Rita Famos (ed.)

Leadership

Female Perspectives

TVZ

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Schweiz

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Foreword

Today, the question of women's leadership should no longer spark fundamental debates. In politics, business and society, we are facing profound changes that call for orientation, responsibility and courage. Here leadership determines not only the success of institutions, but also trust, cohesion and future viability.

Leadership positions are still predominantly male-dominated. In saying so, I do not wish to imply that men are less capable of leading, but rather that important perspectives are all too often lacking. Women's experiences, life realities and leadership approaches are not a special topic but an indispensable part of good leadership. Diversity in leadership is a prerequisite for smart decisions in a complex world.

As a Federal Councilor, I experience every day how much leadership depends on attitude, the ability to engage in dialogue, and a sense of responsibility. For me, leadership means listening, weighing options, making clear decisions and bearing their consequences. It means understanding power not as a privilege, but as a mandate. Many women bring exactly this attitude to the table.

This volume is remarkable in this regard. This is due partly to the multitude of essays by female leaders in the religious sphere. This is an interesting field, since where intrinsic motivation is particularly high, good leadership must take this into account—particularly when dealing with organizations in which voluntary work plays a major role.

However, religious organizations in particular are strongholds of tradition. How do women succeed in leading in this environment? What obstacles do they encounter, and which external and self-imposed attributions can become stumbling blocks? How do they gain acceptance and respect?

It is the diversity of female perspectives that makes this volume so enriching. Through them, it sharpens the focus on one's own leadership. For that is ultimately what leadership is about: reflecting on one's own role, on the expectations of others and of oneself, and on how this role is characterized. And when people also perform their duties with joy, leadership succeeds

January 2026, Karin Keller-Sutter, Federal Councilor

RITA FAMOS

Leadership.
Female Perspectives



Rita Famos

Leadership. Female Perspectives

> Les femmes n'attendent pas que les Églises leur ouvrent des portes pour s'organiser, œuvrer dans la société et revendiquer l'égalité.
>
> Women are not waiting for churches to open doors for them to organize, work in society and demand equality.[1]

On November 2, 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was elected at an online Synod meeting to the Presidium of the Protestant Church in Switzerland (PCS).[2] The media response was significant. I took over the Presidium during an institutional crisis—as the first woman in Switzerland to lead a church or religious community at the national level. I felt the same way that Emmanuelle Seyboldt, former President of the National Council of the United Protestant Church of

1 Lauriane Savoy, Pionnières. Comment les femmes sont devenues pasteures. Genève, Labor et Fides 2023, 83 (Translation by RF).

2 Since the entry into force of the 2020 Constitution, the PCS has been the successor organization to the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, founded in 1920.

France,[3] describes in her essay: I rubbed my eyes and asked myself if it was only the fact that I was a woman that was drawing this attention to me. Where were my qualities, my character traits, my leadership experience and my theological orientation with which I had presented myself during the election campaign and which had been decisive for my election? After all, the other candidate was also a woman.

With great vigor and enthusiasm, I took office on January 1, 2021. During the first two years, the main focus was on holding discussions and conversations in the crisis-ridden and divided committees and at the administrative office with its 30 staff members, building trust and creating transparent supporting structures. During my first two years in office, the investigation of abuse involving my predecessor, which had been ordered by the Synod and was being conducted by a law firm, was underway. The results had to be received and presented to the public. That was a heavy burden. At the same time, however, it was an opportunity because my church demonstrated strikingly that it was looking into the matter and did not sweep abuse under the rug, even when it involved the church leadership and was painful. In connection with the investigation's findings, the Synod's investigative commission issued ten recommendations that needed to be implemented. The crisis made it possible for the Protestant Church in Switzerland to come together on this issue, adopt standards for all member churches to protect the integrity of the person, and better protect those affected today through further measures. I hope that this work can be completed by the end of 2027. It is striking that in many churches of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), women are leading these efforts to deal with cases of abuse, establish standards and acknowledge suffering that has occurred.

Alongside addressing cases of abuse, it was necessary to bring to life the Constitution that had been in effect for a year. In 2020,

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3 President of the National Council of the United Protestant Church of France. See the essay by Emmanuelle Seyboldt in this volume, p. 227.

the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC) adopted a new Constitution and a new name, becoming the Protestant Church in Switzerland (PCS). The Constitution was intended to bring the member churches closer together; this is how the Council interpreted the constitutional process and the text. The Federation had finally become a Church—at least on paper. What that meant, the Constitution left open. It was also unclear what the Constitution meant by the newly introduced "areas of action". The Council proposed an interpretation to the Synod, which was accepted, and the first "areas of action" were established. Clarifying these matters, which the Constitution had left unanswered, and introducing the new leadership tools were challenging leadership tasks.

