

The background of the cover is a collage of Swiss-themed elements. It includes several Swiss franc coins of various denominations (1000, 2000, 5000) and colorful Swiss banknotes. A prominent red and white checkered Swiss flag is in the top right corner. The text is overlaid on this collage.

DECEMBER 2025

# Swiss Review

The magazine  
for the Swiss Abroad

**Switzerland and the Swiss franc –  
a contradictory love affair**

**From political power to popular pastime –  
how choirs evolved in Switzerland**

**Applauded, poisoned, and a mirror of its time –  
the story of Peterli the otter**



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**4 Focus**

Cash conundrum – the Swiss love their notes and coins but barely use them

**9 Society**

How choirs heralded the birth of modern Switzerland

**12 Knowledge**

Apertus, the new Swiss AI language model, even speaks Romansh

**16 Report**

Thirty metres up or down – Switzerland's shortest public transport route

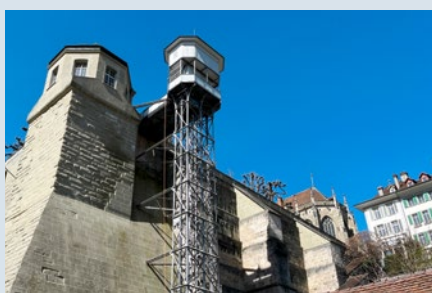


Photo: Peter Maurer

**18 News**

Zurich wants to scrap primary-school French – dismay among francophones

**19 Switzerland in figures**

Switzerland's trendiest dog is long and has short legs

**News from your region****20 Nature and the environment**

Applauded, then poisoned – the instructive tale of Peterli the otter

**24 Politics**

Good news for Swiss Abroad: Switzerland to introduce e-ID

**28 Notes from the Federal Palace**

Tenth anniversary of a landmark law for the "Fifth Switzerland"

**32 SwissCommunity**

Who represents which country in the newly elected Council of the Swiss Abroad?

**35 Puzzle**

A new addition to our 800,000-piece puzzle of the "Fifth Switzerland"

Cover photo: Swiss coins and banknotes. Photo: Keystone

# Small change



The next time you are in Switzerland and you want to travel by tram, try using a ticket machine that still accepts cash – if only to see the dispenser spit out some change. Any 10- or 20-cent coins? Look at them closely. Some may date back 20, 30, 50 or even 80 years. My personal record: a 20-cent coin minted in 1921.

Your analogue ticket purchase will be a little nod to the durability of the Swiss franc. For one thing, the design of the coins has remained unchanged since 1881. The only variable is the year of issue. If we move from cents to francs, small change takes on a whole new meaning. Imagine you have a suitcase containing one million francs in cash – 1,000 Swiss francs would be the ideal denomination of banknote. A million would only weigh a touch more than a kilo, and you could still fit the notes in your suitcase. If you carried one million francs in gold, the weight would increase tenfold.

Of course, this is hypothetical. Gold normally stays in a safe, as do 1,000-franc notes. And fewer of us in Switzerland pay by cash anyway. Nevertheless, the Swiss franc is strong at the moment. Our currency is a source of national symbolism and immense pride – even among people who switched to contactless a good while ago. This is a contradiction: coins and notes have taken a back-seat role in everyday life, yet no cash at all would be unthinkable for most of us – as we explain in our lead article.

Talking of everyday life, we have a couple of changes to announce. Our graphic and editorial designer Joseph Haas, who has shaped the identity of "Swiss Review" for a decade, is stepping down. I would like to express my sincere thanks to him for the thoughtful, engaged manner in which he helped to produce content for our magazine.

Secondly, it is goodbye from me. This edition marks the end of my time as editor-in-chief. I feel privileged to have gone on such an enriching and stimulating journey with you, dear readers. My thanks go to everyone who has praised or criticised our work over the years. I always appreciated your feedback, regardless of whether it was positive or negative.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"Swiss Review", the information magazine for the "Fifth Switzerland", is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.







# Keeping the nation flush with cash

The Swiss franc is a symbol of stability and quality. Switzerland's intimate relationship with its banknotes and coins is a source of national pride. Even in the age of tap-to-pay, the absence of cash would be unthinkable for most Swiss. Why is that?



THEODORA PETER

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) in Berne is the beating heart that regulates cash circulation in Switzerland, ensuring that Swiss banks always have enough cash in reserve for their private and business clients. Banknotes and coins worth a total of over 76 billion Swiss francs were in circulation in 2024 – around twice as much as 20 years ago.

For the purposes of this article, the SNB gave us a rare glimpse into its heavily guarded national cash vault in Berne, where banknotes and coins arrive in numerous crates every day – delivered by cash handling companies like Loomis that move the currency from A to B, supplying it to and collecting it from banks, shops and authorities around the country.

Money is sorted, checked, and replaced where necessary before it re-enters circulation. Last year, the SNB put some 244 million banknotes and 166 million coins back into circulation and withdrew 238 million banknotes and 131 million coins.

## In the heavily guarded vault

To access the cash vault situated at the SNB's headquarters on Berne's Bundesplatz you must go through a security check. A lift takes you underground. After passing through a reinforced door, you walk into a labyrinth of winding corridors and staircases. The lighting in the first room that we enter is as bright as day.

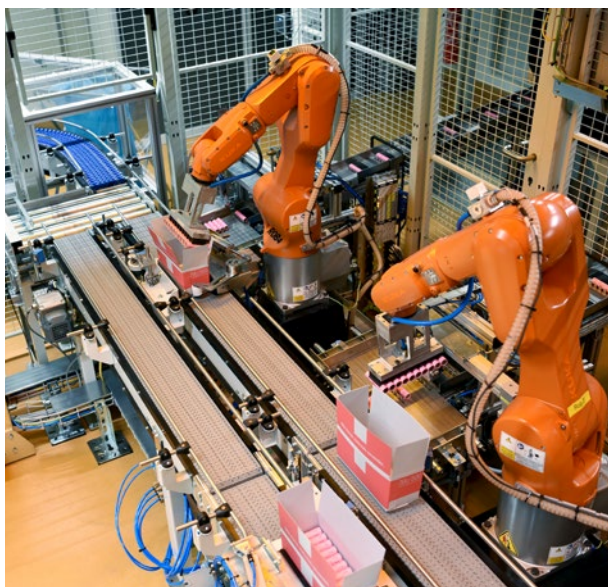
Equipped with machines, robotic arms, and conveyor belts, this space looks like a small industrial facility – albeit one chock-a-block with banknotes. Fifty-franc notes are being checked today. An employee puts the bundles into a machine, which verifies the authenticity and condition of every note within seconds. Counter-

feits are sent to the federal police. Banknotes unfit for use because they are dirty, ripped or no longer meet the required standards in any other way are discarded. These go directly into the shredder and later end up at the waste incineration plant. Some 30 million banknotes were destroyed in 2024. In turn, the SNB issued 41 million fresh banknotes.

“High quality is our hallmark,” says Peter Eltschinger of the SNB's cash department, who is accompanying us on

Cash has become less popular as a means of payment. In 2024, private individuals made only 30 per cent of their daily purchases with banknotes and coins.

Before coins and notes return to circulation, they are sorted and repacked in the SNB's underground vault in Berne. Pictured here: freshly packed rolls of 20-cent pieces.  
Photo: SNB



this tour. The SNB's banknotes are made to last and can withstand repeated folding and washing.

## No one works alone

A machine repacks the banknotes that remain fit for use and are earmarked to return to circulation. Wrapped in plastic, each bundle moves along a conveyor belt and is checked individually by a member of staff before landing in a transport box. If any note has as much as a slight kink, the entire package will go back into the machine to be reprocessed.

More than one person is involved in each processing stage. No one works alone. All rooms and workstations have video surveillance. “This also protects our employees,” says Eltschinger.

A lift takes us further down. The next stop is the coin processing facility. There is a lot more noise here than in the comparatively quiet banknote room. Twenty-cent pieces are rattling through the sorting machine today. Coins failing the quality test go directly into a separate collection point and will later be returned to Swissmint, the manufacturer. Swissmint, or the federal mint, will make these coins unidentifiable and dispose of the metal.

Coins fit for further use are wrapped in paper and repacked in boxes. Each denomination is denoted by a specific colour – in this case red for the 20-cent pieces. Most of the processing steps are automated in this room too. Employees intervene to cut open coin rolls and check coins that the machine is unable to process.

An incongruous red neon sign hangs on the wall. “Geld und Wert. Das letzte Tabu,” it says, which translates as “Money and its value – the last taboo”. It is a memento from Expo.02, the



Swiss national exhibition held in 2002. The SNB asked curator Harald Szeemann (1933–2005) to create a pavilion for the event. The centrepiece was a glass cabinet in which a robotic arm continually pushed 100-franc notes into a shredder. It was a provocative display – and an elaborate con: the banknotes would have been discarded anyway, a process that still takes place every day behind closed doors in the SNB's cash vault.

### Our attachment to cash

The lift returns us to ground level at the end of our tour. We chat to Peter Eltschinger in the SNB's wood-panelled “Salon bleu” meeting room. “What about people's payment habits?” we ask. Fewer of us are using cash. According to an SNB study in 2024, private individuals now only make 30 per cent of their daily purchases in cash – down from about 70 per cent in 2017. Debit or credit card is the most favoured form of payment



Banknotes unfit for use go into the shredder. Some 30 million banknotes were destroyed and around 41 million fresh banknotes were issued in 2024. Photo: SNB

in Switzerland these days, accounting for almost half of all transactions. There has been a strong upsurge in the use of payment apps like Twint. “Twinting” is particularly popular among young people, whereas the over-55s and people on low incomes still pay in cash more often.

### Cash doesn't leave a data trail

Although the use of coins and banknotes is becoming increasingly rare in everyday situations, 95 per cent of the population want to retain the option of paying in cash. How do we explain this paradox? “We Swiss very much value our freedom of choice,” Eltschinger replies, adding that cash will continue to play an important role in future. He believes that the various means of payment complement each other. For one thing, you can use cash immediately and at any time, without the need for electricity or an internet connection. Nor does cash leave a data trail that could

## Cash to be enshrined in the constitution

Swiss law already states that the Swiss National Bank must supply the country with sufficient cash in the national currency, the Swiss franc. But the Federal Council and parliament are now prepared to lend this principle greater weight by enshrining it in the constitution. No changes to the constitution are possible without the vote of the people and the cantons.

The authorities are responding to the 2023 popular initiative “Yes to a free and independent Swiss currency in the form of coins and banknotes (cash is freedom)”. Both the initiative and the direct counter-proposal from parliament will be put to the vote on 8 March 2026.

The Swiss Freedom Movement (FBS), a libertarian pressure group fronted by former SVP politician Richard Koller, is behind the initiative. The FBS first made

headlines during the Covid pandemic after leading protests against mandatory face coverings and other measures such as vaccination.

Its 2021 initiative “against mandatory vaccinations” was rejected in 2024 with a resounding no. The “Cash is freedom” initiative, due to be put to voters in spring 2026, has a greater chance of success. Its stated aim is to ensure that coins and banknotes are always available in sufficient quantities. The authors of the initiative criticise the increased use of electronic payment methods that leave digital trails. In their view, cash is the only sure way to protect anonymity.

### No obligation to accept cash

One issue not being put to a vote is an initiative calling for shops, restaurants and

public transport companies to be obliged to accept cash. Backed again by the FBS, this more drastic measure failed to collect the necessary number of signatures. Nevertheless, politicians are aware of the growing trend of only offering contactless means of payment. The cantonal parliament in Geneva recently decided to change the city's local rules on hospitality.

Consequently, bars and restaurants must now accept notes and coins from their guests as a valid means of payment. Other cantons are looking to take similar measures.

A motion has been submitted in the federal parliament aimed at forcing all service providers to accept cash. The Federal Council rejects this obligation. (TP)



compromise financial privacy. Cash is also immune to the fees that are incurred for using credit cards and payment apps. Furthermore, most companies regard cash as the most economical means of payment.

## Cash assets

The Federal Council and parliament plan to enshrine in the federal constitution that the SNB guarantee the nationwide provision of cash. This is in response to the “Cash is freedom” popular initiative that was launched in 2023. The electorate will vote on the initiative and the associated counterproposal next spring (see box on page 7).

