

# History of Equal Rights in Germany 1789–2007

© Universität Bielefeld – This timeline is an English translation of an original German text: [www.uni-bielefeld.de/gendertexte](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/gendertexte)



- 1789–1793 In the course of the French Revolution, the first women's clubs were formed. The demands: complete civil rights for women, the equality of man and woman, and women's right to vote.
- 1850 »The admission of female persons, schoolboys, apprentices to political societies is forbidden. In addition, such persons may not take part in events or meetings at which political matters are discussed.« (Paragraph 8 of the Law on Associations, in force until 1908).
- 1865 In Leipzig, Luise Otto-Peters and other women founded the »General German Women's Association«. The demands: educational opportunities for women, the right and entitlement to work, and the right to freely choose an occupation.
- 1878 In an amendment to the Industrial Code, maternity rights were regulated for the first time, which put into effect an unpaid ban on working for the period of three weeks after a birth.
- 1882 Founding of the first Sickness And Death Benefits Fund for women and young girls.
- 1889 Founding congress of the »Second Internationale« in Paris; proclamation of the 8-hour workday. At the request of Emma Ihrer and Clara Zetkin, the resolution for equal rights for women was passed.
- Founding of the »Federation of Women Workers« on May 19 in Berlin.
- 1891 The first Protection of Female Workers Act in the Reichstag; women are forbidden to work in mines, the 11-hour day for women as well as four weeks of paid leave after birth are introduced.
- In a Reichstag session on March 12, the admission of women to study at university was denied.
- 1900 The German Civil Code (BGB) comes into force. With its regulation of marriage and family, it anchors the legal position of women according to the terms of patriarchal tradition, i. e. the husband has the final say in all matters of married and family life.
- 1901 Baden is the first German state in which girls can attend upper boys' schools and can matriculate at colleges under the same conditions as men.
- 1908 The new Imperial Association Act allows women to join political societies.
- 1910 August 26-27: International Women's Conference in Copenhagen: establishment of the »International Women's Day« by Clara Zetkin. Demands: 8-hour workday, same pay for same work, leave for pregnant women, and equality of women in the Labour Protection Act.
- 1911 March 19: »International Women's Day« is celebrated for the first time in Germany.
- 1913 3900 female students are enrolled at all the colleges in Germany, which is 4.3% of all students.
- 1918 On November 30, women obtain active and passive voting rights. This right is anchored in Article 109, Paragraph 2 of the Weimar Constitution of August 1, 1919: „Men and women have the same fundamental rights and responsibilities.“
- 1919–1920 In order to integrate soldiers back into the economy, demobilisation regulations order employers to lay off women according to a sequence based on urgency and need.