Many of my colleagues who speak in this book assumed church leadership at a time when their church was facing major challenges. Their and our leadership skills can prove to be successful in these difficult situations, but they can unfortunately also fail, because the challenges facing the churches in the broader societal transformation process are enormous.

In accordance with my constitutional mandate, I represent the PCS at the federal level in national political bodies, in national and international ecumenism, and in interreligious dialogue. Additionally, in 2024 I was elected Executive President of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), and in 2025 Chair of the Swiss Council of Religions.

While in the Swiss Reformed context my being a woman was met with great acceptance and was taken for granted, in interreligious and ecumenical contexts I was often the only woman at meetings. Also within the international Reformed context, I quickly realized that having a woman in a leadership position was not a matter of course and even caused confusion.

During my five years in the Presidium, I met or worked with many women in leadership positions both within and outside the church. Many were pioneering women, while others were able to continue the

work of their female predecessors. The encounters and exchanges with them were always inspiring, stimulating and supportive. We shared many similar experiences, even though we worked in very different contexts. And we always found our exchanges with one another to be a great source of encouragement; with great curiosity we wanted to learn from each other's experiences and insights. Our contexts were and are very different, as are our personalities and our personal and professional histories. And yet there were and are commonalities in our experiences as (the first) women in leadership positions.

During my travels in Europe and internationally, I met many women who live in contexts where the male church leadership denies them ordination as pastors or priests. I met women who serve in churches that, while recognizing the ordination of women, still deny them access to pastoral ministries or church leadership positions.

Thus, the idea of publishing this book matured within me. It is intended to give voice to my many fellow women travelers in a single book, for mutual encouragement and empowerment. But it is also a thank you to all the women with whom I was able to share my experiences, questions and uncertainties during my first years in office.

May the women and men who work for equality in their churches and social contexts serve as the voices of women—all of whom speak of a long journey—as well as an encouragement to persist. The essay by Simone Curau-Aepli, who has been fighting for years as a feminist in the Roman Catholic Church for the equality of women in all ministries, encourages us to persist with her courageous "strength to defy" (pp. 54–67). For, as Judith Pörksen Roder (pp. 170–181) and Najla Kassab (pp. 120 -131) write in their essays, gender equality in spiritual offices and church governing bodies is not a "nicetohave": the very credibility of the church is measured by it.

Swiss women pioneers and their churches

As the first female president of the Protestant Church in Switzerland (PCS), I stand on the shoulders of courageous and pioneering women. One hundred years ago, on October 27, 1918, Rosa Gutknecht and Elise Pfister were ordained as VDM (*Verbi Divini Ministra*) by Church Council member Pastor Johannes Sutz in St. Peter's Church in Zurich.[4] In Romandy, the first female pastor, Marcelle Bard, was not ordained until 1929 in Carouge, in the canton of Geneva.[5] However, the milestone laid by Pfister and Gutknecht in 1918 was still a long way from signifying equality. As is well known, Gutknecht and Pfister were hardly treated as equals: when they took up their parish positions after a period of fruitless job hunting, they did so as mere "parish assistants".[6] This was not an expression of the will of their parishes, but a consequence of Zurich's policies at the time: although the Synodal Council of the Church of Zurich decided in 1921 to admit women to pastoral ministry, each such decision had to be approved by the cantonal Government Council. The Government Council refused its approval on the grounds that women, as "non-active citizens",[7] were ineligible for election to public office. At the time, women had neither voting nor electoral rights. The Neumünster parish therefore had to take Elise Pfister's case all the way to the Federal Supreme Court to

4 See Peter Aerne, Elise Pfister (1886–1944). Der Weg der ersten Schweizer Pfarrerin in der Evangelischen Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich, in: Gesellschaft zürcherischer Geschichtsfreunde (Hg.), Zürcher Taschenbuch (123) 2003, 301.

5 See Savoy, Pionnières, 175. Regarding women's rights and gender equality, the Free Churches in both the cantons of Geneva and Vaud are more progressive than the Reformed churches. Ibid., 43–54.

