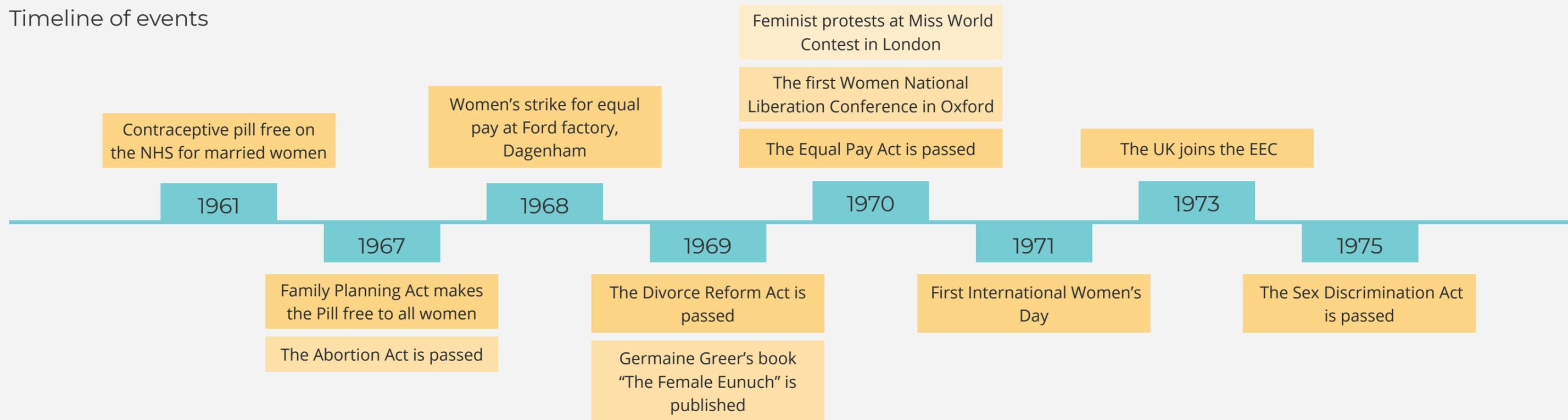


Key Question 4: How far did the lives of women change in this period?

Timeline of events



Key words

EEC	European Economic Community (now called the European Union EU)
Nuclear family	the husband, his wife, their children
Glass ceiling	prejudice that prevents women from being promoted
Backstreet abortion	illegal and dangerous medical procedure to end a pregnancy, not performed by medical professionals
Abortion	medical procedure to end a pregnancy
Divorce	legal procedure to end a marriage
Social stigma	other people disapproving of how you live your life
Sexism	discriminating against women; seeing women as being 'sex objects'

Situation in the 1950s

In the 1950s women:

- were supposed to be good wives and mothers
- were expected to give up their jobs when they married
- were needed at home to plan meals and feed the family
- had to wash clothes and clean the house by hand.

Refrigerators, convenience foods, supermarkets and consumer appliances like washing machines and vacuum cleaners freed up time to do paid work.

WORK – Only 1 in 5 married women went to work in 1951. Childcare was expensive and hard to find. Employers preferred women for lower paid lower skill jobs as they could pay them less than men. Although the number of women in work increased, there was little improvement in the range of jobs that women were doing. Women were still highly concentrated in lower status lower paid jobs.

EDUCATION - Women's education was still biased towards domestic life. Many women left school at the minimum leaving age and married young.

“The housewife is an unpaid worker in her husband's house in return for the security of being a permanent employee” from *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer 1969

Important concept

Feminism – traditional views saw women as wives and mothers, sometimes as unskilled workers but never as bosses or professionals. As more women went to work there was a movement to make women more equal to men not only in terms of pay, but also in terms of the opportunities open to them.

Key Question 4 : How far did the lives of women change in this period?

Changes in women's rights LEGAL EQUALITY

By the 1960s women were getting paid 75% of what men were paid.

Why did things change?

- In 1968, 40 women machinists at the Ford factory in Dagenham went on strike demanding equal pay.
- Women's rights groups began lobbying MPs and newspapers began to run campaigns supported by Labour minister Barbara Castle.
- The UK government had to ensure that men and women had equal pay and equal opportunities to join the EEC in the 1970s.

The Equal Pay Act 1970 required businesses to give equal rates of pay to men and women doing the same job.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 made it illegal to refuse a job to a woman on the grounds of her gender. The Equal Opportunities Commission was set up to investigate discrimination. All subjects in school now had to be open to boys and girls. The Act also guaranteed women access to housing, and monitored their portrayal in advertisements. It was hoped it would break the 'glass ceiling' for women at work.

Changes in women's rights FAMILY

ABORTION was illegal until the **1967 the Abortion Act** legalised abortion within the first 28 weeks of pregnancy, providing that it was done under medical supervision, signed off by two different doctors and it prevented physical or mental harm to the mother or if the unborn child was potentially disabled.

CONTRACEPTION - 'The Pill' was an oral contraceptive licensed for use in the UK in 1961. It was available for free to married women on the NHS. **The Family Planning Act 1967** said that local authorities had to provide contraceptives to anyone who wanted them.

DIVORCE - The nuclear family [husband, wife, children] made up the majority of families and there was a social stigma against divorcees and single parents. **The Divorce Reform Act 1969** made a 'no fault' divorce possible. Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage could now be the only reason for granting divorce. Couples could now divorce if they had lived apart for two years and they both wanted it, or they had lived apart for five years and only one of them wanted it.

Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement

Sexist attitudes [discriminating against women] continued in the 1970s. **Feminism** [promoting women's equality] demanded a shift in the balance of power between men and women. The **Women's Liberation Movement** was not a single organisation, but a collection of different feminist groups trying to improve the lives of women in the UK.

The *Female Eunuch* (1969) by Germaine Greer explained how women were oppressed by men, that most women lived miserable lives because ideas of romantic love and happy families were a myth.

The **National Women's Liberation Conference** in Oxford in February 1970 demanded 1. equal pay 2. free contraception and abortion on request 3. equal educational and job opportunities 4. free childcare.

November 1970, at the Miss World Contest in London, feminist protesters threw flour and smoke bombs.

March 1971, on International Women's Day, 4000 feminists marched through London to petition the government for women's rights. Feminism however was not very popular, especially with men.