- 1923 On March 12, Margarete Von Wrangell became the first female full professor in Germany and obtains the professorship for Plant Nutrition at Hohenheim University, near Stuttgart.
- 1933–1945 Nationalistic rule/ »The Third Reich«. The passive voting right and the opportunity for admission to habilitation at colleges and universities are taken away from women. Prohibitions against taking on certain careers (including scientific and technical careers). Forcible coordination (»Gleichschaltung«) of women’s societies. Massive propaganda campaign for motherhood. Elimination of International Women’s Day in favour of Mother’s Day.
- 1934–1935 Inheritance restrictions for married women. Institution of a numerus clausus for female university students.
- 1937 The law limiting women’s employment is further relaxed. As a result of the military build-up, women are obliged to work in munitions factories.
- 1949 On May 23, the Basic Law of the German Federal Republic comes into effect. Since then, it is concisely stated in Article 3, Paragraph 2, Clause 1 of the new constitution: »Men and women are equal under the law.«
- 1952 Maternity Protection Act: Law protecting employed mothers.
- 1957 The law concerning equal rights for men and women: Equal Rights Act: The most notable change in the area of civil rights is family law. The regulations come into effect on July 1, 1958.
- 1961 Family Law Amendment: Improvement of a wife’s legal position when the husband demands a divorce due to breakdown of the marriage. Fundamentally extends the father’s required child support to the end of the child’s 18<sup>th</sup> year (previously the 16<sup>th</sup> year).
- 1961 Elisabeth Schwarzhaupt (CDU) is named the first female federal minister, responsible for healthcare.
- 1962 The birth control pill is first marketed in the FRG.
- 1965 The Act Amending the Maternity Protection Act and the National Social Insurance Code is adopted.
- 1968 Expansion of the Maternity Protection Act: The job protection period before birth is six weeks. The period after birth is increased to eight weeks, and for premature and multiple births is extended to twelve weeks.
- 1971 Recommendation by the federal chancellor to the federal ministries for the employment of women in civil service, particularly for hiring more female civil servants and employees in administrative and executive positions.
- 1971 June 6: »A Campaign of Self-Incrimination« by 374 women in Stern magazine: »We have had an abortion!« An initiative against Paragraph 218 of the Basic Law.
- 1972–1973 Pension Reform Act: Key aspects: opening the pension fund to homemakers, introduction of a flexible age limit.
- 1972 Annemarie Renger (SPD) is appointed the first female president of the German Bundestag.
- 1973 With the votes of all fractions, the German Bundestag appoints the inquiry committee »Women and Society«.
- 1974 Fifth Act for the Reform of the Penal Code: The termination of a pregnancy in the first twelve weeks becomes exempt from prosecution by the time-frame provision known as the “Fristenregelung”.

## History of Equal Rights – Timeline

- 1975 International Year of the Woman and the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City.
- 1975 The Bundeswehr (Federal Armed Forces) opens the career of medical service officer to women.
- 1975 Act Regarding Complementary Measures to the Fifth Penal Code Reform Act: Women who are insured by statutory health insurance are entitled to individual consultation with a doctor about questions regarding contraception.
- 1976 Fifteenth Amendment to the Penal Code – The Indication Rule: The termination of a pregnancy is fundamentally subject to punishment. Exceptions are allowed when the pregnant woman consents and one of the following reasons applies: medical indication, genetic defect indication, criminal indication, other serious emergency.
- 1977 The feminist newspaper »Emma« is founded.
- 1977 First Marriage and Family Law Reform Act: Partnership principle: no legally prescribed division of labour in the marriage. Change from a principle of fault to one of irreconcilable differences. A male spouse who is not able to provide for himself after the divorce is entitled to request alimony.
- 1979 Introduction of Maternal Leave Act: Mothers who are employed receive, in addition to the previous job protections (six weeks before and eight weeks after the birth), maternal leave lasting four months. A prohibition against termination secures the mother's position, income compensation (up to DM 750 monthly) is paid to her by the federal government.
- 1980 Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen.
- 1980 At the UN's World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, the German federal government signs the convention of December 18, 1979, on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- 1980 Statute regarding the equal consideration for men and women in the workplace and the preservation of claims during a transfer of business operations: Act To Align Labour Law with the European Community.
- 1980 Final report of the »Women and Society« commission of inquiry: The commission expressed recommendations for getting rid of discrimination against girls and women in occupational education and in the job market and for the establishment of requirements for women's and men's freedom of choice in the allocation of their familial, societal, and work-related duties. It put forward proposals for achieving equality.
- 1980 Amendment to the Federal Career Regulation: Raised the age of entry into the civil service for women who had to interrupt their education in order to raise children.
- 1984 Act for the Establishment of a Foundation »Mother and Child – Protection of Unborn Life«: The foundation helps expectant mothers who find themselves in a social hardship with financial assistance. The federal government provides 97 Million Euros for this purpose (as of 2009).
- 1985 Promotion of Employment Act: Easier access to incentives for re-training and further education for women who left the labour force in order to raise children. Part-time work is legally protected the same as full-time work: in other words, part-time and full-time employees cannot be treated differently. New provisions provide better safeguards for on-call jobs that are overwhelmingly performed by women as well as for job sharing.
- 1985 The statute regarding the UN convention of December 18, 1979, for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women becomes effective.

