At the All World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, 189 states adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BPA). This visionary, broad and pioneering platform contains objectives in 12 critical areas of concern and guides governments, civil society, and the private sector in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

"International conferences and summits are as good and sustainable as their concrete implementation," said Ruth Dreifuss, former Minister of Home Affairs and head of the Swiss delegation to Beijing, when launching the Swiss Action Plan for promoting gender equality in 1999. The Action Plan outlines the promises made in Beijing: it contains 287 actions to implement the BPA in all 12 critical areas of concern—poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, ownership of domestic property, prostitution, human rights, human rights, human rights, human rights and political participation. Actions relate to home affairs as well as foreign policy and international cooperation. Based on an approach that aims to mainstream women, the Swiss Action Plan also addresses the roles of different actors in implementing the required actions.

The run-up to Beijing+20 countries around the world assessed their progress and achievements, and identified the challenges that remain for full equality of women and men to become reality. So where do we stand today in Switzerland regarding the promises made in Beijing, and in the Swiss Action Plan? A participatory review and evaluation carried out in 2014 by the University of Bern on mandate of the Swiss Confederation, including the views of government, civil society, specialized gender equality agencies and other experts, has provided rich insights into achievements, challenges and ways forward. Let us look at some of the key findings.

Important steps have been taken in regard to women: in Switzerland it is estimated that 2.8 billion working hours a year are devoted to care of children and adults, and that 80% of this work is unpaid. This unpaid care work amounts to over 80 billion CHF per year if paid at market rates.

Violence against women has decreased. Women are more likely to seek help and report violence; courts hear more cases; more women are being protected; cases are often brought to court; interpersonal violence is increasing, but domestic violence has decreased; and the number of women killed in domestic violence cases has decreased.

An important shift has also been achieved in the public perception of women's equal citizenship and equal worth. Women's equal participation and leadership of women in decision making and in economic life has increased: today six out of ten women are employed. But women's employment differs between countries, and women's leadership remains very modest in international comparison. Full-time places are available for only 11% of all children of school age; for 8% of school-age children. Strikingly, many regions still lack any form of public childcare facilities. Furthermore, costs for public childcare—compared with other countries—are very high, setting wrong incentives for parents for not increasing their paid employment. Elderly care also remains a significant challenge, in particular as demographic shifts coupled with public policy changes increase the burden on the main caregiver, who is mainly done by women. Although men are taking on more responsibility for care work, the majority of the work in the family is still done by women. In Switzerland it is estimated that 2.8 billion working hours a year are devoted to care of children and adults, and that 80% of this work is unpaid.

Further action is needed to make significant progress towards full achievement of the commitments made in Beijing.

The participative review process of the Swiss Action Plan in 2014 identified the following areas for further action: to full achievement of the commitments made in Beijing. Switzerland needs a national programme on promoting gender equality in all its multilateral and bilateral fora. Examples include the adoption of a gender mainstreaming policy in development cooperation, and the elaboration of a national action plan on peace, women and security. There is a need for robust accountability systems.

2002 brought an important milestone concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights and women's bodily autonomy—a long-term central claim of the women's movement. Nearly 75% of those who voted in thereferendum accepted the right to legal abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

An important shift has also been achieved in the public perception of domestic violence—from a private matter to a public one. After the introduction of new domestic violence legislation in 2004 and 2007, women no longer had to report their experiences to the authorities. The measures have been successfully implemented. Women's legal rights have been strengthened; violence against women is considered a crime; restraining orders are granted; domestic violence is no longer considered a private matter; and the court has primary jurisdiction.

The Swiss Action Plan, its evaluation as well as the Swiss Beijing+20 report—and a wealth of other information on gender equality in Switzerland—can be found on the website of the Swiss Gender Equality Office (in German and French). The Swiss Action Plan, its evaluation as well as the Swiss Beijing+20 report—and a wealth of other information on gender equality in Switzerland—can be found on the website of the Swiss Gender Equality Office (in German and French).

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Swiss data and statistics cited in this article can be found on the website of the Federal Office for Statistics.

Information on the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on Beijing+20, together with information on the Regional Review Meetings and the national and regional review reports on Beijing+20, can be found on the CSW website.

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This article reflects the views of the author(s) and does not necessarily represent those of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.