

APRIL 2026

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad

**Needle and thread – the seamstress
who crafts Swiss folk dresses by hand**

**How much growth can Switzerland take?
Electorate to vote on population cap**

**New church sound – the metal fans
recognised as an official congregation**

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SVP Chaos
Initiative
NO!

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Photo: Stéphane Herzog

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Cover photo: The festive folk dress of Innerrhoden is known for its intricate detail and the exquisite craft that goes into its making. Photo: Silvan Bucher, Agentur syn, Stans

Crowded house?



Switzerland’s population is growing – quicker than many people would like. Our number increases by one person every six minutes and 54 seconds. It sounds like a fun fact from the Federal Statistical Office, but it also speaks to one of the most contentious issues of our day.

Over nine million people now live in Switzerland. It could be over ten million in a few decades’ time. For many, this shows how successful our economy is. For others, it is a cause for concern. The “No to a Switzerland of 10 million” initiative, which will be put to voters on 14 June 2026, advocates setting a population cap and drastically curbing immigration.

Without migrant workers, many things that we take for granted would grind to a halt. People from all around the world work in our hospitals, on our building sites, in our restaurants, at our research centres – and elsewhere. They contribute to prosperity and help to mitigate the effects of an ageing population. But growth comes at a price in our towns and cities – where there are housing shortages and packed commuter trains, and where pressure on green spaces and infrastructure is mounting.

It can also be crowded in places you least expect. Nearly 100,000 privately owned boats are registered in Switzerland (see page 16). Finding a mooring in Geneva is just as hard as landing an apartment in Zurich. The waiting list for a rare and precious berth is long. I wonder: shall we also cap the number of boats?

But the initiative is no laughing matter for the more than 530,000 Swiss who currently live in European countries. Free movement makes it easy to live, work or start a company in the European Union. An end to free movement could have a material impact on the residence status and everyday lives of many Swiss Abroad. Ultimately, capping the country’s population at ten million would lead to this scenario. This is why the 14 June vote is also a test of public sentiment regarding Swiss-EU relations.

The associated debate also touches on a lot of what makes Switzerland successful. But Switzerland also has other stories to tell. Like the seamstress who creates made-to-measure Swiss folk dresses (see page 12). Or Metalchurch, Switzerland’s first-ever recognised congregation based on a specific style of music (see page 26). Tradition and innovation in juxtaposition – maybe this is the key to our nation’s success. After all, there are two sides to every story, aren’t there?

WALTER SCHMID, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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



How much immigration can Switzerland take?



Never before have so many people lived in Switzerland. A flourishing economy makes our country a popular destination for immigrants. This brings prosperity, but problems too. Will Switzerland, a small country, soon be too full?

THEODORA PETER AND SUSANNE WENGER

Over nine million people now live in Switzerland, three times more than at the beginning of the 20th century. A high birth rate fuelled rapid population growth in the post-war years; high immigration has had the same effect since the turn of the millennium. Since 2002, people from countries in the European Economic Area have been able to take up employment and settle with their families in Switzerland. The principle of free movement of people between the European Union (EU) and Switzerland also allows Swiss to work and settle in the EU. Over 530,000 Swiss Abroad currently live in European countries.

Opening up the labour market has led to a significant influx of migrants into Switzerland. Since the start of the 2000s, the Swiss population has grown by two million to its present figure of over nine million. Some 2.4 million people – or around 26 per cent of the total population – now live in Switzerland without a Swiss passport.

Two thirds of this contingent come from European countries, particularly Italy, Germany, Portugal and France.

Population of ten million expected by 2040

According to Federal Statistical Office (FSO) forecasts, Switzerland's resident population is likely to reach ten million by 2040 and 10.5 million by 2055, if immigration continues at current levels. With the number of people retiring set to exceed the number of people entering the workforce in the coming years, fresh labour will be needed to keep the Swiss economy going. Immigration slows demographic ageing, but it cannot stop it completely. The over-65s today account for about 20 per cent of the total population. This proportion will have risen to 25 per cent by 2055.

Apart from keeping the economy afloat, migrant workers pay taxes and help to fund the state pension. Yet there is disquiet about the population

growing so quickly. Switzerland is overcrowded, say critics. The impact of an expanding population is mainly felt in urban areas, where housing is becoming increasingly scarce (see pages 8 and 9 for more information). Around two thirds of Switzerland's inhabitants live in the densely populated Central Plateau region between Lake Geneva and Lake Constance, where the roads are gridlocked and the trains, buses and trams full to bursting at rush hour. Politicians are aware of this: the Federal Council plans to invest over 40 billion Swiss francs in the transport network by 2045.