6 Aerne, Elise Pfister (1886–1944), 302, 317. Marcelle Bard was assigned a similar role as "pasteur adjoint" (in masculine form). See Savoy, Pionnières, 179. On the development of the "ministère pastoral auxiliaire" in the canton of Geneva see Savoy, op. cit., 151–161.

7 Sarah Sommer, «Rehe vor die Pflüge spannen?» Der lange Weg der Frauen ins Pfarramt. Broschüre der Reformierten Kirche Kanton Zürich, Zürich 2018, 12.

enable her to assume a full-fledged pastoral position.[8] In December 1921, the Federal Supreme Court dismissed the appeal.

This shows that churches were more willing than politicians to grant rights to women.[9] This openness was already evident in 1904 when the Conference of Protestant Churches in Switzerland[10] recommended the introduction of women's suffrage. In 1908, it was introduced for the first time in the Reformed Church of the Canton of Vaud.[11] In Romandy, however, the Free Churches were the pioneers of gender equality in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[12] Already in 1891, the Protestant Free Church of Geneva introduced women's suffrage.[13] The Protestant Free Church of the Canton of Vaud introduced the office of female pastor in 1930, after Lydia von Auw had already served as pastor for five years.[14] The next "firsts" after Rosa Gutknecht, Elise Pfister and Marcelle Bard were ordained in Switzerland in the 1930s.[15] Yet even in these pioneering churches, it was a long time before women could be more than just trailblazers. It was not until 1956 that a full-fledged pastoral office for women was introduced in the Reformed regional churches.[16] Neither Elise Pfister, who died in 1944, nor Rosa

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8 The exact procedure is described in detail in Aerne, Elise Pfister (1886–1944), 303–318.

9 See Marius Schären, Warum manche Kirchen beim Stimmrecht progressiv waren, 2021. Available online: https://reformiert.info/de/recherche/es-war-nicht-immer-nur-fortschrittlich-warum-manche-kirchen-das-frauenstimmrecht-fruehereinfuehrten-19505.html (06.01.2026).

10 The Conference of Protestant Churches in Switzerland was the predecessor of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC), which was founded in 1920.

11 See Karin Müller, Frauenstimmrecht. Als die Kirche der Politik voraus war (2021). Available online: www.kirchenbote-online.ch/artikel/frauenstimmrecht-als-diekirche-der-politik-voraus-war (06.01.2026).

12 See Savoy, Pionnières, 34–35, 45, 51–52, 219–231.

13 Ibid., 45.

14 Ibid., 51–52.

15 See Doris Brodbeck, Liste der ersten Frauenordinationen in den Evangelisch-reformierten Kirchen der Schweiz. Available online: www.theologinnen.ch/ordinationen.htm (06.01.2026).

16 Ibid.

Gutknecht, who died in 1959, lived to see this transformation within their own church. The pioneering Church of Zurich did not ordain the next women until 1963 (!),[17] the same year in which women were granted the right to vote in church elections—45 years after the Church of Vaud had done so.[18]

Thus, Reformed churches in Switzerland can definitely be considered pioneers in comparison with the political sphere, although not to the same extent in all cantons. Access to ordination can rightly be described as an important milestone. Nevertheless, much still had to happen before women could hold individual pastoral offices as pastors with equal rights.[19]

Judith Pörksen Roder, the first President of the Reformed Churches of Bern-Jura-Solothurn and Esther Straub, the first President of the Reformed Regional Church of Zurich (pp. 260–271), speak in their essays in a way that exemplifies the women of the member churches of the PCS. The Swiss churches recognized the importance of women's networks early on and established the Women's Conference (now the Women's and Gender Conference) 40 years ago. Sabine Scheuter (pp. 196–207), the Diversity Officer of the Reformed Church of Zurich, writes about its significance in promoting the representation of women in church leadership positions.

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17 Called the "Twelve Apostles" because of their number. See Sommer, «Rehe vor die Pflüge spannen?», 23.

18 See Schären, Warum manche Kirchen beim Stimmrecht progressiv waren.

19 Upon marriage, the first female pastors in France and parts of Romandy were required to resign from their positions, following the example set by female teachers. See Savoy, Pionnières, 154–155. This issue was also debated in the Church of Zurich in the early 1920s; however, the Synod resolution of March 1921 would have allowed unmarried women access to pastoral ministry. See Aerne, Elise Pfister (1886–1944), 308–311.