Besides using notes and coins to pay for goods and services, many people like to store their cash at home or in safes – if the number of large-denomination banknotes currently in circulation is anything to go by. Switzerland has over 36 million 1,000-franc banknotes in circulation that account for almost half of the value of all banknotes in use. The SNB is unable to put a figure on how much cash is being hoarded. “We simply don’t know,” says Eltschinger.

A possible clue comes from the proportion of obsolete banknotes that



The SNB is currently deciding on a new design for its banknotes. Above: two of the design nominations. Photo: Keystone

Used 20-centime coins run through the sorting machine. In 2024, coins with a total value of CHF 3 billion were in circulation. Photo: SNB



have yet to return to the SNB. For example, the number of 500-franc notes that have been obsolete for the last 25 years and are still to be retrieved is over 170,000.

The total value of withdrawn banknotes still lying around amounts to over nine billion francs. It is highly likely that many of these obsolete notes are languishing under the nation’s floorboards. But here is the good news: although banknotes from earlier series no longer count as legal tender, you can still cash them in at the SNB any time in the future. Information sheets on this topic are available on the SNB website ([www.snb.ch](http://www.snb.ch)). Eltschinger advises Swiss Abroad to check whether they can return their old banknotes to the SNB securely by post from their country of residence or otherwise physically exchange them at a bank in Switzerland.

## New banknotes from 2030

The SNB is planning to issue a new series of banknotes. Every banknote series has a life cycle of around 15 to 20 years. The current series, introduced from 2016 to 2019, showcases Switzerland in all its diversity. Ahead of the

next series, the SNB recently launched a design competition entitled “Switzerland and its altitudes”. Each of the new 10-, 20-, 50-, 100-, 200- and 1,000-franc banknotes will pay homage to Switzerland’s unique topography.

## Six finalists

This is the first time that such a competition has been subject to a survey conducted among the Swiss population. In the space of three weeks, over 100,000 people viewed the 12 design submissions and voted for their favourites. Eltschinger: “We were pleasantly surprised by how many people took part.” The SNB nominated the six finalists this autumn, from whom the winner will be announced in spring 2026. Further development of the designs will then begin.

These drafts can be viewed on the SNB website. The new notes – Switzerland’s new “calling cards” – should go into circulation at the beginning of the 2030s.



# Susanne Vincenz-Stauffacher and Benjamin Mühlemann



The FDP in Switzerland has a new leadership: the 58-year-old lawyer and St Gallen National Councillor Susanne Vincenz-Stauffacher, and the 46-year-old communications expert and Glarus member of the Council of States Benjamin Mühlemann. Left-wing parties are known for having co-leaders, but now the FDP also has its first-ever dual executive. Vincenz-Stauffacher and Mühlemann have a challenging job on their hands. The over 130-year-old FDP, one of the proud founding parties of the Swiss federal state, is in decline. Its share of the vote, continually falling in recent years, stood at a paltry 14 per cent in the last federal elections. The FDP is now only the third-biggest party behind the right-wing SVP and the SP. If it fails to improve its showing in the 2027 elections, it could lose one of its two seats on the Federal Council. This would be a new low for a party to whom all members of the Federal Council belonged during the first 40 years of the modern federal Swiss state. The new co-leaders cover a broad political spectrum: she is regarded as progressive, he is seen as conservative. Both consider this a strength and have put on an optimistic front, saying that the FDP provides a “safe pair of hands” and is focused on maintaining prosperity. Yet it was when the two were elected at the FDP’s October conference in Berne no less that potential splits in the party were laid bare. Before the event, a big row had broken out over the new package of agreements with the European Union. Framed in the media as the FDP’s “moment of truth”, delegates crossed swords on the issue in an otherwise civilised debate. The conference emphatically endorsed the Swiss-EU accords in the end, following the lead of FDP Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis in adopting a European-friendly stance. Vincenz-Stauffacher voted in favour, Mühlemann voted against. It remains to be seen whether this decision by the party grassroots helps to sharpen the FDP’s profile or alienates voters.

SUSANNE WENGER

## Bilateral agreements – the SVP says no, everyone else says yes

Probably the biggest domestic political issue at present is whether Switzerland should approve its new bilateral agreements with the European Union (EU) after years of frayed relations with Brussels (see “Swiss Review” 2/2025). All of the major political parties have now stated their position on the 1,800-page package of treaties. The picture seems clear at first glance: the SVP is the only party categorically against the agreements, saying that it will oppose ratification. The SP, FDP, Centre, Greens and GLP endorse the deal – referred to as “Bilaterals III” – in principle but would also like some adjustments here and there. The electorate will have the last say, but a voting date has yet to be finalised.

(MUL)

## Three municipalities buy up their winter sports infrastructure to deter foreign investors

With US investors starting to buy up and rebrand Swiss ski resorts, three Grisons municipalities – Flims, Laax and Falera – have banded together to purchase the winter sports infrastructure of Weisse Arena Bergbahnen AG at a cost of over 90 million francs. Voters in the three villages emphatically approved the deal, which aims to safeguard local jobs and secure the ski resort’s future.

(MUL)

## Low winter snowfall, high summer temperatures – Swiss glaciers continue to melt at speed

Glacial melt in the Swiss Alps was dramatic once again in 2025. A lack of winter snow combined with heatwaves in June and August resulted in a three per cent loss in glacier volume – the fourth-biggest decline since records began. There is now a quarter less glacial ice than there was ten years ago (see also “Swiss Review” 3/2025). The Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland network and the Swiss Commission for Cryosphere Observation presented the findings in October.

(MUL)

## Switzerland is currently home to 100,000 recognised refugees – despite a low number of asylum applications

Two important facts to note: the number of Swiss asylum applications has noticeably declined since 2024, but the number of recognised refugees in Switzerland remains consistently high at over 100,000. This does not include the 70,000 or so Ukrainians who are afforded special status (“protection status S”). Switzerland’s overstretched asylum system is a particular challenge for the federal government, with cantons under pressure calling for solutions and an easing of the situation on the ground.

(MUL)



# How choir music shaped modern Switzerland

Choirs are extremely popular in Switzerland. Singing in a choir is a hobby for many people today. Yet in the 19th century, choirs exerted political influence heralding the birth of the modern federal Swiss state, says Berne musicologist Caiti Hauck, who has completed a pioneering study of the choral scene.

SUSANNE WENGER

Choirs are omnipresent in the run-up to Christmas. Festive concerts come thick and fast from ensembles such as the Bach Choir of Berne, the Swiss Youth Choir, the Appenzeller Mittelland Gospel Choir, and the Pro Arte Choir of Lausanne. But choirs also sing all year round. Switzerland has a rich choral scene. Federal statistics show that one in five people in the country sing in their free time – mostly every week and most often in a choir. “Compared to other European countries, Switzerland has one of the highest numbers of singers per capita,” says Caiti Hauck from the University of Bern.

It is hard to pinpoint the exact number of choirs, because they come in many forms. Over 1,200 are currently affiliated to the Swiss Choral Association (SCV), the country’s umbrella organisation of secular choirs. They include male, female, mixed, children’s and youth choirs. Following a decline during the Covid pandemic, the number of choirs has levelled out, says Anna-Barbara Winzeler of the SCV. There are also hundreds of church choirs, hundreds of yodelling clubs, and many informal ensembles that do not appear in any official registers.

## Historical roots

There is a particularly high concentration of choirs in the canton of Fribourg, whose choral scene is included in Switzerland’s national inventory of “living traditions” – a list compiled by the Federal Office of Culture in accordance with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Yet why are choirs so popular in Switzerland? Group singing improves mental



The Chœur mixte St-Michel from Haute-Nendaz – one of over 1,200 choirs in Switzerland.  
Photo: Keystone

Caiti Hauck of the University of Bern studied the early history of choirs in Berne and Fribourg.  
Photo: Dres Hubacher

health and demonstrably strengthens the immune system, but historical factors are also at play.

In the 19th century, choirs were more than just a way to make music. They gained political clout at a time of tension between liberals and conservatives, and the Reformed and Catholic Church. The federal Swiss state was born in 1848, one year after the Sonderbund War. It was Europe’s

first-ever modern democracy. “Male voice choirs helped to further political awareness during the infancy of the Swiss state,” explains Hauck, who has conducted a pioneering in-depth study of the choral scene in the cities of Berne and Fribourg, relying on commemorative publications, association records, membership lists, written correspondence, concert programmes, and press articles as sources of information.

## Political agenda

Hauck found over 100 choirs in Berne and Fribourg. Notable examples included French-speaking Switzerland’s first-ever secular men’s choir, the Société de Chant de la Ville de Fribourg, founded in 1841, and the Berner Liedertafel, established in 1845. Both choirs espoused liberal-radical views – unlike the Catholic and conservative-leaning Fribourg



Cecilian Society men's choir founded in 1877. The Société de Chant made its stance clear, singing revolutionary pieces like "Au bord de la libre Sarine", composed by Jacques Vogt, the choir's founder.

The progressives enjoyed their hour of triumph in 1848, but the 1850s saw the conservatives regain the upper hand in Fribourg. The government feared the influence of the Société de Chant and tried to restrict the choir's activities. It was not until 1871 that the group was able to organise another cantonal singing festival – inviting the Berner Liedertafel to the event. This reputable choir from Switzerland's new capital city had close links to politics, with federal councillors among its non-active members. The Bernese singers supported their Fribourg counterparts in solidarity – but also "out of patriotic duty" to strengthen unity within the fledgling Confederation.

### Singing for the fatherland

"Despite language and religious differences, the two choirs maintained close ties across the Röstli divide," says Hauck. Their lively correspondence bears testimony to this. Male choirs not only offered men a platform to sing together and express political views, but the groups were also interested in cementing national



Above: the Berner Liedertafel in 1850. The Bernese choir was passionate about singing – and politics. Lithograph by Ernst Neubauer, Berne cantonal archives



The Société de Chant de la Ville de Fribourg were feared (and harassed) by Fribourg's cantonal government. Picture provided

unity. The big federal singing festivals that regularly took place from 1843 celebrated this sentiment in much the same way as Switzerland's gymnastics and shooting festivals.

Repertoires included patriotic pieces like "O mein Heimatland, o mein Vaterland", written by Gottfried Keller and put to music by Wilhelm Baumgartner. Folk songs and songs about nature were also popular, while the Berner Liedertafel attempted challenging compositions by Franz Schubert and others. Mixed and female choirs already existed in the 19th century. "Some women's choirs took part in cantonal singing festivals, achieving top marks," Hauck notes. Yet male choirs dominated the narrative, reflecting the gender politics of the day.

### Spanning the social strata

Zurich composer and publisher Hans Georg Nägeli was a pioneer of Swiss choir music who promoted musical education for the people. He founded the first non-ecclesiastical singing institute in 1805, which gave birth to



Hundreds of yodelling choirs complement the stylistically diverse range of vocal ensembles. Pictured here: yodellers from Valais at the 1975 Federal Yodelling Festival. Photo: Keystone



the first-ever secular male choir in 1810. Choirs spanning the social strata were a 19th-century innovation. Known in Europe as the “father of singing”, Nägeli was an influential teacher of music in German- and French-speaking Switzerland. “Many choirs still refer to him in their credits,” says Hauck.

Originally from Brazil, Hauck has been living in the canton of Vaud since 2017. Why is she interested in such a previously neglected topic? “I was fascinated by choir music as a student in São Paulo,” she replies. Hauck has sung in choirs herself and recently conducted the Lausanne police male choir. She has found an effective way to communicate her findings, publishing the comic book “Three Swiss choristers in the 19th



Chorisma is a Schaffhausen choir in which young people hit the notes. Pictured above: a scene from the musical “Rent”.

Photo: Jeannette Vogel, Schaffhauser Nachrichten

The traditional Tell plays in Altdorf have relied on amateur actors and, in particular, amateur choirs since 1899. Archive photo: Keystone, 2004

of the queer community, on feminism, or as groups consisting of locals and asylum seekers.

Choir organisation has changed significantly. Some choirs still meet one evening a week, but looser arrangements are now common. “Plenty of people want to sing, but not everyone wants to be tied to a specific choir,” says Anna-Barbara Winzeler of the SCV. Winzeler, who is studying music at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, conducts chorisma in Schaffhausen, a choir with singers aged between 18 and 35. She believes that young people will pass on the choir tradition.

century” in collaboration with the cartoonist Julien Cachemaille. The book is available online in French and German.