SVP initiative to limit Swiss population

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) believes that population growth has gone too far, calling it "uncontrolled". Its "No to a Switzerland of 10 million" initiative, also known as the sustainability initiative, will be put to voters on 14 June. Specifically, the SVP proposes a constitutional amendment to the effect that Switzerland's permanent resident population may not exceed ten million before 2050, whereby the government would have to take measures to curb migration once the population reached the 9.5-million threshold – a possible scenario even

The impact of a growing population is felt mainly in urban areas, with more and more people commuting between work and home. Pictured above: Lucerne railway station
Photo: Keystone



Switzerland is currently home to more than nine million people, two thirds of whom live in the densely populated Central Plateau region. Pictured right: View of Zurich from Uetliberg hill. Photo: Keystone

within the next five to ten years, based on FSO forecasts. In tabling the initiative, the SVP ultimately wants Switzerland's agreement with the EU on the free movement of people to be terminated – which is what would happen if the government was unable to “negotiate or invoke any exemption or protection clauses” in the event of the threshold being exceeded.

The Swiss electorate rejected a proposal to scrap free movement six years ago, with around 57 per cent voting no to the SVP's “For moderate

do more to exploit the potential of Switzerland's domestic workforce.

Sensitive juncture in Swiss-EU relations

The SVP's latest initiative once again endangers Switzerland's bilateral agreements with the EU, says the government. Terminating the agreement on free movement would also invalidate the other treaties, while Swiss living in the EU could face negative consequences if their right of residence is tied to free movement.

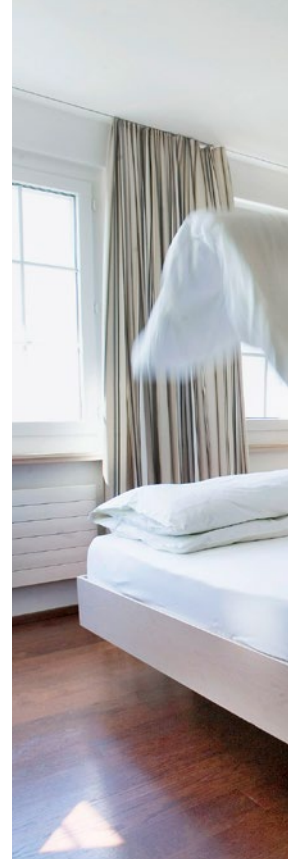
The Federal Council and a majority in parliament as well as industry groups and trade unions reject the “radical” initiative, which, its opponents say, jeopardises jobs and prosperity in Switzerland. The government concedes that immigration and a growing population pose “challenges” for Switzerland – not least on the housing market, which is why additional public money has been ear-

marked for the construction of affordable homes.

The 14 June vote comes at a sensitive juncture in Swiss-EU relations. This March, the Federal Council and the European Commission put pen to paper on a new package of agreements that were agreed by both sides after protracted talks (see “Swiss Review” 2/2025). This package updates and expands the existing bilateral treaties. It also includes a safeguard clause that will allow Switzerland to limit immigration if “serious economic or social problems” arise. Details of when and how this clause would be triggered are still unclear and likely to be up for debate. Parliament still has to ratify the new treaties, after which voters are expected to give their verdict in 2028.

In tabling the initiative, the SVP ultimately wants an end to free movement between Switzerland and the EU.

immigration” initiative in 2020. Yet the anti-immigration SVP managed to win at the ballot box back in 2014, when a narrow majority of voters – 50.3 per cent – narrowly endorsed the “Against mass immigration” initiative. However, the quotas to which foreign workers would have been subject were not introduced, because the government and parliament did not want to risk a breakdown in relations with the EU. The stated alternative was to



More than half of immigrants come to Switzerland for employment. They contribute to economic growth and keep the country's healthcare services running.

Migrants play an important role for Swiss employers. Foreign workers build roads and houses, care for patients in hospitals, develop software and create new products. Some 1.9 million people from abroad were working in Switzerland at the end of 2025, accounting for 35 per cent of the country's total working population – up from 25 per cent 20 years ago. Meanwhile, the domestic workforce is shrinking: baby boomers (the generation born from 1946 to 1964) have retired or are about to retire, and low birth rates mean there is a shortage of young people entering the job market.

Eighty per cent of foreign workers come from countries in the European Economic Area. Around a million workers have arrived in Switzerland since the introduction of free movement. The bilateral agreements with the EU, which came into force in 2002, give Swiss companies seamless access to the European single market – and allow them to recruit professionals from EU/EFTA countries with ease. Most

foreign nationals work in labour-intensive economic sectors – like catering or building. In professions such as bricklaying and floor laying, they account for as much as 60 per cent of the workforce.

Demand for skilled people is particularly high in the booming construction sector, where companies are operating at full capacity and increasing their income. More homes are being built, and the public sector is investing in new infrastructure. The Swiss Contractors' Association ex-

According to a Swiss National Bank study, Switzerland faces a shortfall of around 400,000 workers over the next ten years.

pects demand for workers to continue rising – not least because there is a shortage of trainees learning skilled trades. Thousands of apprenticeships remain unfilled every year in construction, mechanical engineering and hospitality.

Shortfall persists despite training drive

There is also continued demand for workers in the growing healthcare sector, where 188,000 new jobs were created between 2010 and 2020, according to a report by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). Around a third of these positions were filled by people from EU/EFTA countries. The proportion of foreign personnel is considerably higher in Ticino and the Lake Geneva region, where many healthcare employees commute from Italy and France every day.