The pastoral ministry as a litmus test for women's rights in the church context

The issue of gender equality in the church context is particularly evident in the pastoral office. In the ecumenical landscape, the Protestant churches, together with the Anglican Church, stand largely alone. However, the history of women's equality in the Swiss regional Reformed churches does not exist in a vacuum. Politics, particularly the long road to women's voting and electoral rights in Switzerland, played a major role in the church context of the early 20th century and helped determine the church's scope for action and its limits. But it was not only institutional politics that formed the backdrop to church debates and discourses.[20] It should be noted that many men also advocated for greater equality. Some of the authors in this volume highlight this. It is not uncommon for women in leadership positions to owe their success not only to pioneering and encouraging women, but also to men who stand shoulder to shoulder with many women in advocating for a church that also demonstrates its credibility through gender equality in all ministries and offices.

Another milestone that was essential for admission to the pastoral office was the admission of women to university studies.[21] At the beginning of the 20th century, the churches were confronted with educated female theologians for whom there were no corresponding professional roles. In Geneva and Lausanne, the so-called *ministères féminins* were therefore established: a shorter course of study than the regular five-year theology program that qualified graduates to perform many pastoral activities.[22] However, the celebration of church services, particularly preaching and the administration of the sacraments, were

20 For the churches in Vaud and Geneva see Savoy, Pionnières, 17–43.

21 See ibid., 54–58.

22 See ibid., 59.

excluded.[23] These *ministères féminins* thus effectively corresponded to an institutionalized training program for parish assistants, whose task was to support pastors.[24] The issue was therefore never about denying women "offices" in general, but rather "the office" itself.

This reveals a gender-specific difference in perception between the pastoral office and diakonia. Opponents of women's ordination argued at the time of the first women pastors that diakonia was more suited to women due to their nature, which was intended for service and devotion.[25] This view is not merely a relic from the past. Angela Berlis, a priest of the Old Catholic Church and Professor of the History of Old Catholicism and General Church History at the University of Bern, testifies in her essay to how much easier it was to ordain the first deaconess in her church than it was to ordain the first female priest later on (pp. 38–52). Simone Curau-Aepli, who dedicated her life to advocating women's rights in the Roman Catholic Church, also reports on this. Moreover, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) concluded in its 2024 survey on gender justice among its member churches:

> Women are often permitted to serve in roles that emphasise care, support, or unofficial preaching, but not in positions that *embody* sacramental or governing authority. This reflects a gendered hierarchy of legitimacy: service roles are open, governance and ordination remain restricted.[26]

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23 See ibid., 60.

24 In the canton of Geneva, this training was offered for 50 years; in Lausanne, only for a few years. See ibid., 59.

25 See ibid., 101–103. Elise Pfister was originally offered a position the parish's social work, which she declined. See Aerne, Elise Pfister (1886–1944), 306.

26 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Gender Audit 2024 Report. Reimagining Church Leadership, Gender Justice and the Imago Dei 2024. Available online: https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Gender-Audit-2024-Report-2.pdf (06.01.2026), 31. Cf. ibid., 34–35.

The survey, known as the "Gender Audit", also shows that 40% of Reformed churches that do not ordain women nevertheless allow them to preach. The report concludes from this that the ban on women's ordination is not due to a lack of homiletic skills, but to the denial of "formal sacramental and leadership authority".[27] According to the WCRC, structural and cultural barriers to the recognition of female authority in leadership positions also persist in Reformed churches that do ordain women.[28] Emmanuelle Seyboldt, former President of the United Protestant Church of France, provides striking examples of this in her essay.[29]

The WCRC's gender audit also contains encouraging findings: at the time of the survey, 82.84% of WCRC member churches allowed women to be ordained.[30] However, whether this also means equal access to exercising the pastoral ministry was not surveyed—and given the history of the Swiss churches, doubts in this regard are warranted.

In the WCRC member churches that do ordain women, women account for an average of 33% of the pastors.[31] In Switzerland, according to the Swiss Institute for Pastoral Sociology, the percentage of women pastors in the Reformed churches in 2024 was 43%, while the percentage of women engaged in specialized pastoral roles stood at 50%.[32] However, there are significant differences between the cantons,[33] and the trend is not linear. For example, the Church of Geneva lost 9% of its

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27 See ibid., 31.

28 See ibid., 20–26, 3.

29 See Emmanuelle Seyboldt's essay on pages 222–234 in this volume.

30 See WCRC, Gender Audit, 20.

31 Ibid.

32 See Schweizer Pastoralsoziologische Institut SPI, Die Personalsituation in den evangelisch-reformierten Kirchen. Available online: https://kirchenstatistik.spisg.ch/die-situation-in-den-evangelisch-reformierten-kirchen/#close (06.01.2026).