## Between tradition and change

The Berner Liedertafel remained a male choir until it disbanded in 2018 due to a lack of young singers. The Société de Chant de la Ville de Fribourg was discontinued in 2000. It is normal

for choirs to come and go, says Hauck. As early as the 19th century, complaints about irregular rehearsal attendance appear in records, and choirs broke up due to dwindling numbers. But new choirs have sprung up ever since in a wide diversity of styles. Hauck: “Choral music is thriving in Switzerland and bringing generations together.” Political debate now plays less of a role, even if choirs continue to take a stand – on behalf

**The comic book** “Three Swiss choristers in the 19th century” communicates the results of Caiti Hauck’s study in French and German. It is available free of charge at [www.clefni.unibe.ch](http://www.clefni.unibe.ch).

## Listen to choirs

We have put together some audio recordings of Swiss choral music. Visit [www.revue.link/choirs](http://www.revue.link/choirs)





# Switzerland offers the world a Romansh-speaking AI model

The two Swiss institutes of technology and a partner launched the Apertus language model in September. The system was trained using words taken from 1,800 languages, including Swiss German and Romansh. Apertus has been criticised for its mistakes but experts believe it just needs time.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

I make my way down the pedestrian avenues of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL) campus, where I meet with Antoine Bosselut, specialist in artificial intelligence and multilingual issues for large language models (LLMs).

These artificial intelligence systems, packed with billions of units of data, can answer any number of questions, in a similar manner to ChatGPT. The 34-year-old professor, born in France and educated in the United States, knows his fair share



Antoine Bosselut of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne highlights the open-source nature of Swiss AI language model Apertus. It is all about democratising AI, he says. Photo provided

about creating machines that can master languages from Tibetan to Romansh. He is one of the fathers of the new Swiss AI model, Apertus.

## Its algorithms are freely accessible

In early September, the two Swiss institutes of technology and the Swiss National Supercomputing Centre (CSCS) announced the launch of the first multilingual open-source LLM developed in Switzerland. “Apertus represents a major step forward in transparency and diversity for generative artificial intelligence,” its crea-

tors say. What makes this LLM different from Llama 4 (developed by Meta), Grok (produced by Elon Musk) or even ChatGPT, which is an entire AI system? The elements making up the Swiss system – its algorithms and computation parameters – are freely accessible. Instructions are provided, whereas ChatGPT (for example) remains an opaque commercial model.

Another difference is that Apertus is not a general system. “Commercial models are not sufficiently specialised for certain specific purposes; however, the more specialised AI is, the stronger it becomes,” explains Bosselut.

Hospitals could use Apertus as a tool – its algorithms and its computation system – for training systems to analyse thousands of radiographs. The AI is capable of comparing data and detecting differences barely visible to the human eye.

## The search for secure data

The CSCS supercomputer trained Apertus using billions of data items found online. This data constitutes an LLM’s basic lexicon. For this model, data was only used when the owners did not expressly forbid the use of “crawlers”, robots that scrape the web for content, according to the EPFL. “If, for example, the ‘New York Times’ were to block access to its articles from certain crawlers, we would exclude it as a source for our data,” the professor says.

Apertus’s training was based on 15 billion words taken from 1,800 languages (there are approximately 50,000 billion words on the internet). In this case, the creators of the LLM

guarantee future users – such as businesses – that the data is reliable in the ethical and legal sense of the term, in contrast to the commercial stakeholders in AI, who refuse to publish their training data.

## Inclusion of languages such as Tibetan, Yoruba and Romansh

Large language models tend to focus on the traditional internet languages – English, French, Chinese, Japanese, etc. They use their calculators and algorithms to decode the languages’ structures. This time, however, the Swiss LLM searched for data in languages not often found on the internet, such as Tibetan, Yoruba, Swiss German and Romansh.

Since these languages are not widely “spoken” online, it was necessary to create content from adjacent languages. The idea is that the model should be able to learn Romansh in spite of the scarcity of data, because it has also been trained in Italian and there are similarities between the two languages, explains Bosselut. What is the objective? Apertus has been adopted by a school in Nigeria, for example, which can now develop its lessons on the basis of a language that is largely absent from other models. This corresponds to the EPFL’s aim of “democratising AI”.

## City of Zurich uses Apertus

To refine it further, the Swiss LLM was subjected to attempts to crack it at hackathons, a type of competition used to test systems. Students have used the tool to create services. It can be an interface for learning Ti-





betan. Some bright sparks have created a system called “Mut zur Lücke” (daring to have gaps). It tells students which parts of their lessons they can ignore without the risk of failing.

Zurich City Council also uses Apertus. “I am ZüriCityGPT and I know (almost) everything that’s published on the city’s website,” the site announces. With certain limits. How many armed police does the city have? Apertus is “unfortunately unable to help you”, the robot replies. GPT is a little savvier. “Around 1,700 agents are authorised to carry a service weapon, but there are no public sources indicating how many actually carry a weapon on a permanent basis,” it says.

Surprisingly, Apertus is provided without an interface that would let its users write prompts. This was not the objective: the LLM is there to act

as source material, according to its creators. However, anyone can try out Apertus via <https://publicai.co>, a platform developed by an American non-profit organisation.

### Mistakes and criticism

In Switzerland, the first feedback on Apertus centred on some glaring errors. “I am learning that Chillon Castle was originally a small, fortified village built on a limestone rock in the middle of the lake,” François Pilet, a journalist from French-speaking Switzerland and one of the founders of the investigation website Gotham City, wrote mockingly on LinkedIn. He is astonished at the price of the program. “At a time when the Swiss federal institutes of technology are tripling fees for foreign students, they had no qualms about spending ten million Swiss francs to finance what

has turned out to be a modern art performance!” he complains. The attack brought reactions from internet users, including Maxime Derian, a French artificial intelligence expert. “American and Chinese open-source models had a head start. So what? The first models from those countries were also far from perfect. Your Swiss model is local. The next versions will be better and it will be useful within two to three years,” the expert predicts. The fact that Apertus makes mistakes is because the model has not yet been sufficiently trained and does not have enough data. Antoine Bosselut shares this view: “We have done the lion’s share of the work, which involved building and training the model. The model is now available free of charge to future users,” the EPFL professor says in the model’s defence.

Like all AI language models, Apertus had to be trained. The Swiss supercomputer ALPS in Lugano was used for this purpose. Photo: Keystone



## Reunited at last

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) is one of the most important German expressionist artists. In 1933, he curated a showcase of his works at the Berne Kunsthalle. Over 90 years later, the Berne Museum of Fine Arts is hosting a new Kirchner retrospective entitled “Kirchner x Kirchner”. The highlight of the exhibition is the two oil paintings “Sunday in the Alps. The scene at the well” (from the museum’s own collection) and its pendant “Sunday of the Mountain Farmers” (from Berlin’s Federal Chancellery) being shown together again after more than 90 years. Both large-format (170 x 400 cm) tableaux hung in the entrance hall of the Kunsthalle in 1933 during Kirchner’s retrospective. But they have never been seen together since. These monumental works are now appearing side by side in Berne until January. Kirchner produced them in the mid-1920s in Davos, where he had been recovering from the First World War since 1917 – and would remain until committing suicide in 1938.

After the Nazis seized power, Kirchner’s art was increasingly banned and defamed. In 1937, many of his 600 confiscated works appeared in a Nazi propaganda exhibition of “degenerate art” in Munich.

As a symbol of reparation, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt decorated the German government offices with works by expressionist artists in 1975. He gave Kirchner’s “Sunday of the Mountain Farmers” pride of place in the cabinet room in Bonn. The painting moved to the cabinet room of Berlin’s new Federal Chancellery in 2001.

THEODORA PETER

[www.revue.link/kirchner](http://www.revue.link/kirchner)







Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: "Sunday of the Mountain Farmers", 1923–24, oil on canvas, 170 x 400 cm © Federal Republic of Germany



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner: "Sunday in the Alps. The scene at the well", 1923–24, oil on canvas, with its original decorated frame, 168 x 400 cm © Berne Museum of Fine Arts



## “Much more than just a lift”

No form of public transport in Switzerland offers a shorter route from A to B than the Matte Lift in Berne. But this elevator has a long history. “Lift boy” Peter Maurer is familiar with it.



DÖLF BARBEN

“You can take the stairs, if you want,” says Peter Maurer. Two women have just arrived at the yellow ticket kiosk. Both of them laugh. They know he is joking. Maurer, 69, is a retired radio journalist who works as the Matte Lift conductor. He refers to himself as a “lift boy”.

Observe Maurer around other people and you soon realise that he is a master of dry humour. “You can keep your hat on,” he mutters to one elderly gentleman, who smiles.

The Matte Lift is somewhat peculiar. Inside, you see the same buttons that are common to any lift. But the difference is that you cannot simply walk in and use it – even if you theoretically could. You first need a ticket, because the Matte Lift is a licensed, managed and subsidised mode of public transport.

This elevator also covers the shortest public transport route in Switzer-

land: 30 metres, or less than the length of a tram.

A joint-stock company manages the lift. “In legal terms, we are a cable car,” says its chair Marc Hagmann. “But we are indeed a lift, I hasten to add.” When the Matte Lift opened in 1897, it was regarded as a pioneering project. Over 700 people now use it every day, amounting to more than 20,000 passengers a month. A trip costs 1.5 Swiss francs – for dogs and bikes as well as people. Certain public transport travel cards are accepted. Operating the lift barely generates any profit, but the elevator is important for people here, says Hagmann, who believes that what they are doing has a social purpose.

It was Switzerland’s first publicly accessible electric passenger lift – and is comparable to Europe’s highest outdoor lift, the Hammetschwand Lift on Lake Lucerne. The Matte Lift is also situated outdoors. Instead of being

The Matte Lift “mountain station” towers high about Berne’s Matte district. The trip up and down originally took passengers from one end of the social pyramid to the other.

Photo: Peter Maurer



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful?

In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records

**This edition:  
The shortest public transport route in Switzerland**

contained within a building, it is attached to the outside of a wall. At the top of the wall is the Minster Terrace, the beautiful space situated on the southern side of Berne’s biggest and most important church.

The distance from top to bottom is only 30 metres – or 183 stairs. But the journey up and down originally took passengers from one end of the social pyramid to the other, explains Peter Maurer. Berne’s wealthy families resided up in the old town, while the poor – tanners, boatmen and rafters – lived down below in the Matte district. According to Maurer, some addresses on Badgasse used to be official bathhouses but had turned into brothel-like establishments over time. “The rich opposed construction of the lift because they didn’t want anyone from Matte encroaching on their lofty perch.”

There may be some truth to this. Historian Stefan Weber wrote about





## When the Matte Lift opened in 1897, it was regarded as a pioneering project.

In legal terms, the Matte Lift is a cable car – even though it is unmistakably an elevator.

Photos: Peter Maurer

the early days of the Matte Lift in his master's dissertation, describing how much opposition there was to the project. The idea that the burghers of the old town looked down – literally and figuratively – on those who lived in the Matte district is by no means far-fetched, he says, although the wealthy never explicitly voiced such a sentiment, instead expressing concern that the lift would ruin the appearance of the terrace wall and “spoil” the ambience.

Those times are long gone. People were grateful for the Matte Lift once it was built, viewing it as a symbol of progress. Levels of inequality have fallen dramatically since then, says Maurer. Affluent locals also live in houses at the bottom of the elevator these days. “Thanks to gentrification,” he says wryly.

Maurer began working as the lift conductor five years ago. “There are seven lift boys and two lift girls. All of

us are retired.” He does seven to eight daily shifts every month. He has always enjoyed talking to people. As a journalist, he was used to striking up conversations. “Now people talk to me instead.” The Swiss magazine “Beobachter” interviewed him once.

Maurer has a philosophical air about him. The story of the Matte Lift



The Matte Lift is “much more than just a lift”, says Peter Maurer – who, for many local people, is more than just a lift conductor.

Photo: Marc Lettau

is very much a metaphor for real life, he says. There will be ups and downs. He has had his fair share of misfortune – his wife died ten years ago. But lucky breaks too. Maurer, a single father, found his current job by pure coincidence. One day, while swimming in the River Aare, he spotted an old colleague on the river bank who said he was now working as a conductor on the lift. “It sparked something,” says Maurer, who decided that very evening to become one himself.