Over 40 per cent of practising physicians in Switzerland are foreign, of whom half come from Germany. To reduce this level of dependency, the Confederation and cantons have increased the number of places for medical students at Swiss universities in recent years. But this training drive only goes so far in meeting demand, as figures from 2024 show: whereas 1,400 medical graduates re-

Migrants play an important role in the Swiss labour market. Most work in labour-intensive areas, e.g. restaurants and hotels (pictured left and middle).

Photos: Keystone



Pictured right:
Challenging shifts – the growing healthcare sector also relies on foreign workers.
Photos: Keystone

Views of a migrant who came and then left

Journalist Anne-Careen Stoltze, 48, emigrated to Switzerland from Germany in 2006. She returned to her home country with her family 13 years later.

“I moved to Switzerland for love. When I met my future husband in 2004, I was living and working in Bremen as an intern at a newspaper. Matthias, who originally comes from Hamburg, was already working in Berne at the time. Swiss hospitals were actively targeting medical students in Germany for placements and assistantships.

After two years of commuting between Berne and Bremen, we made Switzerland our home. While Matthias continued with his training to become a specialist physician, I was able to get into journalism. The media crisis then hit Switzerland, and I lost my job – at the very time I was pregnant. They gave me a payout, but this was the first time I realised how little mothers are protected and how little support parents receive.

Balancing work and family is easier said than done in Switzerland. Both our children attended day care, which

cost a lot of money. Many mothers – and, increasingly, fathers – reduce their working hours to look after the family. Given the shortage of skilled workers, Switzerland should create parameters to exploit the potential of its female workforce more effectively. I understand why people are debating immigration and overcrowding. I reported a lot about urban development during my time as a local journalist.

After leaving journalism, I trained in science communication and worked at the Bern University of Applied Sciences for several years. Switzerland became a second home for our family. Our children, who were born in Berne, see themselves as Swiss. Yet I never felt like I truly belonged. On the one hand, it was because people always regarded me as German due to the language. But I also missed being able to vote and make a difference as a citizen. We were in the process of applying for citizenship when my parents and parents-in-law fell ill in Germany. This shifted our priorities. If we wanted to be closer to our parents, it was clear that we needed to return. I also wanted to be active in politics and civic society back home. In 2019, we

moved to my grandparents’ house which we had renovated in Brandenburg. My husband kept his medical practice in Berne, where he now works and lives three days a week. I myself have been working in my local district as an international relations officer since 2025, bringing people together across the German-Polish border.”

“Balancing work and family is easier said than done in Switzerland.”





ceived their Swiss diploma, over 3,200 foreign medical degrees were recognised by Swiss employers in the same year.

The domestic workforce is nowhere near able to fill all available positions in the nursing sector either. Since Covid, which stretched hospitals and healthcare staff to the limit, the skills shortage has become more acute. From around 11,000 before the pandemic, the number of job vacancies had risen to over 14,000 by the beginning of 2025. Industry associations report that a third of nurses leave the profession feeling demoralised. It is estimated that Switzerland will have about 30,500 fewer nurses than it needs by 2030 – in hospitals, in care homes and in the home care sector.

The “Strong healthcare” initiative, approved by voters in 2021, requires greater investment in education and further training as well as higher wages, including better overtime pay for night and weekend shifts. Yet parliament is still working out how this can be put into practice, given the additional costs that it entails.

Immigration numbers down

HR solutions provider Adecco indicated in its latest Job Index that the skills shortage has been easing

since 2024 in other areas of the economy, such as IT, financial services and the commercial sector. This is down to a stalling global economy as well as economic uncertainty, says Adecco.

Economic performance also feeds into immigration figures: almost 100,000 more people moved to Switzerland than left in 2023, the year in which net migration reached its peak. Net migration has been falling since then – by 15 per cent to 83,000 in 2024 and by ten per cent to 75,000 in 2025.

The labour market continues to attract many new arrivals, but not all of these migrants remain in Switzerland for good. Job cuts, high living costs, no work-life balance, or difficulties integrating are possible reasons why foreign workers return to their home country. Family can also be a factor. This was the case for journalist Anne-Caren Stoltze who arrived in Switzerland from Germany in 2006 and who returned home 13 years later (see page 7).

From an economic perspective, Switzerland will still need to attract foreign labour in future. Otherwise, the working-age population will shrink when more people retire than enter the workforce in the coming years. This demographic shortfall is expected to equate to around 400,000 workers over

the next ten years, according to a Swiss National Bank study.

Businesses want growth

Without the migrant workers “that the country so desperately needs”, Switzerland risks losing business to other countries as well as a decline in essential services, write the *économiesuisse* business federation and the Swiss Employers’ Association in a position paper on the SVP’s “No to a Switzerland of 10 million” initiative, which will be put to voters on 14 June.

There are concerns that economic growth, reflected in the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), could also slow. Switzerland’s GDP per capita has risen by 23 per cent since 2002 – and this has brought more prosperity. How much immigration has contributed to economic growth cannot be accurately quantified. But there is little dispute that free movement adds value.