33 In 2019, women accounted for 30% of the clergy in Geneva; in the same year, the proportion in the Reformed Churches of Bern-Jura-Solothurn was 42%. See Savoy, Pionnières, 331–332.

female clergy between 2010 and 2019.[34] Based on this figure, historian Lauriane Savoy hypothesizes that the dynamics of job cuts in poorer and smaller churches do not favor the proportion of women.[35] In an international comparison, Switzerland ranks in the middle: in the EKD, the proportion of women in 2018 was 39%,[36] and in France, 35%.[37] In July 2020, the Church of Sweden became the first Protestant church with a higher proportion of women than men—with 0.1% more women than men.[38] In her essay, Antje Jackelén writes from her experience as the first Archbishop of the Church of Sweden (2014–2022) that Sweden, although seemingly utopian, is nonetheless shaped by prejudices. She recounts her experience with the public, her handling of projections, and her relationship to her role (pp. 90–109).

As has already become apparent from the mention of several essays, the pastoral office is not the only leadership position within the church. Even though systematic data on this is difficult to access, existing surveys show that women remain underrepresented in church leadership bodies. The Protestant Church in Germany, which published its second *Atlas on Gender Equality* in 2025, reports the following figures on the proportion of women: 46% in district synods, 44% in regional synods, and 52% in the EKD Synod.[39] The WCRC's gender

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34 See ibid., 332.

35 Ibid.

36 See EKD (Hg.), 2. Atlas zur Gleichstellung in der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. Eine aktualisierte Bestandaufnahme (März 2025). Available online: https://gleichstellungsatlas.gender-ekd.de (06.01.2026), 50–51.

37 See Regards Protestants, Peut-on être femme et pasteure? (6. Juli 2020). Available online: https://regardsprotestants.com/religion-spiritualite/peut-on-etre-femmeet-pasteure (06.01.2026).

38 In 2020, the proportion of women in the Church of Sweden was 50.1%. See Savoy, Pionnières, 335.

39 See EKD (Hg.), 2. Atlas zur Gleichstellung. Available online: https://gleichstellungsatlas.gender-ekd.de (06.01.2026), 23. What is striking in the EKD is the gap between senior and mid-level leadership positions. See ibid.: "The proportion of women in senior church leadership positions (such as regional bishop) was 58% at the end of 2023, representing an increase of 22 percentage points within ten ye-

audit mentioned earlier reports a global proportion of women of 38% among delegates in synods or general assemblies.[40] In the Synod of the Protestant Church in Switzerland, the proportion of women in 2026 is 55.13% (35 women out of 78 Synod members). Ten of the twenty-five member churches of the PCS are led by women in 2026, accounting for just under 40% of leadership positions. These figures exceed those of Swiss society as a whole, where the proportion of women in leadership positions stood at 37.4% in 2024.[41]

The essays by Heike Springhart, the first Regional Bishop of the Protestant Church in Baden (Germany, pp. 246–258), and Anna-Nicole Heinrich, the youngest Chair of the Presidium of the EKD Synod (pp. 68–77), provide insight into other church leadership roles, the relationship of these leaders to their office, and the challenges they face as leaders.

A few figures—Switzerland in comparison

As is well known, compared to other European countries, Switzerland granted women political rights relatively late. In 1959, Romandy led the way: Geneva, Vaud and Neuchâtel adopted voting and electoral rights for women at the cantonal level; it was not until 1971 that these rights for women were adopted at the federal level.[42] Further milestones

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ars. At the midlevel, the trend has been significantly slower; here, the proportion of women stood at 31% at the end of 2023 and has increased by 10 percentage points over the past ten years."

40 See WCRC, Gender Audit. Available online: https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Gender-Audit-2024-Report-2.pdf (06.01.2026), 20.

41 See Bundesamt für Statistik (Hg.), Frauen in Führungspositionen (2025). Available online: www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann.assetdetail.34527505.html (06.01.2026).