He found his calling. But the lift also found him. The job seems to suit him perfectly. “It is more than just a lift,” he says. “Much more.” And as if he cannot quite believe his eyes, he has started photographing it in his spare time. At all times of the day and the year, from every possible angle. He produces a poster every few months. The latest one, called “Sonnenblumenlift” (Sunflower lift), is situated at the bottom of the lift.

More than a lift. Just ask those who live in the Matte district and make frequent use of it. Some of the elderly residents like chatting to the conductors, says Maurer. “We are always happy to talk. We are the only people with whom some of them regularly come into contact.”

He and his colleagues can tell how people are doing just by engaging with them. Whether they are happy or have a lot on their mind. And if someone is not having their best day, Maurer will happily carry their shopping bag a few metres for them.

The lift is a beacon for people here, he says. Particularly in winter when it is still dark in the morning. When they open at 6 a.m., a light comes on at the top of the lift. “That is when they know that one of us is here.”

To view a selection of Peter Maurer's lift photos, visit our online edition at [www.revue.link/elevator](http://www.revue.link/elevator)



# The Federal Council defends the French language

Education is a tricky area in a country as culturally diverse as Switzerland – not least when it comes to language teaching. The biggest German-speaking canton, Zurich, plans to remove French from its primary school curriculum. This is a step too far for the federal government.

DENISE LACHAT

The Federal Council's reaction was direct and unequivocal. A few weeks before, Zurich's cantonal parliament had voted to remove French from its primary school curriculum and postpone it until upper school. This decision was a "worrying" development, wrote the federal government in a statement on 19 September 2025. Zurich's argument was that early French lessons had not been a success, with pupils only picking up a mediocre command of the language. Worse still, the curriculum had become overloaded. Children were no longer achieving the necessary standard in their own school language.

Zurich's decision has disrupted an uneasy status quo, whereby children start learning one foreign language in year 3 and another in year 5 of primary school. One of these is an official Swiss language, the other English. However, cantons can decide which language comes first. For years, French has had its work cut out in many German-speaking cantons. The cantons that teach English first are Zurich, Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus, Schaffhausen, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Appenzell Innerrhoden, St Gallen, Aargau, and Thurgau. A good few are considering postponing French until upper school, like Zurich.

The news from Zurich sent shock waves across French-speaking Switzerland, where all the cantons give priority to German as a matter of course and, if anything, are increasing, not cutting, the volume of German teaching. An exasperated Christophe Darbellay, education minister of the canton of Valais and chair of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education, wondered out loud how the Swiss can live together if they are unable to speak a common language.

Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, the francophone federal councillor responsible for education, believes, like Darbellay, that national unity is at stake. The many French speakers who make an effort with German would be disappointed to learn that German speakers evidently care less about Switzerland's other official languages, she said.

It is not as if French-speaking primary school children find German particularly appealing – all foreign languages pale in comparison to the lure of English, the all-pervasive lingua franca. Yet Article 70 of the federal constitution states that the Confederation and the cantons "shall encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities". Swiss from different language regions must be able to understand each other and want to live together irrespective of linguistic and cultural barriers – because Switzerland is a nation united by choice.



To safeguard multilingualism in compulsory education, the Federal Council wishes to expand the scope of the Languages Act. It sees two options: either enshrine the current consensus – another Swiss language at primary level, plus English – in law, or introduce a minimum requirement that gives the cantons more leeway. The other Swiss language would have to be taught from primary school until the end of lower-secondary level.

Why this flexibility? Since the founding of the Confederation in 1848, education has essentially been a matter for the individual cantons. To iron out differences in curricula, the federal government got the 26 cantons to agree on some key principles around 20 years ago. The idea behind this cross-cantonal accord, which voters also emphatically approved at the ballot box, was that school leavers across the country should have the same basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic at the end of compulsory education, even if they have moved from one canton to another.

Constitutionally obliged to intervene whenever the spirit of this agreement is breached, the Federal Council can now fire a warning shot to any cantons that may wish to break rank.

French lesson at a primary school in Bungertwies (ZH). The canton of Zurich plans to eliminate national language French from its primary school curriculum. Archive photo: Keystone, 2015



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## About dachshunds and playing cards

# +46%

Urban trends change all the time, and dogs are no exception. Dachshunds are all the rage at the moment. The number of sausage dogs in Switzerland has risen by 46 per cent in the last seven years. What used to be a popular canine among the prim-and-proper middle class is now the designer dog of choice for young urbanites. What would Otto the dachshund say?  
Grrrrr, woof, woof! Source: research by Tamedia



# 1 000 000

No changing trends here: the Swiss still love card games. And Jass continues to be Switzerland's undisputed national card game. Its most popular variant is "Schieber", which is played with a 36-card deck. It is unclear how many Swiss play Jass, but the following statistic gives an idea: over one million Jass sets are sold every year. That is enough for four million Jass players to partake in a game of "Schieber" simultaneously. Source: research by NZZ Folio

# 4000

But this is no game: more and more young IT specialists are losing their jobs. According to a study by the Swiss Economic Institute (KOF) at ETH Zurich, an unusually large number of digital natives in the IT sector are currently unemployed – because they have been replaced by AI. The number of young, jobless IT experts in Switzerland has doubled to 4,000 "surprisingly quickly", the study says.

Source: KOF/ETH Zurich

# 50 000 000



If your net assets are 50 million Swiss francs or more, you probably don't have too many job worries. In recent weeks, many around the country would have been forgiven for asking: where exactly in Switzerland do the 2,500 individuals with at least 50 million live?

The canton of Nidwalden has the highest density of super-rich: 22 out of every 10,000 inhabitants. Zurich leads the way in absolute terms, with 400. The canton of Fribourg is at the other end of the scale, with only 0.4 super-rich per 10,000 inhabitants. Source: data analysis by Tamedia



# Applauded, then poisoned – Peterli, the crowd-pleasing otter that met an unfortunate end

The story of Peterli the otter is a metaphor for Swiss attitudes to wildlife. Otters were regarded as pests in Switzerland until the middle of the 20th century. Peterli, the darling of Dählhölzli Zoo, became too popular for his own good – and paid for it with his life.

ROGER SIDLER

In 1953, the director of Basel Zoo, Heini Hediger, wrote an essay addressed to the Federal Council. The renowned zoologist wanted to express his appreciation for the revised Hunting Act that had come into force. The legislation marked a turning point: otters, along with other species like the skylark and the golden eagle, had finally been removed from the list of huntable animals and were now regarded as protected. It was a very late reprieve for the otter – the animal was almost extinct in Switzerland by that time.

## Extinction was the goal

Hediger thought the original legislation, dating back to 1888, had been a big mistake. “Everything must be done to facilitate the extirpation of otters, herons and other animals that threaten fishing,” read Article 22. Bonus payments would also be made for culling them, it said. The canton of St Gallen would pay 20 Swiss francs, Berne 15 francs and Vaud 40 francs per kill. The rewards were sizeable in the end, with cantonal and local fishing associations often paying an additional bounty on top. Hunters would have shown little interest in slaughtering otters otherwise, preferring stags, roe, and wild boar for their meat.

## A baby otter

Records show that 100 to 150 otters were shot each year in the 1890s, but the annual kill rate dropped to under ten during the Second World War. The last bounty payments were made in 1932. With no animals to kill, there was no sense in dangling any



Peterli in the arms of a young boy at the zoo – photographed by Heini Hediger. The otter had not yet grown to full size. Photo: Heini Hediger, 1938/1939

more financial carrots. Otters had completely disappeared by the middle of the 20th century.

Heini Hediger's efforts to protect local wildlife were inspired by the sad story of one otter. Hediger had been the director of Dählhölzli Zoo in Berne from 1938 to 1944, and it was there that he had grown fond of Peterli, the resident otter. Peterli had caused quite a stir one summer – much to Hediger's delight. The director could not think of a better advertisement for the zoo.

But how did Peterli end up at Dählhölzli in the first place? Head warden Werner Schindelholz relates that he stumbled across a blind baby otter while scouting the River Aare in June 1938. The animal could barely have been more than a few days old. Young otters normally open their eyes after about 30 days and only leave their burrow after ten weeks. It is, therefore, extremely unlikely that Schindelholz, an experienced hunter, came across this baby

simply on the river path. He probably located it in its den instead. Schindelholz had always dreamed of making such a discovery, and so decided to take the little otter – weighing 220 grams and barely 20 centimetres long – home with him. He proceeded to bring the creature up himself, naming it Peterli.

In autumn 1938, rumours spread around Berne of a man who would walk around town with an otter in tow, the animal obeying its master in the manner of a little dog. Schindelholz even took Peterli with him on the bus. This story has been corroborated. The otter once sat on Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta's lap, Hediger claimed in his memoirs. But no one can confirm this.

Schindelholz handed the otter over to Dählhölzli at the beginning of 1939. Peterli became an instant hit at the zoo, where he was the entertainer. Every afternoon, the otter would scurry over to the water fountain outside the public restaurant, where a crowd of people were waiting for him. Peterli would corkscrew through the water, juggle a ball, catch fish thrown in the air and retrieve objects. Schindelholz would then carry him over to his rudimentary stone-wall enclosure consisting of a pool and a rocky bank.

## The fence was pointless

The zoo soon discovered that hosting a celebrity otter had its drawbacks. There was nothing physically protecting Peterli in his pool from the whims of the general public. Visitors would tease the otter with their handkerchiefs, hats, umbrellas and walking sticks. Or throw toys at him –



items that were often dangerous to the animal. Neither a hastily erected wire fence nor “keep out” signs improved matters. When the zoo reported culprits to the police, there was an outcry around the city.

### Sugar cubes and razor blades

The cantonal government minister responsible for the zoo was irritated by all the fuss and called for an end to the otter’s “performances”. But Hediger the zoo director was having none of it. The quarrel died down a little once Peterli reached sexual maturity by the age of one.

The otter was no longer quite as obedient. But although Peterli was now behaving more like an otter would, he would still come scuttling along whenever Hediger called out his name. He continued to entertain – while visitors continued to throw all sorts of rubbish into the pool. Sugar cubes and other “treats”. But razor blades too. Poisoned bait landed in the enclosure on the night of 5 December 1941. Wardens found Peterli dead in his den the next morning. News of the otter’s demise spread in no time. Newspaper “Der Bund” published an obituary.

### Otter from Warsaw

One of Peterli’s two predecessors at the zoo, purchased for 550 francs when Dählhölzli opened in 1937, had already disappeared without a trace. Zoos in general were anything but safe havens for otters. By 1951, Zurich Zoo had reported its third otter fatality due to an attack by a member of the public. One of its otters had more or less been stoned to death.

Dählhölzli initially chose not to keep otters after Peterli’s death. This was until it built a new, safe space situated in the woods in a protected part of the zoo. Dählhölzli’s director



Monika Meyer-Holzapfel was ready to purchase an otter in 1949 but was unable to find one in Switzerland. She had to fly in Peterli’s successor from Warsaw.

### Hunted and misunderstood

After seeing what had happened to Peterli, Heini Hediger took matters into his own hands. In publications and on radio programmes, he did all he could to highlight the plight of a species that had been unfairly branded as a fish thief. Didn’t otters devour vast numbers of fish and hunt simply for the thrill? No, said Hediger, explaining that the otters at Basel Zoo each consumed 600 grams of food every day – not kilos of fish, as the press had written. Their diet also included frogs, crayfish, rats, mice and waterfowl.