Yet there is much less agreement on what impact workforce-driven immigration has on the environment and society. How much growth does Switzerland need to maintain living standards? The debate is ongoing.

Pictured left: Demand for skilled people from abroad is particularly high in the booming construction sector. Photo: Keystone

Above: This student in Lausanne is making a point to highlight the housing shortage. Photo: Keystone



Pictured right: Cooperative housing project at the Koch site in Zurich – building about 360 affordable apartments for 900 people. The federal government wants to promote non-profit housing developments. Photo: Keystone

The flip side of growth and immigration is clearly evident on the Swiss housing market, where living space is becoming scarce and rents are going up. There is no consensus on how to solve the problem.

Switzerland's housing crisis is particularly acute in Zurich, the country's biggest city, where booming demand collides with lack of availability. Whenever an affordable rental apartment comes on the market, hundreds jostle to view it. Pictures of would-be tenants waiting in long queues do the rounds on social media. A disheartening state of affairs. Such scenes have become symptomatic of an increasingly urgent problem in Switzerland.

is one out of every 100 apartments – a clear indication of an overheating market. This shortfall not only makes finding a place harder but also pushes prices up.

Regional differences, social impact

The housing shortage mainly affects cities like Zurich, Geneva and Basel – conveniently located urban centres that are particularly popular among EU migrants. Yet pressure is also felt in smaller cities and in popular resorts in the mountains, according to a government report. In some Alpine regions, locals and non-local workers are now struggling to find housing – partly because of the proliferation of second homes and short-term Airbnb rentals.

The cost of renting has been rising for over 20 years. New leases are especially prone to price jumps – of two to six per cent a year since 2022, depending on the region. If you are renting for the first time or moving, you

can expect to pay significantly more compared to long-term renters who stay put. A country in which nearly 60 per cent of households live in rented accommodation is sensitive to such market forces. This has real-life consequences. A 2025 ETH Zurich study shows that low-income households in the five biggest urban areas are being priced out. But middle-income households are also being hit by housing costs eating up an increasing portion of their monthly budgets.

Immigration, regulation, speculation

It is no surprise that housing is a matter of heated debate ahead of the vote on the SVP's "No to a Switzerland of 10 million" initiative. Protagonists put forward different explanations and solutions, depending on their political persuasion. The SVP cites "uncontrolled" immigration. It says that supply still falls short of demand despite more housing being built in the last 25 years, and that Switzerland is also losing its green spaces: "It is not that we are not building enough. The problem is too many immigrants." Meanwhile, the Liberals (FDP) believe that regulation is acting as a drag. Planning requirements and objections are de-

"It is not that we are not building enough. The problem is too many immigrants."

SVP position

Zurich, home to major job providers in the banking, insurance, tech and service industries, has a record-low vacancy rate, with only one out of every 1,000 apartments available, mostly high-end. The national figure



laying building projects, they lament. The party wants to expedite procedures and relax noise restrictions.

Profit-driven speculators have accelerated rental hikes, says the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP), which is collecting signatures for an initiative to combat extortionate rents as well as calling for more non-profit housing schemes. However, a popular initiative aiming for a fixed proportion of affordable homes failed at the ballot box in 2020.

A complex range of factors

Studies and market analyses show that immigration exerts pressure on the housing market, but that other factors also need to be considered. According to federal data, immigration was a major driver of household growth between 2014 and 2023, fueling demand. But average living space per capita also played a role, increasing from 45 to 46.6 square metres in the space of ten years.

The introduction of free movement between Switzerland and the EU in 2002 pushed up the price of renting and home ownership until 2016, according to a 2023 study by the University of Fribourg. Its impact waned thereafter, because the market responded and new homes were built – albeit not enough. Experts note that

the housing market is a complex system based on supply and demand as well as building law and economic parameters. From 2018, construction activity declined not least as a result of high costs and a shortage of building land.

Addressing concerns over residential density

Scarce building land is not only down to Switzerland's topography. It is also enshrined in law. In 2013, voters approved the revised Spatial Planning Act, which limits construction on greenfield sites and encourages inward urban development. It would be possible to create living space for two million people without developing new land, says a 2025 study by the Sotomo research institute. Yet projects to increase residential density often face resistance at local level. People fear being squeezed out of their neighbourhoods, or a decline in their quality of life.

Innovative concepts address these concerns, showing how it is possible to build higher and more densely while creating green spaces. One urban planning model is the “ten-minute neighbourhood”, where jobs and everything you need for daily life are in close proximity. Developed by ETH Zurich and funded by the Swiss Na-

tional Science Foundation, the idea is designed to help cantons and municipalities implement the Spatial Planning Act.

An annual 40,000 to 45,000 new homes have been created in Switzerland in recent years. According to estimates, 30 to 50 per cent more is needed to balance supply and demand. Although the number of building applications has increased slightly of late, the government realises that there is no quick fix. Together with cantons, municipalities and the property and construction sectors, it has drawn up an action plan consisting of 30 measures.

