⇒ What kind of **educational strategy** is Switzerland implementing for media professionals to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes and to make sure the media promote diversity and do not perpetuate gender stereotypes?
- ⇒ Which measures is Switzerland implementing to ensure **advertisements** do not conform to gender stereotypes?
- ⇒ What measures is Switzerland implementing to **prohibit sexist advertisement** promoting discrimination and violence against women?
- ⇒ Which measures is Switzerland introducing to **promote the equal representation** of women and men in the media?
- ⇒ Which measures is Switzerland taking to ensure **gender equality amongst media professionals** at all hierarchical levels?
- ⇒ Which measures is Switzerland taking to encourage the media to ensure that **female and male candidates/representatives** receive equal visibility in the media, especially during an election period?⁷
- ⇒ Is Switzerland introducing incentives for the media to promote positive images of **ethnic minority and migrant women**?

Women and New Media: Hate Speech

With reference to COB 2016 par. 23 a, COB 2009 par. 26, as well as, Art. 2 (f) and Art. 5 (a) of the Convention

⁶ Tristan Brenn, Editor in Chief SRF (CR TV Newsletter 05/19)

⁷ A recent alliance F study found that SRF invited a largely disproportionate amount of men (78%) to their popular debate programme „Arena“.

In traditional media, women are immensely less visible than men. Social media has improved this imbalance, however, simultaneously has lowered inhibitions of voicing hostile and violent opinions. This vastly disproportionately affects women: 80% of hate speech commentaries on the internet are directed towards women.⁸

- ⇒ Does Switzerland have an action plan to **tackle gender-based hate speech** in social media and more generally on the internet?
- ⇒ Which gender specific measures does Switzerland have in place to **protect victims** of hate speech?
- ⇒ Which measures does Switzerland have in place to **prevent gender specific hate speech**?

3. Economic Empowerment and Equal Pay

With reference to COB 2016 par. 37, Art. 5 and Art. 11 of Convention:

According to the Federal Equality Office, women earn approximately one fifth less than men.⁹ Although the National Parliament recently decided in favour of regular pay equity checks, this will merely affect 1% of the companies based in Switzerland. In addition this obligation expires in twelve years. The majority of employed women in Switzerland work part-time and/or in low-wage sectors.¹⁰ The prevailing work culture is geared towards men: There is no paid parental leave divided equally between the parents, childcare facilities are insufficient and inadequate, and there are tax disincentives for second-income earners.¹¹ These realities effectively result in the fact that women alone bear the career risk of starting a family. They moreover effect women's substantial underrepresentation in management positions. Over the past 22 years, the percentage of women represented in executive positions has increased by a mere 6.6%.¹²

Labour Market and work place

- ⇒ How does Switzerland ensure **equal opportunities** for women and men in the **labour market**?
- ⇒ Which measures have been adopted to achieve greater **integration of women in the workplace**?
- ⇒ What measures have been adopted to combat **pay discrimination** and the gender wage gap, which has effectively increased?¹³
- ⇒ How does Switzerland facilitate access of **migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women**, as well as, women with **disabilities**, to the formal labour market?

Management Positions

- ⇒ How is Switzerland countering **the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions** in companies?¹⁴
- ⇒ What is Switzerland's strategy to ensure that **women succeed in middle and top management positions**?¹⁵

⁸ See <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/sonntagszeitung/Frauenhass-aus-der-Tastatur/story/13863292>

⁹ See https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/gender-equality_firms-required-to-publish-gender-pay-gap-in-2021/45175268

¹⁰ 6 out of 10 employed women work part-time, in comparison to 1.8 out of 10 men.

(<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann/erwerbstaetigkeit/teilzeitarbeit.html>; <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann/erwerbstaetigkeit.html>)

¹¹ See <https://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/switzerland-2017-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>

¹² See <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/kataloge-datenbanken/tabellen.assetdetail.7606979.html>

¹³ 44% of the pay gap in Switzerland remains unexplained and includes potential gender-related pay discrimination. (<https://www.ebg.admin.ch/ebg/en/home/topics/work/equal-pay.html>)

¹⁴ In 2018, only 7% executive boards members of the 118th largest companies based in Switzerland were women. (<https://www.schillingpartners.ch/de/medienmitteilung/schillingreport-2018/>)

¹⁵ See <https://www.schillingreport.ch/content/uploads/sites/2/2018/11/schillingreport-2018.pdf>

⇒ What is Switzerland's strategy to encourage **part-time opportunities in high-level positions**?