When the otter became a protected species in Switzerland, Hediger concluded that the animal was

This diorama dating back to the 1930s at Berne’s Natural History Museum depicts how otters were viewed at the time: as hungry fish thieves. Photo: Keystone

virtually extinct. He believed that the opportunity to learn more about otters had been squandered. He also had no idea why otters were unable to breed in captivity. Knowledge in this area was limited. Switzerland still had between 80 and 150 otters

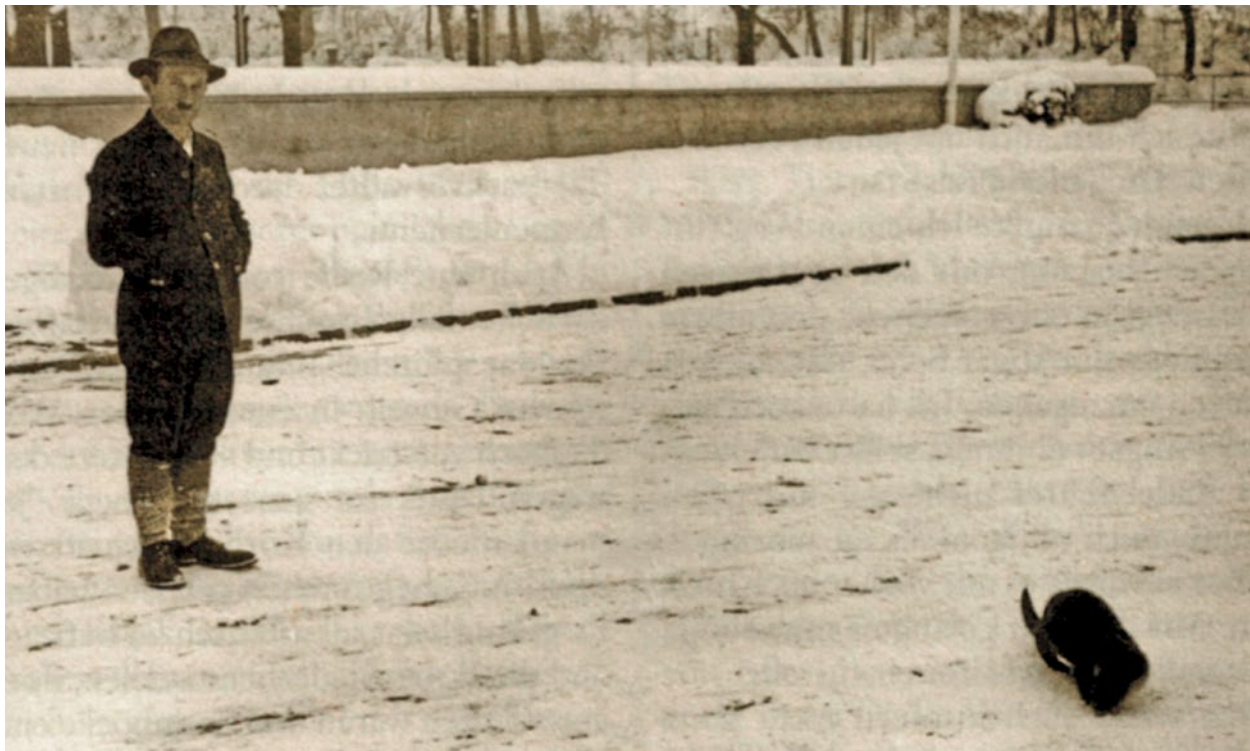
Hunter Rudolf Plattner holding a dead otter in Reigoldswil (1927) – there was a nice bounty payment for every kill.

Picture source: Basel-Landschaft cantonal archives, StABL PA 6281 02.01





Head warden Werner Schindelholz taking Peterli on a wander through the snow – photographed by zoo director Heini Hediger. Photo: Heini Hediger, 1938/39



at the time, divided into a few small clusters in Grisons, on Lake Neuchâtel and on Lake Biel. But despite government measures to protect them, these remaining otters also disappeared. Not only had their natural habitat been destroyed, but pollu-

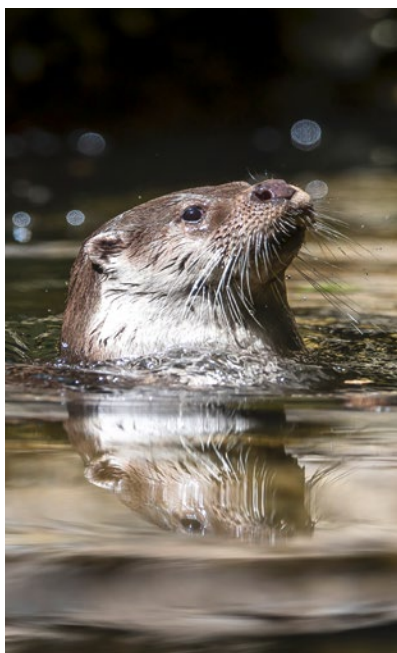
tion had also been an aggravating factor.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a group of man-made, toxic chemicals used in numerous products, had entered the otter's food chain, building up inside the animal. Consequently, the otters became infertile. Switzerland banned PCBs in 1986, but the last otter died on Lake Neuchâtel three years later. The species was declared extinct in Switzerland.

### Addendum

For two decades, the only otters in Switzerland lived in zoos or were preserved in museums. Nevertheless, 1985 saw the first-ever Swiss otters to be born in captivity. This was in Berne. Another litter was born one day later at Zurich Zoo. The species started to make a quiet comeback in 2009. There were individual sightings at first. Now offspring have also appeared. The outlook may be improving.

One of his predecessors was stoned to death at Zurich Zoo. There is no danger of this happening to Tom – photographed here in summer 2024. Photo: Keystone



### Animals in captivity The history of Dählhölzli Zoo

There are various ways in which to recount the history of a zoo. Historian Roger Sidler (born in 1968) tells the story from the point of view of the animals. Peterli the otter, Igor the tiger and Céline the wildcat lived at Dählhölzli Zoo in different eras. They and other animals in captivity are reflections of society. They are silent witnesses of history, raising fundamental questions about our relationship with wildlife and the natural world.



**“Zootiere als Zeitzeugen”**  
2024, Hier und Jetzt publishing house, 208 pages, ISBN 978-3-03919-623-4, CHF 34.00



## Harald Feller, the quiet hero



FRANÇOIS WISARD  
 “Harald Feller – Retter von Verfolgten, Gefangener von Stalin. Die Leben eines Schweizer Diplomaten in Budapest”, Elfundzehn-Verlag, 2025. 250 pages, CHF 29.80

He hid Jews at his consular residence in Budapest during the final months of the Second World War. He was tortured by Hungarian fascists and later captured by the Russians. The life of Harald Feller from Berne reads like a film script, but few will have heard of his story. Until now. Historian François Wisard sets out to right this wrong in his new book – an objective and well-researched account published in French and German.

Feller, a young lawyer, worked from 1943 to 1945 at the Swiss legation in Budapest. There he experienced the German occupation, the Hungarian Nazis’ seizure of power, and the bloody battle for the city, which ended in victory for the Red Army. Feller stayed put at the legation, of which he became head in 1944. From 1944, the – officially neutral – Swiss Vice-Consul in Budapest, Carl Lutz, issued diplomatic letters of protection to tens of thousands of Jews, rescuing them from deportation and death (see “Swiss Review” 3/2023).

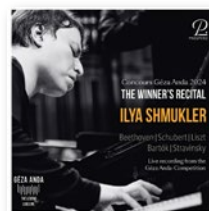
Feller was also a hero, saving the lives of at least 32 people. He gave exit and transit documents to some, he provided shelter at his residence to others. In doing so, he not only broke diplomatic rules but also put himself at great risk. The Hungarian Nazis interrogated and tortured him at the end of 1944. In February 1945, the Soviet secret service abducted Feller to use him as a bargaining chip with Switzerland. After one year in a Moscow prison cell, he was released in exchange for Russians detained in Switzerland. On his return, he learned that criminal proceedings had been launched against him.

The Swiss authorities were investigating whether he collaborated with the Nazis. This charge proved to be groundless, but Feller was never officially vindicated. Unlike Carl Lutz, who fought for recognition until his death in 1975, Feller withdrew from view. He worked as a public prosecutor in Berne and got involved in the theatre after retiring. Eva Koralnik contacted him in the mid-1990s. Koralnik was a child when Feller enabled her, her mother and her sister to escape to Switzerland. The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial honoured him at her request in 1999, naming the then 86-year-old as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations”.

Feller died in 2003. His life in the Swiss diplomatic service was like no other, Wisard writes. Yet Feller never considered writing his memoirs. He had only done his duty, he said.

SUSANNE WENGER

## Shmukler wows Zurich



ILYA SHMUKLER  
 “The Winner’s Recital”  
 Prospero 2025

Try playing Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 1 as an unmistakably 18th-century piece yet give the audience enough hints as to the greatness of a classical maestro who would define the early 19th century. Ilya Shmukler pulled this off in a live recital.

Not only that. Shmukler performed the piece – the recording of which is now available on CD – in the first round of the 2024 Concours Géza Anda in Zurich. The very round in which the competing pianists nervously pace around biting their fingernails in some dimly lit backstage room at the Musikschule Konservatorium in Zurich.

Unfazed, Shmukler played like a virtuoso. Then came the semi-final on a sweltering

June evening in Winterthur. Despite the presence of jury chair and master pianist Mikhail Pletnev, it was turning out to be a forgettable occasion. Then Shmukler walked on stage to perform Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 17. – another “threshold” piece. Composed in 1784, No. 17 already hints at the glorious No. 20 in D minor that was to follow one year later. Shmukler’s skilfully ambivalent interpretation won over the audience, sealing the young man’s place in the final at the Zurich Tonhalle. Indeed, everyone in the auditorium now knew that Shmukler would go on to win the competition.

The Géza Anda Foundation was created in 1978 in memory of Swiss-Hungarian pianist Géza Anda who died in 1976. It owes its existence to Géza Anda’s wealthy widow Hortense Anda-Bührle. The Concours Géza Anda has taken place every three years since 1979. What is remarkable yet telling is that none of the star prodigies have previously won the competition – pianists like Bruce Liu and Daniil Trifonov earned their stripes elsewhere.

But what sets the Géza Anda Foundation apart is that it helps its winners by providing them with concert appearances for three years – in Europe, South America, and Asia. Past winners include Konstantin Scherbakov, Alexei Volodin, Nikolai Tokarev and Dénes Várjon.

This list now includes Ilya Shmukler, who was born in Moscow in 1994. His live competition performances – pieces by Beethoven, Schubert, Liszt, Bartók and Stravinsky – have been recorded on an album. There is much to admire about this wonderful pianist, whom we will all hear much more about sooner or later.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS





## Switzerland to introduce e-ID

At the second attempt, voters narrowly endorsed the introduction of digital IDs (e-ID). This has positive implications for e-voting. Popular initiatives launched by digital petition may also be possible in future.

EVELINE RUTZ

The result was a cliffhanger of the type rarely seen in Switzerland. On 28 September 2025, a whisker-thin ballot-box majority of 50.34 per cent voted in favour of digital IDs (e-ID). Many of the yes votes came from Swiss Abroad, 63.93 per cent of whom gave a clear endorsement to the federal act that will pave the way for e-ID (see also “Swiss Review” 5/25). The result would have been even closer without expatriates having their say: only 50.14 per cent would have voted yes.

No one had expected such a nail-biter. There had been relative unanimity across the political spectrum, with both the Federal Council and a parliamentary majority approving the legislation. Only the SVP and EDU were categorically against it. Why the photo finish if the result was supposed to be a foregone conclusion? Opponents of the

bill say it was due to lack of trust in politics and the state. Political experts cite general unease about the rise of digitalisation. According to Lukas Golder of the GfS research institute in Berne, the pressure to modernise explains why Switzerland’s cities voted yes to e-ID. People in rural areas were more sceptical.

### Good news for the “Fifth Switzerland”

It is no surprise that Swiss Abroad were more in favour of e-ID than the rest of the electorate. With e-ID, they will be able to enjoy convenient online access to government services around the clock, regardless of where they are in the world. They will benefit increasingly from end-to-end digital services. E-voting, which may become completely paper-free one day, is one example. Swiss who live abroad would no longer have to rely on their identification code arriving by post on time. They may also be able to sign digital petitions for popular initiatives and referendums in future, thanks to the digital collection of signatures, known as “e-collecting”.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is delighted by what it calls an “important result for the ‘Fifth Switzerland’”. The referendum has seen one of its key wishes fulfilled. “Thanks to the yes vote, e-ID will now make it easier for people to communicate with Switzerland’s public authorities, irrespective of where they live,” says OSA Director Lukas Weber. The OSA hopes that simplified identification processes will also enable better access to private-sector services – particularly banking.

### Relief for the government

Federal Councillor and Justice Minister Beat Jans is also relieved that e-ID has been approved, explaining that the importance of online interaction is growing, as is the need for security. “In the offline world, so to speak, we like to know who we are dealing with. Why should that be different in the online world?” Jans said that the Federal Council had worked intensively and consulted with other parties to prepare for the introduction of e-ID – and that this groundwork had paid off at the ballot box. He will continue to oversee these efforts but takes misgivings from the no camp seriously. “We will have to try to win over the sceptics.” Jans also vowed to keep digital IDs voluntary.