These range from more efficient authorisation processes to better use of building land. But they are only recommendations for the time being. More tangible is a proposal that the Federal Council has put to parliament: a fund that issues loans to non-profit housing developers being bolstered to the tune of an extra 150 million francs between 2030 and 2034, in order to facilitate the construction of low-cost homes. The Swiss parliament will vote on the scheme this year.

More affordable homes and an action plan to combat the housing crisis – this is how the government hopes to blunt the SVP's “No to a Switzerland of 10 million” initiative. Will voters be on board? We will find out on 14 June.

Building higher and more densely is one way to create living space without developing new land. Modern developments – like this one in Schlieren (canton of Zurich) – prioritise short distances and green spaces.

Photo: Keystone

Stanislas Wawrinka



Tennis player Stanislas Wawrinka announced in December 2025 that this would be his final year on tour. “It’s time to write the final chapter of my career,” the Vaud native said. When he was invited to Melbourne in January at the age of nearly 41, “Stan the Man” showed what he was still made of against world number 9, American Taylor Fritz. The “Stanimal” finally lost — in style — in the third round of his last Australian Open, the same competition where, in 2014, he had first eliminated Novak Djokovic, and then Rafaël Nadal in the final.

He has had quite the career since the first time he hit a ball with his elder brother in Saint-Barthélemy (Vaud). Wolfram, their father, ran the farm at a centre for the disabled. Stanislas, who was born in 1985, says that he drew his inner strength from this environment. Four years earlier, about 180 kilometres away, another boy had been born: Roger Federer. “To many people, I’m the Swiss guy who loses,” Wawrinka once told a French newspaper bitterly.

Roger has surpassed Stan at home, but the latter is still extremely popular abroad. He is, after all, the man who beat Federer, Nadal and Djokovic. He won Roland Garros, playing in some very Swiss red-and-white checkered shorts. “I go swimming in them, I play tennis in them and afterwards I sleep with them on,” he joked.

The differences between Wawrinka and Federer have been well documented. The Vaud player frequently earns praise for his approach towards his adversaries. For example, Stan did not celebrate at Roland Garros in 2015 when he beat a Rafaël Nadal in poor form. What will Wawrinka do when he has hung up his racket? Sell shoes? “I still have dreams in this sport,” the Swiss said in his characteristically reserved style.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Tourism at a record high

Swiss hotels reported a total of 43.9 million overnight stays in 2025, eclipsing the previous record set in 2024. In particular, there was a sharp increase in the number of foreign guests, most of whom came from Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The cantons with the highest number of overnight stays were Zurich, Berne, Grisons and Valais. (WS)

Increase in foreign trade

Swiss foreign trade grew in 2025 – despite US tariffs. Exports rose by 1.4 per cent to a record 287 billion francs. Imports also increased by 4.5 per cent to 232.7 billion francs, the second-highest figure ever recorded. The main drivers were pharmaceutical and chemical products, which account for over half of all exports. (WS)

VAT hike?

The Federal Council wants to set up a dedicated fund to help strengthen Swiss security, recognising that the defence ministry needs to bolster air defences and improve counter-drone and other electronic warfare systems. To generate this additional funding, it proposes raising VAT by 0.8 per cent over a period of ten years, starting in 2028. The constitutional amendment needed to effect this increase is due to be put to voters in 2027. (WS)

Record-breaking Olympics

Switzerland celebrated a historic medal haul at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina, its athletes putting in their best-ever performance at a Winter Games with a total of 23 medals: six golds, nine silvers and eight bronzes. The Swiss finished eighth in the medal table, ahead of Austria and just behind Sweden. (WS)

Brien/Brinzauls habitable again

Residents of Alpine village Brien/Brinzauls in the Albula Valley (canton of Grisons) can finally return to their homes after 62 weeks. The evacuation order effectively exiling them from their own village since November 2024 has been lifted. This is after monitoring showed that Brien/Brinzauls was no longer in acute danger. “Swiss Review” reported on the village’s plight in edition 5/2023. (WS)

Like wearing a piece of Switzerland

Armed with needle and thread, Monika Bögli spends many hours at a time preserving a Swiss tradition at her Neuenegg workshop in the canton of Berne: she creates made-to-measure women's folk garments by hand.

DENISE LACHAT

Monika Bögli's skirt flashes bright blue as she opens the door to her workshop in Neuenegg with a flourish. She would never call it a skirt – "gown" is the correct term. A blue-and-green striped apron covers it at



the front. Bögli has a white blouse under the bodice, with a filigree brooch attached to it in the centre. Around her neck is a black band of exquisitely meshed silk. You would be forgiven for thinking that this dainty woman is dressed for an occasion. Far from it. Bögli is wearing her everyday Bernese folk garments. "This is how women in rural areas used to dress for work," she grins. Farming families would use wool or linen – home-produced materials robust enough to withstand countless washes.