- 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi.
- 1985 Third Amendment of the Framework for Higher Education Act: In the future, institutions of higher learning must work towards the elimination of existing disadvantages for female scientists.
- 1986 Survivor's Pension and Parental Leave Act: Credit for a year of insurance for raising each child for all mothers, born in 1921 or later, who receive a disability pension or an old-age pension starting in 1986. Women and men receive a survivor's pension under the same requirements.
- 1986 Federal Child-Raising Allowance Act: Legislation regarding the granting of a child-raising allowance and parental leave.
- 1987 Child-Raising Benefit Act: Law regarding benefits from the federal pension fund for mothers born before 1921 who raised children; Mothers born before 1921 receive a child-raising benefit for each child who was born alive.
- 1988 First informal Council of Ministers for Women's Affairs of the European Community (EC) in the Federal Republic of Germany.
- 1990 The GDR joins the Federal Republic of Germany –Legal provisions for families and women, which for more than 40 years were differently arranged in the two German countries, are now harmonised in the Unification Treaty. The treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, which creates a unified Germany, stipulates how the legal situation is viewed throughout all of Germany starting on October 3, 1990 – Unification Day – and by which principles any still differing provisions should be jointly resolved. Article 31, Paragraph 1 assigns to the unified German legislature the responsibility of further developing legislation for equality between men and women.
- 1990 Founding of the Independent Women's Association (UFV) in Berlin –The founding proclamation from an initiative committee contains, among other statements, the following: »In the current situation of social upheaval, the interests of women have so far played a subordinate role. (...) So let's seize the initiative! Women, let's organise! Let's create our own advocacy group! Our recommendation: let's establish together a women's society in which all  
 - independent women's groups and initiatives  
 - women's societies and commissions  
 - women's fractions of political parties and mass organisations  
 - and every individual woman band together in a political advocacy group, without giving up their autonomy.«
- 1991 The Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) opens all career paths in the medical service and the military music service to women.
- 1992 Pension Reform Act: Starting with births in 1992, the credit in the statutory pension system for time spent raising children is raised from the previous one year to three years.
- 1992 The child-raising allowance for children born on or after January 1, 1992, is extended to two years.
- 1992 First Amendment of the Maternity Protection Act (Improvement in employment protection).
- 1992 Assistance for Pregnant Women and Families Act: The legislation to protect prenatal/nascent life by supporting a child-friendly society, for assistance in case of a conflict caused by pregnancy, and for the regulation of pregnancy termination is approved by the German Bundestag.
- 1992 EC Maternity Protection Directive 92/85 with minimum requirements for maternity protection becomes effective.

## History of Equal Rights – Timeline

- 1993 Heide Simonis (SPD) is the first female minister president of a German state. She governs Schleswig-Holstein until 2004.
- 1994 The mandate for equality in Article 3, Paragraph 2, of the Basic Law is expanded: »The State shall promote the actual accomplishment of equality of men and women and act towards eliminating existing disadvantages.«
- 1994 A uniform regulation in the Penal Code protects girls and boys under 16 years of age from sexual abuse regardless of the gender of the abuser.
- 1994 The Second Equal Rights Act (federal statute) comes into effect. Main points:
- Law for the support of women and the compatibility of family and career in the federal bureaucracy and in the federal court system: Women's Promotion Act
  - Toughening of the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender in the working world
  - Expanded participatory rights for works council and staff council with respect to the promotion of women and the compatibility of family and career
  - Law protecting employees from sexual harassment in the workplace: Employee Protection Act
  - Law regarding the appointment and posting of women and men to committees within the federal sphere of influence: Federal Committee Personnel Act
- 1994 Regulation regarding the selection of female employees in federal agencies: Female Employee Selection Regulation.
- 1994 Germany-wide Women's Strike Day in March: The women from the new women's movement wanted to connect their different experiences and positions in order to make them mutually productive.
- 1995 Regulation for Statistics on Women's Promotion: Besides the collection of data, this regulation above all directs the communication of this information to the highest federal authorities and regulates its further utilisation.
- 1995 By means of the Amendment to the Assistance for Pregnant Women and Families Act, the Federal Constitutional Court's requirements for the legal regulation of pregnancy termination were implemented. The key issue is the required counselling of pregnant women in the case of hardship or conflict.
- 1995 The UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.
- 1995 EC resolution on »The Portrayal of Women and Men in Advertisements and the Media«.
- 1996 The legal entitlement to a nursery school place for children starting at the end of their third year is regulated.
- 1997 The redefined Paragraph 177 of the Penal Code becomes effective: Rape within a marriage is prosecutable.
- 1997 Decision of the European Council in Amsterdam: The objective of the support for equal rights for women and men is established in Articles 2 and 3 of the EC treaty. In Article 119 of the treaty, the principle of equal pay for equal work is expanded to equivalent work.
- 1997 The legislation for the revision of regulations concerning foreigners and asylum processes contains an improved hardship provision and enables a distinct right of residence for foreign wives who were victims of domestic violence.