This is precisely what opponents of e-ID want. Critics say that they will follow implementation of the scheme closely. “I will fight any further proposals to make digital mandatory,” said the SVP National Councillor Lukas Rei-



Following the tight result, Justice Minister Beat Jans hopes to win the trust of those who voted no.  
Photo: Keystone



mann, who noted that nearly half of voters rejected e-ID. Parliament, the Federal Council, and public authorities must apply the brakes, he added. Monica Amgwerd, who headed the no campaign and is the general secretary of the Digital Integrity party, also wants guarantees on data privacy and security to be enshrined in law. “These would go some way to placating the other 50 per cent who voted no,” she says.

### Still a lot to do

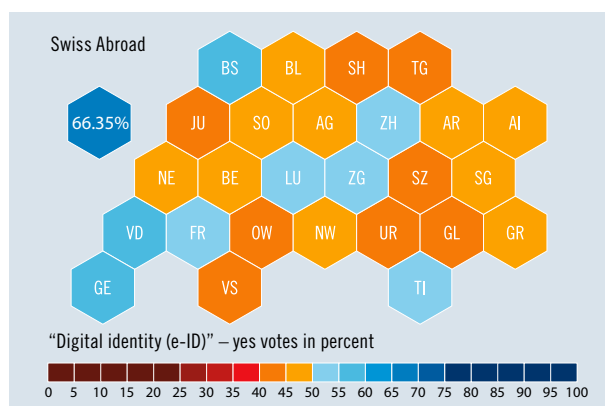
On 28 September 2025, voters approved a system that provides a trustworthy technical and organisational platform for data sharing. This infrastructure will also enable public authorities and the private sector to issue other electronic credentials, such as driving licences, residence certificates, criminal records excerpts, and degree certificates. E-ID should be available from the third quarter of 2026. There is still a lot to do until then, says Rolf Rauschenbach, who is the e-ID information officer at the Federal Office of Justice. The federal government must work to ensure that the infrastructure operates in accordance with the law. All stakeholders that use e-ID or wish to issue their own electronic credentials will then have to fulfil their responsibility. Rauschenbach: “At the end of the day, we need to convince the general public of the everyday benefits of using e-ID.”

### Homeowner tax to be abolished

There was less opposition to the second voting proposal on 28 September, with 57.7 per cent of the electorate approving the abolition of a tax that homeowners must pay on property they live in (imputed rental-value tax). Majorities in German- and Italian-speaking Switzerland favoured a reform of home ownership taxes, while voters in French-speaking Switzerland saw it differently. This divide had already become apparent during the voting campaign. Conservative federal parliamentarians in French-speaking Switzerland were also against abolishing the tax – unlike their colleagues from other parts of the country. People would invest less in their properties and the construction industry would suffer, they warned.

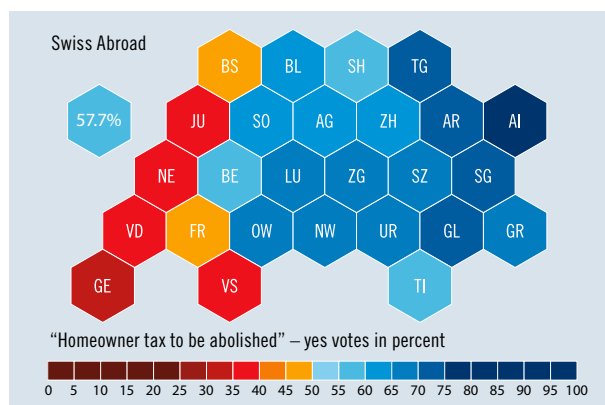
It was more the principle behind the tax itself that came under debate in German-speaking Switzerland, where there was disagreement over whether the levy was fair. Ultimately, the majority of voters decided that it was not. The Swiss Abroad emphatically agreed, with 61.3 per cent supporting the amendment, which also abolishes tax deductions on mortgage interest payments and maintenance

## Digital identity (e-ID) scheme to go online in 2026



A razor-thin majority – 50.34 per cent – approved e-ID. The Swiss Abroad emphatically agreed with this verdict, with 63.93 per cent voting yes. Rural voters, on the other hand, were particularly sceptical.

## Homeowner tax to be abolished



Anyone who owns a house or apartment will no longer have to pay tax on hypothetical income from their property, after 57.7 per cent of the electorate voted to abolish the concept of imputed rental value. Swiss Abroad supported the change, with 61.3 per cent voting yes.

costs. The changes will come into force in 2028 at the earliest. Furthermore, the amendments will also give cantons the green light to tax holiday homes – a concession to the Alpine regions, which had consistently opposed abolishing the homeowner tax until now.



## Vaud police: training under scrutiny

Since 2016, five Africans have died while in custody in the canton of Vaud. Racist messages exchanged between officers have also shocked the general public. The quality of training is being called into question. In French-speaking Switzerland, Savatan Police Academy is the subject of particular criticism.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Between 2016 and 2025, five people died during or following arrest by Vaud police officers. The victims were all of African origin, which adds racist undertones to the suspicion of unbridled brutality. The publication of racist and sexist messages by Lausanne police officers on WhatsApp groups this summer tarnished the force's image further. These messages led to eight officers being suspended from duty. According to public broadcaster RTS, one of them was present during the questioning of Mike Ben Peter in Lausanne on 28 February 2018. The Nigerian, suspected of drug trafficking, was pinned to the ground face down for several minutes. He died. The six officers involved in the affair were acquitted but the case is still pending before the Federal Supreme Court. "This succession of incidents raises questions," acknowledges Frédéric Maillard, analyst of police practices in Switzerland who advises Lausanne Police Commander Olivier Botteron. What is the common denominator? This is the question.

### The same theory for everyone

These incidents involved several Vaud municipal police forces (Lausanne, Morges and Chablais) as well as the cantonal police. Is there a systemic problem in these bodies? Maillard describes the Lausanne police as working in a very dense operating area with a strong sense of team spirit and being somewhat closed-off. It is composed of managers some of whom have been co-opted. The trainer furthermore believes that the same configuration applies to police forces in German-speaking Switzerland, with the same risks.

So what about police training? Switzerland's six regional police training colleges function according to a model devised by the Swiss Police Institute (SPI). Since 2020, the course has lasted two years: one year at school and one year in the field, culminating in a federal diploma. The theory features chapters devoted to ethics and to minorities. "Ethnic origin must never be the sole reason for stopping someone," the course materials say. Police examinations are standardised, but recruitment is at a cantonal level.

In Neuchâtel, for example, candidates must first sit basic tests: French, sport, general knowledge and a psychometric test. Around 25 applicants from a total of 300 are accepted per

"We have always said  
that Savatan is  
not suitable for training  
police officers"

Mike Berker, Vice-President of the  
Geneva Judicial Police Union

year. Candidates are placed in situations in which they have to exercise their authority. For example, an applicant might be asked to play a ticket inspector confronted with a passenger who is putting his feet on the seats. "If, after asking the person twice to remove their feet, the candidate becomes violent, they are clearly not right for the job," says Raphaël

Jallard, director of the Fribourg, Neuchâtel and Jura Interregional Police Training College (CIFPOL). "You have to build a connection with the person instead of getting into a conflict," the former commissioner explains. In his view, the police officer "must not be the problem". In both Fribourg and Neuchâtel, the recruitment process includes in-depth interviews with a psychologist, says Jallard. The primary aim of CIFPOL is "to train civic-minded officers".

### Training seen as too military

In the canton of Vaud, police go through Savatan Police Academy (VD), where aspiring candidates are trained with their counterparts from Geneva; Valais left the institution this summer. The centre, nicknamed "le Rocher" (the Rock), opened in a former military barracks in 2004 and has faced frequent criticism. The same is true of its director, Colonel Alain Bergonzoli, who was appointed in 2008. "We've always said it: the location is not suitable for training police officers. The training provided is military, patronising and focused on parades," complains Inspector Mike Berker, vice-chairman of the trade union for police officers Syndicat de la police judiciaire à Genève. He feels that the barrack's style and remote location make it hard to recruit the right people for the cantonal police. "The candidates are young, and they are trained in an environment where every human encounter is potentially a threat to such an extent that, when they arrive in Geneva, they have to review their whole approach to training," says Berker.

Frédéric Maillard believes that spending a year "at the Rock" suits





Cases of alleged police violence have led to public protests in French-speaking Switzerland. Pictured here: a vigil for Roger Nzoy Wilhelm, who died at Morges railway station.

Photo: Keystone

certain people very well but recalls that Geneva police officers disliked travelling out there, since the criminal police previously had its own separate training programme for future inspectors. “Before, the Geneva police used to admit university graduates and people from the service sector, where physical fitness was not necessarily the main consideration,” says Maillard. The idea of raising the flag at dawn every morning at the Rock, in the middle of nowhere, is believed to have put off these candidates. In 2016, Geneva sociologist Dominique Felder interviewed police commanders from Vaud and Valais. “The martial approach favours intensity over content, obedience over critical thinking and conformity over independence,” her report, cited by RTS, says. The document triggered a wave of reforms.

### Savatan to close

Some people trained at Savatan have reported that the instructors there made sexist and racist remarks. Did the atmosphere at Savatan have a negative impact on some of the police officers involved in the Vaud police incidents? “I’ve seen it myself: some candidates have been programmed by their training to see the other person as a threat, even when they are asking for help,” says Frédéric Maillard. According to a person who has visited Savatan as an external agent, the centre tolerated certain words or attitudes which, if they were left unchecked by the police forces, could lead to escalations. The cantonal police forces, for their part, do not seem overly concerned by the methods used at the Rock. “The causal link between the training at Savatan and the

WhatsApp groups affair within the Lausanne police is far from being established,” stated Cantonal Councillor Vassilis Venizelos before the Vaud Cantonal Parliament.

In the end, the cantons of Vaud and Geneva will be shifting the training of their police officers back to within their cantons by 2029. Savatan’s bad reputation is apparently not the reason behind this shift. It is more driven by a desire to centralise personnel and by financial considerations, given that the lease on Savatan – which is being rented out from the Swiss Armed Forces – is expiring in any event. The main concern is believed to be ensuring that police officers in French-speaking Switzerland all follow the same training process, since the methods and the culture differ from one canton to another.



# A law that has shaped everyday life for the “Fifth Switzerland” for ten years

In 2025, the Swiss Abroad Act celebrates its tenth anniversary. The Federal Act on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad, to give its full name, came into force on 1 November 2015 and promoted the visibility of and respect for the “Fifth Switzerland”.

AMANDINE MADZIEL

The Swiss Abroad represent 11.2 per cent (as of 2024) of the total Swiss population. This impressive figure encompasses individual lives and needs, as well as a wide variety of expectations and obligations. The Swiss Abroad Act is more than a simple law: it is an acknowledgement of the unique status of the Swiss Abroad. More than anything, for former member of the Council of States Filippo Lombardi, the sponsor of the law and current president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), it is the “awareness of having your own identity and equal rights with Swiss people living in Switzerland”. This equality was “won” in the wake of political struggles in favour of the Swiss Abroad. Indeed, Swiss emigration has not always had such a rosy image and has always been scrutinised by political movements and groups throughout history.

## Switzerland and the Swiss... Abroad

Until the end of the 19th century, Switzerland was a country of emigration. Net migration was negative, and there were multiple reasons for this. Poverty and the harshness of rural life drove numerous Swiss people to seek their fortunes abroad. Around the 1850s, emigration agencies were booming and promised to organise travel for potential emigrants, often exploiting their unfamiliarity with the situation. The business was lucrative, and there were over 300 such agencies across the Swiss Confederation at that time. A Federal Emigration Office was established in 1888 to keep an eye on these agencies.

For a long time, Swiss emigrants were seen as a burden by the authorities and received only meagre support. It was not until 1966 that the Swiss Abroad were explicitly mentioned in Article 45bis of the Federal Constitution, which improved their status by legally recognising them. In 1999, when the Federal Constitution was revised in its

entirety, Article 45bis was replaced by Article 40, which provided that the Confederation would contribute towards reinforcing the ties that bound the Swiss Abroad to each other and to Switzerland. It also stipulated that the Confederation would legislate on the rights and duties of the Swiss Abroad, particularly with regard to the exercise of their political rights at a federal level, the performance of their military and civilian service, assistance to persons in need and social insurance.

