

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 20 (1993)  
**Heft:** 3

**Artikel:** Professional life essential for women's independence : still not enough self-reliance  
**Autor:** Willumat, Heidi  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907418>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 31.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**



cally. The 10,000 women massed before the federal parliament on March 10 were there to remind Swiss parliamentarians of an important fact: that there is no longer any valid reason for excluding more than half of the population from exercising power at the top level. The election of Ruth Dreifuss to the Federal Council after much hesitation marks an important turning-point. Francis Matthey had to pay the bill: quite apart from his undoubted qualities a man was forced to refuse election to one of the highest posts in the state – which he felt he richly deserved – in favour of a woman colleague.

years – was refused permission by his party to serve for another four years, and a woman, Micheline Calmy-Rey, at present president of the cantonal assembly, may well be elected in his place.

The number of elected positions available remains the same, and in almost all cases where a woman is up for election the position is at present held by a man. If the flame lit by Christiane Brunner in March of this year continues to spread, the fiercest male opponents of a quota system may find themselves revising their views – with the aim of making sure that men too are fairly represented in politics! ■

Professional life essential for women's

## Still not en

**D**o you earn enough money to cover your needs? Is your work satisfying? Do you have a voice in what you do and how much? Do you have problems placing your children in play-school or kindergarten or with the lunch-hour? Do you get enough free-time, holidays and maternity leave? Might you be sexually harassed at your workplace? Are you taken seriously at work even if you are over 50? Will your pension be enough for comfort? Does your employer offer you appropriate further training? Are you generally regarded as equal to men?

These, or some of them, are questions which women confront in their professional lives: problems which have to be addressed if they are to be satisfied in their work.

### A start – but maybe a false one

When a woman plans her life nowadays, a job is usually included. Indeed it is a condition for her future independence. But much less automatic is the opportunity for qualified training leading to a job with chances of promotion. It is certainly true that more girls now take part in the first stage of non-compulsory education, higher secondary school, but that in itself does not mean that they have better opportunities of climbing the professional ladder. This depends on too many other factors, for example



**Career-oriented women between two fronts: either to be as professional as their husbands or, if they succeed, not to be real women. (Photos: Keystone)**

The detonator of the present movement to elect women was the fact that in their original vote members of the Federal Assembly saw no objection whatever to continuing the system by which the Federal Council consisted of men only. In Aargau, Soleure and Neuchâtel, voters of both sexes now seem to have woken up to the fact that things have changed. Male candidates – and this includes those who had been quite prepared to work in favour of women's rights – have found themselves on the touch-line. In Geneva, socialist executive member Christian Grobet – who has been in the government for the last 12

### Interview

## Slow progress to equality

Swiss Review talks to Claudia Kaufmann, head of the Federal Bureau for Equality between Men and Women.

**Swiss Review: Ms. Kaufmann, let's start with an explosive matter: equality of pay. What is the situation in Switzerland?**

Claudia Kaufmann: We still have an average pay difference of about 30%. We do not (yet) have any active policy aimed at wage equality. Just think of it –

since equality of the sexes was inscribed in the Constitution in 1981 there have been only 15 court cases about pay. Neither employers nor trades unions seem to realise they have new responsibilities in working out wage contracts. The law on equality between the sexes is mired in parliamentary procedure – although in most European countries all this belongs to the past. Let's hope it will go through without too much trouble.

**SR: And equality of opportunity?**

CK: There will be no wage equality without equality of opportunity. In international terms the most progressive countries are those which have taken broad steps towards equality of opportunity with comprehensive measures in tax policy, social services and child



independence

# ough self-reliance

university entrance and then the job market itself. It is proven that more girls underestimate the value of a good education and its importance in obtaining a profession with good prospects than boys. In many cases this lack of

*Heidi Willumat*

judgement means that as women they one day find themselves in dead-end jobs.

What lies behind this self-deprivation? It is well-known that sexual roles are determined by family, school and society, and this affects women well into adulthood. Much more than men, they are confronted with contradictory value systems; only very slowly, beginning at the legal level with the new marriage law, is housework and childrearing coming to be regarded as equal to professional life. But economists have not yet developed a way in which these services rendered to the family may be recognised as actual components of professional life. The very basis for professional ambition is lacking, and when women want to return to a job after their children are grown there are few opportunities for suitable further training.

## Other barriers

In spite of the growing professional consciousness of women and more positive

care. Switzerland still has a lot to do in these areas.

## SR: What do you think about quotas?

CK: I am in favour, both in professional life and politics. But they must be worked out according to individual cases and firms, and a set of other measures would be needed covering women's dignity as such, return to professional life, part-time work even in top posts, revaluation of family work. The statement that it is not enough to be only a woman is not true! But in a quota system women too must show qualifications and prove ability. However, women have just as much right to be mediocre as men. Only when this is fully realised will true equality have arrived.

*Interview: Heidi Willumat*

attitudes at work there are still many other barriers, both self-induced and imposed from outside, which prevent uninterrupted professional motivation. Work interest, self-realisation and inner satisfaction – these are conditions of success in professional life. A study carried out at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne shows that such inner satisfaction depends largely on character and job commitment. But unfortunately female psychology often leads to unnecessary tensions. Jobs chosen by women often pander to precisely the weaknesses, or faultlines, in the female temperament: subordination, acceptance of their fate, passivity and a feeling of dependence are not set aside and offset but extended, strengthened and used. The reverse side of the coin is that their special competences, their productive, life-giving and human qualities, quite apart from their intellectual strengths, are adapted, redirected, suppressed, sometimes even broken, in the supposed interest of the concern as a whole.

Women's attitudes in professional life have much to do with their relationship to performance, success and power. While men are concerned mainly with self-realisation and aggressive implementation of their own designs, women think in more interwoven terms and feel they must respect the mutual dependence of their fellow staff. «This means that many women too often see their male superiors and colleagues as warning examples», says Anita Calonder in a study on women in professional life for the Federal Office for Industry and Labour on which this article is largely based. «They often find it more difficult than men to look at lack of success as an incentive to new efforts. They often see mistakes as proof of incapacity, which impairs their self-confidence».

## Requirements

So it is not sufficient, concludes Anita Calonder, that women should be competitive with men in terms of basic or further training. There are many other factors which limit the professional progress of women: social standards, traditional roles, lack of the requisite structu-

res, unfavourable professional and educational systems, etc. Education itself makes a leading contribution to purveying the «woman's role». The value which the mother puts on her position in the family and in professional life will influence the daughter in later years in her attitude to work outside the family. It is also true that co-education – which is once again being frequently questioned – can also contribute to developing «helplessness in learning» and «role-oriented conflict avoidance strategies».

There still remains much to be done to break out of this vicious circle and to lighten today's gloomy view of women in professional life.

**Housework and childrearing are still not recognised as a job.**