Political and Public Life

- ⇒ What efforts is Switzerland taking to **adapt political and public life to family life**?
- ⇒ What measures is Switzerland taking to **create and improve childcare structures** for the children of administrative staff, members of government, and members of parliament?
- ⇒ What specific measures is Switzerland taking to improve the **breastfeeding facilities** in administrative, governmental, and parliamentary buildings?¹⁶
- ⇒ What steps are planned to **standardise maternity pay and maternity representation** regulations for women parliamentarians at all levels?

Family Life

- ⇒ Which steps have been taken to **reconcile family life with work**,¹⁷ especially with regard to affordable childcare?
- ⇒ What is Switzerland's strategy for lifting the **tax disincentives** for second-income earners?
- ⇒ Which economic improvements for women would result from a **tax reform with individual taxation**? What research has been conducted on this issue?
- ⇒ How does Switzerland intend to address the issue concerning the **low pension levels** of women, in particular, of women involved in unpaid care work?

4. Parental Leave

With reference to COB 2016 par. 37, and Art. 11(1)(b) and 11(2) of the Convention:

Fathers are not entitled to paternity leave under Swiss federal law. They can merely claim leave at the birth of their child based on their regular annual leave (Art. 329(3) OR). There is also no parental leave, which could be divided between parents. Swiss federal law therewith delegates the role of caregiver automatically to mothers and the role of wage-earner to fathers. Switzerland is very far behind the large majority of OECD countries in this regard.¹⁸ There is a necessity to legally establish a paid parental framework to ensure a balance in societal roles and career risks in starting a family. Parental leave has a proven positive economical and societal impact, as well as a device effect on individuals and families.¹⁹

- ⇒ Does Switzerland intend to **catch up with the other OECD countries** in terms of parental leave and leave behind its disconcerting role as one of the least progressive countries in this area?
- ⇒ Has Switzerland taken into account the possibility of **counteracting the shortage of skilled labour** in Switzerland by introducing parental leave?
- ⇒ Will Switzerland consider that parental leave has a **positive effect** on productivity, turnover, and morale, as well as, tends to lead to cost savings in companies?²⁰

¹⁶ Currently there is one small room in the parliamentary building (allocated in April 2019).

¹⁷ According to the OECD Economic Survey: Switzerland 2017, "greater integration of [...] women in the labour market would increase well-being, raise productivity and mitigate the effects of population ageing" (<https://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/switzerland-2017-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>).

¹⁸ The average parental leave in OECD countries lies at 54.4 weeks. In contrast, Switzerland has just declined to legally ensure four weeks of paternity leave. (<https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/53293.pdf>)

¹⁹ See <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/53293.pdf>

²⁰ See <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/53293.pdf>

5. Gender Mainstreaming

With reference to COB 2016 par. 19 a – b

Amongst others, this report has underlined the endemic structural nature of gender inequality in Switzerland. To challenge such a deep-rooted patriarchal system, which is tangible in all areas of society, a clear and much needed gender mainstreaming strategy, with a corresponding budget, is indispensable.

- ⇒ Has Switzerland **reconsidered its decision** regarding the adoption of an integrated gender strategy?
- ⇒ Does Switzerland have a **national action plan** for gender equality?
- ⇒ Can Switzerland **reconcile not having a gender mainstreaming strategy** with its international role as a prominent advocate for the protection and promotion of women's rights?²¹
- ⇒ Will Switzerland adopt a much-needed national **gender budget**?
- ⇒ Following the national women's strike in June 2019, will Switzerland respond to the demands of its population by ensuring and enhancing the competencies, visibility, and resources of the **Federal Office for Gender Equality (EBG)** and the **Federal Commission for Women's Issues (EKF)**?
- ⇒ Which **monitoring and accountability mechanisms** will Switzerland implement to ensure gender equality?
- ⇒ How will Switzerland ensure the inclusion of gender as a central point in the **new national human rights mechanism**?
- ⇒ How does Switzerland intend on ensuring its A Status with the **Paris Principles** with its alternative advisory committee instead of a strong **national human rights mechanism**? What place will gender have in this new mechanism?

²¹ Switzerland is one of the largest donors of UN Women and has always been a strong supporter of the independent goal of gender equality, women's rights and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5) when preparing the United Nations Agenda 2030.