42 See Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen EKF (Hg.), Frauen·Macht·Geschichte. 2.1 Der lange Weg zum Stimm- und Wahlrecht für Frauen (2009). Available

that promoted women's legal and financial independence were the introduction of gender equality into the Federal Constitution in 1981,[43] the introduction of the new marriage law based on the equal rights of men and women in 1988,[44] and the Gender Equality Act of 1996.[45] These and other important achievements[46] led to an increase in the proportion of women in the National Council from 10 women in 1971 (10%) to 77 in 2023 (38.5%).[47] A lot has changed. At the same time, at 38.5%, women are still underrepresented, especially given that they make up the majority of the resident and voting population.[48] One can

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online: https://www.ekf.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/e-4XK4q4r7Cu/2020_Folien-Der-lange-Weg-zum-Stimm-und-Wahlrecht_de.pdf (29.09.2026), 10.

43 See Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, Art. 4 (2): "Men and women have equal rights. The law ensures their equality, particularly in the family, education and the workplace. Men and women are entitled to equal pay for work of equal value." Cf. Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen EKF (Hg.), Frauen·Macht·Geschichte. 3.1 Gleiche Rechte für Frau und Mann: Institutionelle Gleichstellungspolitik (2009). Available online: www.ekf.admin.ch/ekf/de/home/dokumentation/geschichte-der-gleichstellung–frauen-macht-geschichte/frauen-macht-geschichte-18482000.html (06.01.2026), 5–6.

44 See Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen EKF (Hg.), Frauen·Macht·Geschichte. 3.5 Frauen im Zivilrecht: Mündigkeit, Ehe, Scheidung (2009). Available online: https://www.ekf.admin.ch/dam/de/sd-web/N0HF7bd27Zwx/2001_AM_FMG-Recht-5-1848-2000_de.pdf (29.09.2026), 7–9.

45 See EKF (Hg.), 3.1 Gleiche Rechte, 8.

46 For more detailed and additional information on political equality for women in Switzerland, see Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen EKF (Hg.), Geschichte der Gleichstellung. Frauen·Macht·Geschichte (2020). Available online: www.ekf.admin.ch/ekf/de/home/dokumentation/geschichte-dergleichstellung–frauen-macht-geschichte.html (06.01.2026).

47 See Bundesamt für Statistik (Hg.), Gewählte Frauen. Frauen in politischen Institutionen, nach Parteien (2025). Available online: www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/politik/wahlen/gewaehlte-frauen.html#die-frauen-auf-bundesebene- (06.01.2026).

48 See Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen EKF (Hg.), Frauen·Macht·Geschichte. 2.3 Politische Partizipation. Frauen in politischen Ämtern und Positionen (2009).Available online: www.ekf.admin.ch/ekf/de/home/dokumentation/geschichte-der-gleichstellung–frauen-macht-geschichte/frauen-macht-geschichte-18482000.html (06.01.2026).

agree with Viola Amherd's statement from 2021: Switzerland "still has room for improvement."[49]

These statistical findings, however, are only the tip of the iceberg. Leadership requires that basic needs such as economic security, health and education be met:

> In general, people who are able to carve out time for leadership and to be reasonably effective in it need their basic needs met. Such needs include economic security (basic workplace issues), reasonably good health and well-being (physical and emotional), and some modicum of education commensurate with the level of leadership.[50]

Inequalities in these areas have a direct impact on access to leadership positions. Globally, women are more frequently affected by poverty, health burdens, and financial and social insecurity[51]—also in Switzerland. According to the Federal Statistical Office, women received 31% less in pension payments in 2023[52] and earned 16% less than men in 2024.[53] Women suffer more frequently from mental and

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49 Viola Amherd, 'Vorwort', in: Frederike Asael / Hilmar Guernet (Hg.), Frauen in der Schweiz 2021. Schauplatz 11, Raiffeisen Forum Zeitschrift 6/2021, 16. In 2020, for example, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Spain and Austria had a higher proportion of women in their parliaments. See EKF (Hg.), Politische Partizipation, 1.

50 Georgia Duerst-Lahti, The Consequences of Gender for Women's Political Leadership, in: Karen O'Connor (Ed.), Gender and Women's Leadership. A Reference Handbook. Thousand Oaks (California), SAGE 2010, 26.

51 See UN Women, Facts and figures. Economic empowerment (28 June 2024). Available online: www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-economic-empowerment#87146 (06.01.2026).

52 See Bundesamt für Statistik (Hg.), Indikatoren der Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann und Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie 2/2025 (26.06.2025). Available online: www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann.gnpdetail.2025-0340.html (06.01.2026).

53 See Bundesamt für Statistik (Hg.), Lohnunterschied. Erklärter und unerklärter Anteil des Lohnunterschieds zwischen Frauen und Männern (2025). Available