- 1999 Based on the decisions of the World Conference on Women in Beijing and on the Amsterdam Treaty, the federal government was required to introduce gender mainstreaming as a strategy and method for improving the equal rights of women and men.
- 2001 Third Amendment to the Federal Child-Raising Allowance Act: Legal right for part-time work for fathers, better opportunities for women to stay in contact with their profession during maternal leave through part-time employment. Renunciation of the general principle of the current Child-Raising Allowance Act, which is still based on and promotes the traditional division of labour between the genders by assigning child care to the mothers and the role of breadwinner to the fathers.
- 2001 Parental Leave Act: Fathers and mothers can raise and take care of their children for the first three years together. In this period they are entitled to part-time employment of up to 30 hours per week in businesses with more than 15 employees.
- 2002 Revision of the Maternity Protection Act: The regulation improves the maternity protection period for a premature birth. For the calculation of annual leave, maternity protection periods and other employment restrictions for pregnant women and mothers are counted as periods of employment.
- 2002 Protection Against Violence Act – legislation for civil rights protection against violent acts and stalking: Perpetrators can be barred from a shared home; protective orders, such as restraining orders forbidding contact or requiring that a minimum distance be maintained, can be issued.
- 2005 Angela Merkel (CDU) becomes the first German female chancellor.
- 2006 Psychological Terror Act («Stalking»).
- 2006 General Equal Rights Act (AGG): With the General Equal Rights Act taking effect, the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth established the Anti-Discrimination Office according to Paragraph 25, Subparagraph 1 of the act.
- 2007 The income-oriented parental allowance supersedes the child-raising allowance – Legislation regarding parental allowance and parental leave (Federal Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act - BEEG): For births starting in 2007, the current federal child-raising allowance is superseded by the new parental allowance. The parental allowance offsets the reduction in income after the birth of a child. It consists of 67% of the average monthly disposable earned income (after subtracting taxes, social security contributions, and work-related deductions) in effect just before the birth, with a maximum of €1800 and a minimum of €300. A non-working parent receives the minimum amount in addition to the present family income. The parental allowance is paid to father and mother for a maximum of 14 months; the two of them can divide the period of time between themselves as they wish. One parent can claim up to twelve months, and there are two additional months if in this period earned income disappears and the partner participates in care of the child. Single parents who receive parental allowance as compensation for lost earned income can, because of the absent partner, claim the full 14 months of parental allowance.
- 2007 On September 26, 2007, the German federal cabinet approved the »Second Action Plan to Combat Violence Against Women«. Its goal is the sustained protection of women against violence in all areas of life.

Note from the authors of the catalogue »The Second Glance: Women«: The fact that this timeline ends in the year 2007 does not mean that in the year 2021 real equality for women in Germany has been achieved: [www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/nachhaltigkeitspolitik/gleichstellung-von-frauen-und-maennern-841120](http://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/nachhaltigkeitspolitik/gleichstellung-von-frauen-und-maennern-841120) Further information on the history of women's equality in Germany and many other countries, can also be found on the websites listed under the heading »Relevant Internet Sources« (p. 100f.).