Hand-made with pride

Bögli's attire mainly consists of hand-woven half linen and takes many hours to create by hand – 50 to 70 hours, she calculates. The bodice is a particular challenge to make, with its three layers – wadding, lining, fabric – and additional trimming. With the effort that goes into it, not to mention some of the fine, handcrafted materials used (e.g. silk), the finished ensemble does not come cheap: around 2,200 Swiss francs for a brand-new everyday garment and 3,000 francs for a festive dress, with the additional

silver jewellery costing at least another 3,500 francs. Put one of these outfits on and you feel like a different person. The lining in the bodice alone changes your whole posture. Bögli is proud and honoured to be wearing hers. "It just fits perfectly. You feel properly dressed."

The invention of a tradition

Pride and honour are closely intertwined with the sense of carrying on a tradition dating back to medieval times. People in Switzerland almost stopped wearing traditional dress completely at one stage. Economic growth following the birth of the federal Swiss state in 1848 fuelled the rise of industry, transport, technology and trade, as machines took over work once done by hand. Swiss men and women, particularly in the cities, increasingly looked abroad for fashion trends to follow. Grassroots customs and traditions only regained popularity at the end of the 19th century, with old costumes being acquired, documented and reproduced. Three specific milestones then played a role. The Swiss Heritage Society was founded in 1905 to protect the nation's cultural heritage, i.e. not only



Switzerland's historic buildings, but also its traditional forms of dress. At around this time, people in various cantons began handcrafting folk garments again based on old designs. In 1926, this movement set up its own

Monika Bögli in her everyday Bernese folk dress. The red and blue aprons on the hanger are made of damask silk – part of a Bernese festive ensemble.

Photo: Denise Lachat

representative body in Lucerne called the STV, or Swiss traditional costume association, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The STV wanted to rehabilitate traditional dress as a timeless, simple, unifying element in everyday life. Finally, the 1939 national exhibition in Zurich showcased folk garments from all corners of the country – to project the image of a strong, independent Switzerland in uncertain times and symbolise national belonging, unity and identity.

Such clothes are no longer commonly worn, except on special occasions. Folk costume festivals, variety shows, weddings and christenings, says Bögli. And official functions. As guest of honour at the 2010 Swiss

Former President of the Swiss Confederation Doris Leuthard in her traditional Aargau dress at the 2010 Swiss National Costume Festival.

Photo: Keystone



National Costume Festival in Schwyz, then Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard wore a traditional dress from her home canton of Aargau.

A sense of belonging

We again live in uncertain times. After folk costume and traditional dancing and yodelling clubs lost members during Covid, folk costume tailors from various cantons now report revived interest among young people.

Some 700 different traditional costumes are worn around Switzerland, varying in colour, tailoring and ornamental detail. In clockwise order: Appenzell Innerhoden, Toggenburg, Uri and St Gallen.

Photos: provided/Silvan Bucher



Traditional garments are now given as confirmation gifts, while hoteliers like to deck their children out in regional costume. Generally speaking, a lot of the purchases are made by people in rural areas. Monika Bögli also has young female clients, who have often inherited their grandmother's dress and want her to adjust the size for them. Or customers who want to mark a significant birthday with something beautiful.

Bögli used to wear traditional dress herself as a little girl. She would go folk dancing and later joined a group of folk costume enthusiasts – like her mother and grandmother before her. For her, wearing traditional dress shows that she belongs – to her family and to her region. “These clothes are part of my culture,” she says. “They express regional identity.” Indeed, not only does every Swiss canton have its own specific traditional costume, there are dozens of local variations that vary in colour, tailoring and ornamental detail. No fewer than 700 different costumes have been identified around Switzerland.

An expression of a diverse culture

Some dresses are similar, says Sissi Sturzenegger, who chairs the STV's folk costume committee. But those with a discerning eye recognise the differences. For example, a wheel-shaped bonnet called a “Radhaube” is worn in the cantons bordering Lake Constance – but also on the other side of the Swiss border. To mark its own anniversary, the STV wants to showcase the rich diversity of Swiss traditional dress to a wider public – at events like the Schweizerisches Trachtenchorfest (Swiss folk costume choir festival) on 5 and 6 June in Sursee (canton of Lucerne), but also in the form of a lavishly illustrated book showing styles from all the cantons. They say that folk cos-

“These clothes are part of my culture. They express regional identity.”

Monika Bögli



tume is a “certificate of origin that you wear over your body”. This also rings true far beyond Switzerland's borders: during her training, Bögli was involved in making dresses for two Swiss Abroad who live in Canada.

Bögli only produces costumes from the Bernese Mittelland, the Emmental Valley and Obere Aargau – she would never consider garments from any other regions or cantons. All her fellow tailors follow this same principle. Little room for artistic interpretation is allowed anyway: every costume has its own template detailing the respective cut and accessories. You can only choose the colour and maybe also the patterns yourself, says Bögli, pointing to a whole stack of folders containing patterned fabrics and costume descriptions. “It was a real hotchpotch before the 1930s. Then things improved.”

One day a week

Bögli trained for three years as a garment designer and did a further two

Monika Bögli stitching a three-layered bodice by hand – a job that takes many hours. Photo: Denise Lachat

years of specialist training. There are still plenty of people who want to follow this same path, she says, but apprenticeship opportunities are becoming rare. It is now possible to do modular training in the canton of Berne, with specific courses on making bodices and blouses, for example. “But families are key to passing on the tradition.” For a start, Bögli's own children enjoy wearing traditional costumes. Her three daughters, aged 26, 28 and 30, were only three years old when they first appeared in folk dress at family celebrations and other important events. And they still wear folk dress on such occasions to this day.