## The “Fifth Switzerland” as a resource

At the beginning of the 21st century, the image of Swiss people living abroad improved considerably and, according to Filippo Lombardi, the “Fifth Switzerland” began to be seen as a resource. Politics finally recognised the importance of this long-neglected population abroad. The Swiss Abroad Act (SAA) came from a parliamentary initiative from Ticino member of the Council of States Filippo Lombardi, and the dedication of Rudolf Wyder, OSA director at the time.

Prior to the SAA, the statutory provisions governing the Swiss Abroad were scattered across a wide range of laws, ordinances and regulations. So what message did the passing of the SAA send?

“The Act lent dignity to this constitutional mandate.”

Filippo Lombardi

Filippo Lombardi thinks it “lent dignity to this constitutional mandate”. The Act condensed and structured the rights and obligations of the expatriate population. It established individual responsibility as the fundamental principle behind the relations between the Confederation and individuals, to whom it guaranteed certain rights, whilst simultaneously defining the scope of the support available. It furthermore listed the various services that Switzerland can provide for its citizens residing abroad, whether temporarily or permanently.

What does the SAA contain, broadly speaking?

## Being entered on the register of the Swiss Abroad

The SAA defines the Swiss Abroad as anyone who has reported to the competent representation and has thus been entered in the register of Swiss Abroad. This registration is compulsory. You must be entered in the register of the Swiss Abroad to benefit from consular services and exercise your political rights.

## Obligation to register

When a child obtains Swiss nationality through parentage or adoption, that child must be registered with the competent representation by submitting the relevant official documents. They will then be entered in the register of the Swiss Abroad.

## Administrative services

The Act sets out the consular services that can be provided in various areas such as civil status, naturalisation, military matters and issuing identity documents.

## Exercising of political rights

Swiss citizens of legal age may exercise their political rights wherever they live, whether in a Swiss municipality or abroad. The SAA





governs the principles and methods by which the Swiss Abroad can exercise their voting rights. The provisions of the Federal Act on Political Rights apply subsidiarily. Swiss Abroad who hold the right to vote must nonetheless inform the competent consulate of their intention to exercise that right.

### **Social assistance**

Swiss Abroad encountering hardship can apply for social assistance, and their applications will be examined on an individual basis. If they are successful, the Confederation will provide social assistance abroad or help the persons concerned return to Switzerland.

### **Consular protection**

The Swiss Abroad Act covers how consular protection is granted to Swiss nationals abroad, including providing assistance in the event of a crisis or catastrophe. Since individual responsibility prevails, there is no right to consular protection that applies subsidiarily.

### **Celebrating the Act's tenth anniversary... what has it changed in practice?**

For Filippo Lombardi, the change has been very positive. The Act continues to be highly appreciated and serves those it concerns well. It is an instrument of democracy that, over the course of ten years, has proven its worth and shown it is still relevant today. No amendments to the Act have proven necessary so far, which illustrates its effectiveness perfectly. His only regret is that Swiss schools are not covered by the law, meaning they are less protected.

Overall, this concentration into a single law has reinforced and promoted the defence of the interests of the Swiss Abroad. The camp of the Swiss Abroad still needs defending, however, in a world that has become more complex, and in a Switzerland that has become more complex, as we all face an uncertain future.



## Federal votes

The proposals submitted to the people are set by the Federal Council at least four months prior to the voting date.

The Federal Council decided at its session on 5 November 2025 to submit the following proposals to the people on 8 March 2026:

- Federal Popular Initiative “Yes to an independent and free Swiss currency with coins or banknotes (Cash is freedom)” and the direct counter-proposal (Federal Decree on the Swiss Currency and Cash Supply) (BBI 2025 2885 2886)
- Federal Popular “Initiative 200 francs is enough! (SBC Initiative)” (BBI 2025 2887)
- Federal Popular Initiative “For a fair energy and climate policy: Investing for prosperity, jobs and the environment (Climate Fund Initiative)” (BBI 2025 2888)
- Federal Act of 20 June 2025 on Individual Taxation (BBI 2025 2033)

All information on proposals submitted to the people (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by the parliament, Federal Council etc.) can be found at [www.admin.ch/abstimmungen](http://www.admin.ch/abstimmungen) or in the Federal Chancellery app “VoteInfo”.



## Popular initiatives

The following federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for signatures in brackets):

- Federal Popular Initiative “For donation-funded refugee aid and protection (Refugee Aid Initiative)” (12 February 2027)
- Federal Popular Initiative “For the recognition of the State of Palestine” (14 April 2027)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in French, German and Italian at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch)

> Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen  
> Hängige Volksinitiativen



# New registration process – places to be allocated by lot

In response to the huge demand for places on its camps, the Youth Service is changing its registration system.

To ensure greater fairness for all concerned, and particularly for people in different time zones, 2026 will see the introduction of a new procedure for signing up to OSA Youth Service camps, whereby places will be allocated by lot.

Each person may only register once per camp. However, it is possible to register for more than one camp at the same time – albeit we will then ensure

child is drawn for more than one camp, they will be notified by email. The child can then choose to participate in one of the camps. The Youth Service must be informed of the child's decision within 24 hours. We will definitively confirm the child's attendance at their chosen camp thereafter.

If places are still available after the allocation process, there will be an additional registration phase from

## Holiday camps in 2026 – summer adventures in Switzerland

A summer camp in Switzerland is the perfect opportunity to enjoy adventures and Swiss culture in the great outdoors. Amid an Alpine setting, our young campers will spend an unforgettable, action-packed few days of interaction and exploration – from hiking, to swimming, to gathering around the campfire.

Organised by the OSA Youth Service, our 2026 camps are for young people aged 15 or older, offering them the chance to strengthen their own Swiss roots and make lifelong friendships. Here are our holiday camps at a glance:

- 4–17 July 2026: Sport and leisure camp in St Stephan (canton of Berne)
- 18–31 July 2026: Sport and leisure camp in St Stephan (canton of Berne)
- 18–31 July 2026: “Mountains and lakes”
- 1–14 August 2026: “Swiss Challenge”, throughout Switzerland

that no child participates in more than one camp per year. Ultimately, we want as many children as possible to enjoy our camps.

The registration phase will be open for 24 hours: from 10 a.m. on 13 January 2026 (Swiss time) to 10 a.m. on 14 January 2026. After you submit the registration form for any camp, you will receive an email confirming participation in the random allocation process. Camp participants will then be chosen by lot at the end of the registration phase.

Once this procedure has finished, you will receive an email telling you whether a place has been allocated and, if so, for which camp; or whether the person is on the waiting list. If a

2 p.m. on 14 January 2026 (Swiss time) to 15 March 2026, working on a first-come, first-served basis. Further information on all youth offers is available at [www.revue.link/youthoffers](http://www.revue.link/youthoffers). For additional details, please do not hesitate to contact the Youth Service.

MARIE BLOCH,  
OSA YOUTH SERVICE

**Swiss  
Community**

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland  
Phone. +41 31 356 61 25  
[youth@swisscommunity.org](mailto:youth@swisscommunity.org)  
[www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)





## Director Lukas Weber hands over the baton to Daniel Hunziker

Following an intense and eventful time at the helm, Lukas Weber is to step down as director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) on 31 December 2025. The OSA Executive Board wishes to thank Lukas Weber for his work and collaboration at a challenging time.

We are delighted to announce that Daniel Hunziker has been appointed as the new director. Daniel will start in his role on 1 January 2026 and will work with Lukas Weber beforehand to ensure a smooth handover.

Daniel Hunziker has wide-ranging professional experience in the financial and organisational fields. He was the Swiss honorary consul to New Caledonia, where he lived for many years as a Swiss Abroad himself.

FILIPPO LOMBARDI,

PRESIDENT OF THE ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

## SJAS to hold nine summer holiday camps and its first-ever information meeting in 2026



Photo provided

As the year ends, we at the SJAS are not only looking forward to the festive season. We are also excited about the winter holiday camp that is just around the corner. Our fun and frolics in the snow will barely be over before the next red-letter day on Tuesday, 13 January 2026 – the date on which the registration phase opens for our summer holiday camps.

To ensure that everyone is well prepared, our website contains all the latest camp locations, dates and applicable age categories. We have a varied schedule in store for summer 2026, with nine different holiday camps. Each of our Swiss Trips will explore a different part of the country, such as French-speaking or central Switzerland.

Our website now also features FAQs as well as clearer instructions for those who wish to sign up for the camps. What is more, next year will see the SJAS hold its first-ever

digital information meeting for parents. Anyone interested and available is welcome to join our Teams meeting on Thursday, 4 June 2026. Further details of the meeting will be available in the April edition of this magazine.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the administrative office at [info@sjas.ch](mailto:info@sjas.ch) or on +41 31 356 61 16.

ISABELLE STEBLER, SJAS

Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer  
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger  
The foundation for young swiss abroad  
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)  
Tel. +41 31 356 61 16  
[info@sjas.ch](mailto:info@sjas.ch)  
[www.sjas.ch](http://www.sjas.ch)



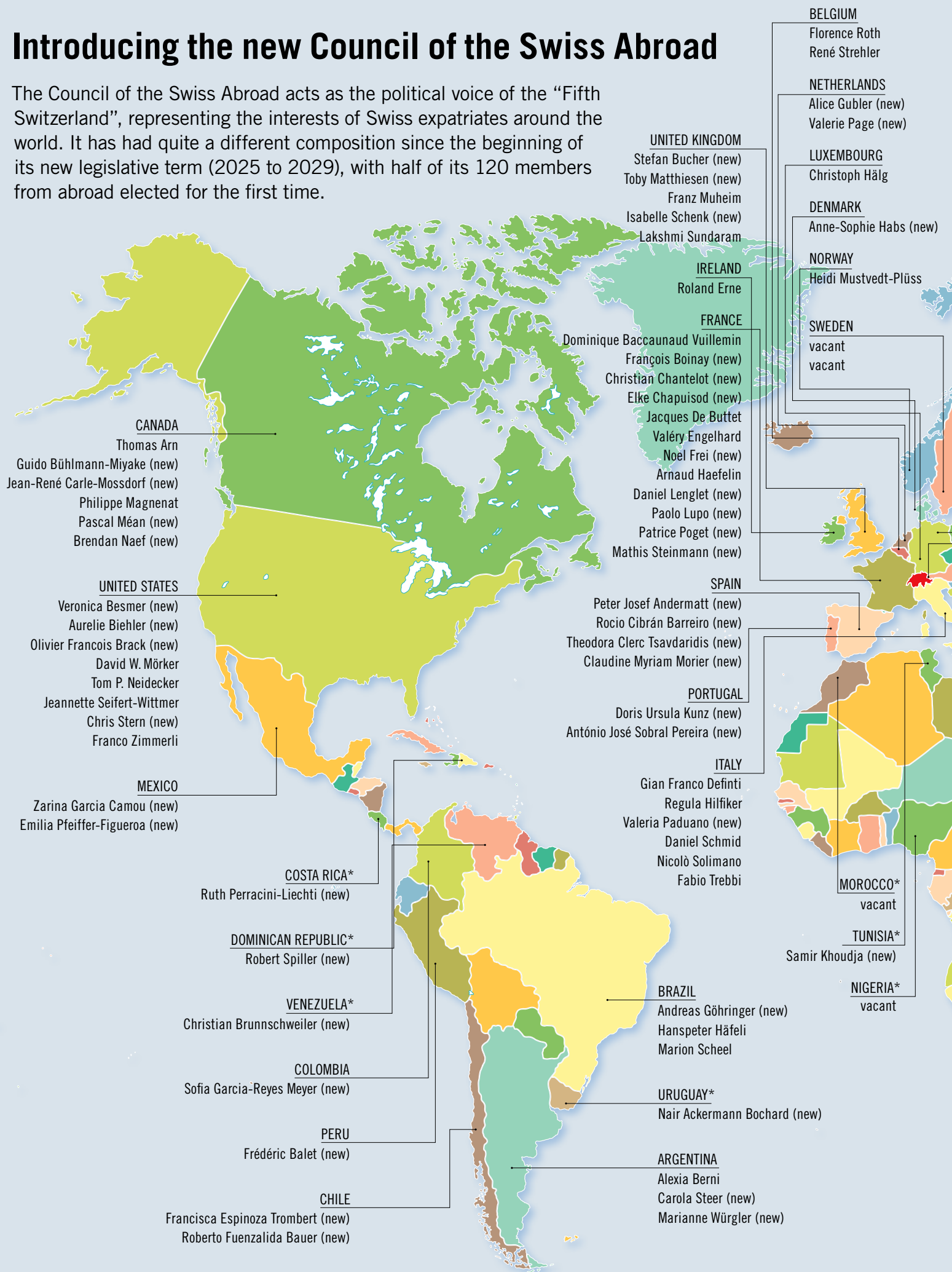
programme	date	age group	participants
Bern, Waldmatte (BE)	20 June to 3 July 2026	10- to 14-year-olds	42
Swiss Trip 1	24 June to 3 July 2026	12- to 14-year-olds	30
Wengen, Alpenblick (BE)	4 to 17 July 2026	12- to 14-year-olds	36
Rechberg (AR)	8 to 17 July 2026	8- to 12-year-olds	36
Swiss Trip 2	8 to 17 July 2026	12- to 14-year-olds	30
Langenbruck (BL)	18 to 31 July 2026	8- to 12-year-olds	36
Gastlosen, Jaun (FR)	18 to 31 July 2026	12- to 14-year-olds	48
Fieschertal (VS)	1 to 14 August 2026	10- to 14-year-olds	48
Swiss Trip 3	5 to 14 August 2026	12- to 14-year-olds	30