Bögli still has other things to do today – and disappears briefly into an adjacent room to change. She normally spends one day a week in her workshop, and the rest of the time taking care of the livestock and the shop at the family farm in Neueneegg. Bögli returns in her decidedly 21st-century jeans and blouse, her Bernese folk dress now safely under wraps until next time.

“Das Schweizer Trachtenbuch” contains more pictures like the ones on page 13. It will be published on 15 June 2026 to mark the 100th anniversary of Switzerland's traditional costume association. Further information about the book: www.trachtenbuch.ch



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FDFA OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS
The editorial responsibility for the “Notes from the Federal Palace” section is assumed by the Consular Directorate, Innovation and Partnerships, Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Berne, Switzerland. kdip@eda.admin.ch | www.eda.admin.ch

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furrer@airpage.ch | www.airpage.ch

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EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Nema Bliggenstorfer (NB)

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revue@swisscommunity.org
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More hens than humans in multinational Switzerland

21

Twenty-one per cent of Swiss have at least two nationalities, up from 14 per cent in 2010. In French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino almost twice as many people have more than one nationality than in German-speaking Switzerland. And most dual nationals either hold Italian, French or German citizenship. Such plurality is increasing.

Source: Federal Statistical Office, 2024 survey

76

Society may be becoming more polarised, but 76 per cent of Switzerland’s inhabitants believe that direct democracy is our country’s most important unifying factor. Immigrants and expats think that Switzerland is a more united country than the Swiss themselves would have you believe.

Source: Sotomo, Barometer: Zusammenhalt in der Schweiz, 2025

98

But remember: taking your shoes off is key to successful integration. In Switzerland, 98 per cent of us do this before we enter our (or anyone else’s) home. Yet half of all households argue every month about keeping the rooms tidy.

Source: Sotomo, IKEA Home Life Monitor 2025

1,040,400

Switzerland has 1,040,400 hectares of agricultural land. The many meadows and fields used for farming equate to a quarter of the country’s total area and are the mainstay of domestic food production. No wonder then that with 13.4 million chickens, Switzerland has more hens than humans.

Source: Federal Statistical Office, 2025



75,000

Some 83,000 people left Switzerland in 2025, with net immigration to the country standing at 75,000. The number of asylum applications fell to 25,781. This is an area attracting heated debate (see “Focus “on pages 4-10). In a land of multiple nationalities, more than a few hens and considerable codetermination, maybe it is because identity is more than just a number.

Source: State Secretariat for Migration, 2025



The nautical life gets Swiss pulses racing

Switzerland features dozens of lakes that can be sailed by fans of water sports. It has one sailing boat for every 353 inhabitants, the fifth-largest number in the world. The country also has its nautical heroes.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

In comparison with other countries, Switzerland has among the highest number of boats per inhabitant. It may not have a sea, but it does have 150 sailable waterways and offers good conditions for taking to them, particularly in a sailing boat. “The mountains create thermals, which are ideal for the sport,” according to Olivier von Arx, president of the Association des propriétaires de bateau [Swiss boatowners’ association] (APB) in Geneva. “The first regattas on Lake Geneva took place in the 19th century, where transport ships competed,” says Bernard Schopfer, himself a sailor and the author of several books, including on the regattas at this world-famous boating spot. The specialist provided media



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records
Today: Switzerland has a high concentration of boats.

support for Team Alinghi in the run-up to Switzerland’s first victory in the America’s Cup in Auckland in 2003. At that time, several sailors from the New Zealand team, who held the title, had defected to the Swiss team.

New Zealand, a seafaring nation, wanted to see Switzerland disqualified from the competition, arguing that the country had no access to the sea and that the Swiss campaign – run by billionaire Ernesto Bertarelli – was driven solely by money. Alinghi’s media team countered. “The rules of the America’s Cup state that you have to have a sea inlet. The Rhine counts,” explains Bernard Schopfer. Alinghi Switzerland had highlighted the considerable number of boats per inhabitant in Switzerland. “We also told the life

stories of Swiss sailors such as Pierre Fehlmann,” the Geneva native recalls.

Fehlmann, who won the Whitbread Round the World Race in 1986, is a leading light in Swiss sailing. “He was the first great Swiss mariner. He made sailing famous and sailors like Dominique Wavre [who has sailed around the world ten times] took up the sport thanks to him,” remarks Daniel Rossier, former commodore of the Cruising Club de Suisse (CCS), which has 6,000 seafaring members. Today, Switzerland has at least another two top-level sailors to its name: Alan Roura, the youngest competitor in the 2017 Vendée Globe, and Justine Mettraux, who finished eighth in the 2025 edition of this solo round-the-world race in 18-metre IMOCA





“The first regattas on Lake Geneva took place in the 19th century, where transport ships competed.”