Lukas Weber represented the OSA at the 2025 SwissCommunity Days in Berne. He is leaving the organisation at the end of the year. Photo: Marc Lettau



# Introducing the new Council of the Swiss Abroad

The Council of the Swiss Abroad acts as the political voice of the “Fifth Switzerland”, representing the interests of Swiss expatriates around the world. It has had quite a different composition since the beginning of its new legislative term (2025 to 2029), with half of its 120 members from abroad elected for the first time.



#### GERMANY

Nike Bahlmann (new)  
Tessa Huber (new)  
Sonja Lengning  
Tobias Orth  
Paul Röthlisberger  
Sabrina Sadowska (new)  
Sarah Straubhaar (new)  
Luis Wyss (new)

#### LIECHTENSTEIN

Elisabeth Hasler

#### CZECH REPUBLIC\*

André Lienhard (new)

#### FINLAND

Martin Tapio

#### AUSTRIA

Robert Beitzlmeier  
Ivo Dürr  
Nicole Prutsch

#### HUNGARY

John McGough

#### CROATIA\*

Marija Komin

#### SERBIA\*

Lazar Bogojevic (new)

#### GREECE\*

Constantin Kokkinos

#### TURKEY

Nejla Ertekin (new)  
Helen Freiermuth

#### DOMESTIC MEMBERS

Jean-Luc Addor (new)	Robert Reich
François Baur	Estelle Revaz
Roland Rino Büchel (new)	Heinz Rhyn (new)
Katja Christ (new)	Elisabeth
Eric Dubuis (new)	Schneider-Schneiter
Alex Farinelli	Carlo Sommaruga
Giampiero Gianella	Nicolas Walder
Alex Hauenstein (new)	Beatrice Weber
Beat Kaser (new)	Laurent Wehrli
Filippo Lombardi	Peter Zschaler
Alain Meyer (new)	

#### YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Max Groenveld, Niederlande (new)  
Edgar Pourailly, Belgien (new)

#### THE NEW OSA EXECUTIVE BOARD

The OSA's strategic body, the Executive Board, consists of the following members:

Filippo Lombardi, President  
David W. Mörker, Vice-President  
Laurent Wehrli, Vice-President  
Gian Franco Definti, Quaestor  
Dominique Baccaunaud Vuillemin  
Roland Rino Büchel (new)  
Helen Freiermuth  
Sonja Lengning  
Franz Muheim  
Carlo Sommaruga  
Carmen Trochsler

\* The delegates from countries marked with an asterisk represent a constituency consisting of several countries.

More information on the Council of the Swiss Abroad and its duties:

[www.revue.link/asr](http://www.revue.link/asr)



#### JAPAN

Laïna Droz-dit-Busset (new)

#### CHINA

Daniel Heusser

#### HONG KONG\*

Joshua Spirgi (new)

#### VIETNAM\*

Claudius Rüeeggesser

#### PHILIPPINES\*

Oskar Greder (new)

#### UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Nico Tschanz (new)

#### ISRAEL

Adiel Guggenheim (new)  
Dov Guggenheim (new)  
Ralph Steigrad  
Zehorit Tzfira-Horn (new)

#### MAURITIUS\*

Thierry Bercin (new)

#### SRI LANKA

Rolf Blaser

#### THAILAND

Marco Rudin (new)  
Joseph Schnyder

#### SINGAPORE

Alexandra De Mello

#### EGYPT

Simone Höch

#### KENYA\*

Laura Salzmann (new)

#### SOUTH AFRICA\*

Hans-Georg Bosch  
Pierre-Yves Roten (new)

#### AUSTRALIA\*

Roland Isler  
Beat Knoblauch  
Carmen Trochsler  
Barbara Zingg (new)

#### NEW ZEALAND\*

vacant  
vacant



# The Swiss schools abroad

Swiss schools abroad and their umbrella organisation currently have growing concerns about their future. The austerity measures proposed by the federal government are threatening their existence around the globe.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

The 17 Swiss schools abroad recognised by the federal government are located on three continents in ten countries. They were originally founded by local Swiss communities abroad. Today, the Swiss Schools Act sets out the requirements for the recognition of these schools. The Federal Office of Culture is responsible for Swiss schools abroad within the Federal Administration and for calculating subsidy contributions. Each school is supported by a “patron” canton, which provides pedagogical advice and supervision.



Teaching in line with the Swiss curriculum – at a Swiss school in Barcelona, Spain.

Photo: educationsuisse

## The Swiss schools abroad

### Brazil

- Escola Suíço-Brasileira de São Paulo
- Colégio Suíço-Brasileiro, Curitiba

### Chile

- Colegio Suizo de Santiago

### China

- Swiss School Beijing

### Italy

- Scuola Svizzera Bergamo
- Scuola Svizzera Catania
- Scuola Svizzera di Roma
- Scuola Svizzera Rahn Education Milano

### Colombia

- Colegio Helvetia, Bogotá

### Mexico

- Colegio Suizo de México – Campus México CDMX
- Colegio Suizo de México – Campus Cuernavaca
- Colegio Suizo de México – Campus Querétaro

### Peru

- Colegio Pestalozzi, Lima

### Singapore

- Swiss School in Singapore

### Spain

- Colegio Suizo de Madrid
- Escuela Suiza de Barcelona

### Thailand

- RIS Swiss Section – Deutschsprachige Schule Bangkok

### Umbrella organisation

Educationsuisse, [www.educationsuisse.ch](http://www.educationsuisse.ch)

The tasks of Swiss schools abroad include not only bilingual teaching based on the Swiss curriculum but also promoting Swiss culture and supporting ties between young Swiss citizens living abroad and their homeland. They are also intended to be multicultural meeting places.

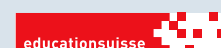
Heinz Rhyn, educationsuisse president, says: “Those who attend a Swiss school abroad not only benefit from the quality of the school and the teaching according to the Swiss curriculum and requirements, but also learn several languages and get to know different cultures. Swiss values and broadening horizons, innovation and networking, building bridges and strengthening community – this is what pupils and students learn in Swiss schools in addition to acquiring academic skills. Swiss school qualifications are recognised at all levels. This means that those who graduate with a Swiss Matura can also study at Swiss universities.”

Since the founding of its predecessor organisation, the umbrella association educationsuisse has developed into a central interface in the school network and represents the schools’ interests vis-à-vis authorities and politicians in Switzerland. Its main tasks include promoting and connecting schools, advising and supporting graduates of these schools and, more generally, young

Swiss citizens living abroad who are looking for post-compulsory education in Switzerland. educationsuisse is also the employer of Swiss teachers at Swiss schools in Europe.

Financed mainly by parental contributions, Swiss schools act as ambassadors for Switzerland in their host countries by imparting Swiss education and values and strengthening ties between Switzerland and other countries. This long-established presence would be jeopardised by the drastic reduction in subsidies, and decades of networking and development work would be undone.

educationsuisse is the umbrella organisation of the 17 Swiss schools abroad recognised by the federal government. educationsuisse advises and supports both young Swiss Abroad and students from Swiss Schools abroad, who wish to pursue their education or training in Switzerland.



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1/800 000



The "Fifth Switzerland" is a colourful, varied and multilingual puzzle with well over 800,000 pieces. Today's puzzle piece is ...

... **Vanessa Meister, 44 years old, living since 2010 in Kerala, India. She is a designer and creative consultant.**

#### What does it take for you to be able to say, 'This is my home'?

For me, it was when I felt I could have children in India. It took a while until I understood the culture well enough and found a daily rhythm that made it possible to imagine giving birth here. It was worth the wait – and to break a few healthcare clichés: both my birthing experiences were amazing and unforgettable.

#### Is it possible to have several homelands?

Yes, I believe it is. The connection with the homeland that raised me – Switzerland – and the one that welcomed me – India – is of a different nature but equally powerful. Both are filled with deep respect, immense gratitude, and a loyalty that runs very deep. It's not about choosing one or the other – it's about embracing both with trust and strength.

#### How and when do you show your Swissness in your everyday life?

I am punctual and reliable – in life and in work. I think I inherited that steadiness and quiet power

from the mountains and rivers of Switzerland.

#### Which dish makes you think of home?

At Christmas, my relatives usually send me a parcel that makes me cry profusely every time: Nusstängeli biscuits, Paprika chips, Thomy mustard, Gruyère cheese, Tourist chocolate, and Cenovis (food paste). I savour these and share them – very sparingly – only with my closest friends.

#### Do you ever feel like a foreigner when you visit Switzerland?

Yes, I do. Not exactly a foreigner, because I blend in easily and know how to adapt and play the role, but I do feel a little disconnected at times – and probably behave terribly according to Swiss rules of politeness.

#### What do you miss the most about or from Switzerland?

I miss the change of seasons – that moment when summer turns to autumn, the chill in the air, the golden light. I miss long walks and cycle rides with my dad and coming home afterwards to a warm cup of tea and chat with my mum.

#### Do you have any specific expectations of Switzerland?

I expect Switzerland to stay sharp, remain at the top of its game, set a high bar, and push for a fairer world. I have a sense that Swiss people can achieve a lot and should carry that responsibility with care. I also hope that a certain rigidity can soften into gentleness – without losing structure.

[www.revue.link/puzzle3](http://www.revue.link/puzzle3)

## BE PART OF THE PUZZLE

Would you like to create your own puzzle piece and add to our colourful, varied and multilingual picture of the "Fifth Switzerland"?

Visit [www.revue.link/puzzle3](http://www.revue.link/puzzle3) to see all the previous puzzle parts and find out who to contact if you wish to join in.

Each person featured in the puzzle series receives an extensive list of questions, of which they can pick out and answer a minimum of four and a maximum of eight.

## Discussion

### Switzerland in shock following Trump's tariff announcement, "Review" 4/2025

#### ANDREA ESSLINGER, THAILAND

Consumers in the US will have to pick up the tab for the tariffs – not the Swiss economy or Swiss exporters. The duties affect goods destined for America as opposed to those going out. This will mainly fuel US inflation. And Swiss exporters will simply have to find other markets. The US under Trump is not a reliable partner and will soon go bankrupt.

#### SUSANNE BOSS, OLDEN, NORWAY

The answer is quite simple: slap a reciprocal 39 per cent tariff on US goods! Then let's see how the Americans fare.

#### RUDOLF MEGERT, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

Shocking indeed! The whole world, including the American people, will now end up paying for Washington's trade deficit. Switzerland was hit where it hurt, because it keeps blaring out that it is a wealthy country (which it hasn't really been for some time).

#### JEAN-MARC SALVADÉ, SPAIN

The US tariffs are not some form of punishment or sanction. It is normal that Donald Trump should defend his own interests. Just as the Swiss government should defend our interests, propose alternatives or take countermeasures. Or are our politicians too weak to protect our nation's interests?



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