Bernard Schopfer, seafarer and author



“This country has people with the financial means to buy a boat; there are also plenty of lakes and getting to the water is easy.”

Mathieu Verrier, sailor and naval architect

yachts. Both are also incidentally from Versoix, a small Geneva town on the banks of Lake Geneva!

“The accomplishments of Swiss sailors and Alinghi’s victory in 2003 really inspired people,” says Vaud sailor Mathieu Verrier, who has crossed the Atlantic in a 6.5-metre boat. He designed and built his sailing vessel for the 2009 Mini-Transat, a gateway race to the larger high-sea regattas. Another Swiss was involved: Geneva native Fabrice Germond, who works in the same Lausanne naval of-

ice, VMG Yacht Design, that the two founded. Mathieu Verrier sums up the status of sailing in Switzerland: “This country has people with the financial means to buy a boat; there are also plenty of lakes and getting to the water is easy,” he says. Switzerland has 20 lakes on which you can acquire your sailing licence. The champions are the residents of Vaud, who have over 15,000 registered boats. Next come Zurich (with 10,000) and Geneva (with 6,000). Mathieu Verrier owns a small catamaran, which can

be sailed solo. He admits that he plans his life around the weather forecasts, “with a schedule dictated by the wind”.

For some Swiss, lakes form the direct horizon. The country can lay claim to two of the largest lakes in western Europe: Lake Geneva and Lake Constance. People who boat on lakes are divided into two main if not opposing groups: those who sail and those with motorboats. The latter are growing in number. “A motorboat is like a car with two moorings; it has a steering wheel and burns fuel,” says Mathieu Verrier. Sailing, whose enthusiasts are gradually dwindling, requires extensive training. It is also time-consuming, admits author Bernard Schopfer, who devoted his Tuesday evenings to regattas on Lake Geneva for 30 years. He remembers returning to Geneva from Lutry on Sunday nights, by motorboat. “With a motorboat, you can head off from Lausanne to go and eat perch in Thonon, in France. With a sailing boat, you never know when you’re going to get there,” explains Verrier.

What about taking to the high seas? “The difference is that lakes have no salt,” jokes the Vaud naval architect, who nonetheless warns that a lake like Lake Geneva can be subject to violent winds. “During the most recent world-record round-the-world yacht race, the strongest winds were encountered in Brittany, towards the end, with speeds reaching 80 km/h, but we’ve had 140 km/h on the lake in the past,” he recalls. Lakes can prove dangerous, as shown by the accident that occurred on Lake Zug in June 2024, where the wreck of a sailing boat was found 80 metres down, with the body of a sailor. The craft had sunk during a regatta. In 2019, strong winds descended on the Bol d’Or, the largest freshwater

In 2003, the Swiss Alinghi team made history by beating title-holders New Zealand in the America’s Cup. This was the first time a European team had won the Cup.

Photo: Keystone



regatta in the world. For an hour, winds of over 100 km/h scattered the fleet, causing 212 of the 465 boats registered to abandon the race, but there were no victims.

These conditions are reminiscent of the open sea, and many Swiss people take to the sea for the first time every year, after obtaining their sea licence. Getting a licence involves taking 14 weeks of theory lessons and passing an exam. You then need to actively sail 1,000 nautical miles, the equivalent of 1,850 km at sea, validated by skippers. Every year, around 800 Swiss men and women sit this exam, according to Daniel Rossier, former boss of the CCS. “The Swiss licence is very demanding,” states the 82-year-old sailor, who has travelled across every sea. He says he was always amazed by the number of fellow Swiss he met in ports, particularly in the Caribbean.

Another challenge is finding somewhere to moor. You need a berth if your boat has a keel or if it is too large to be easily placed in dry dock in the off-season. But people’s dreams of boat ownership are being stymied by a chronic lack of these berths. In late 2025, Geneva had a waiting list of over 1,000 people, according to the authorities. Paradoxically, only a minority of boats are



regularly taken out on the water. The solution would be to share boats, or even remove the ones that are permanently moored, “but we cannot hold people to a timer”, says the head of APB, Olivier von Arx, who claims he never misses an opportunity to go sailing. “I go 300 metres out, I cut the engine and I enjoy the wide-open space and the peace and quiet,” he says.

Passing down a berth in the family, on the other hand, is still subject to very strict conditions. This means there is a permanent shortage of mooring berths. “And that’s a good thing,” remarks Bernard Schopfer, pointing out that Swiss lakes have only a finite area.

A nation of freshwater sailors

According to official data, there were 94,372 private boats registered in Switzerland in 2024, of which 63,446 were motorboats and 23,385 sailing boats. This means that Switzerland had one sailing boat for every 353 inhabitants, more than in France (380) or Italy (394). This score placed Switzerland fifth globally, with Norway (92) and New Zealand (173) arriving in first and second place. (SH)

Switzerland has one of the highest concentrations of boats in the world. But getting your own berth is no easy feat. In Geneva alone (image), there is a waiting list of over 1,000 people. Photo: Stéphane Herzog

He held up a mirror to Switzerland – and only narrowly avoided destroying himself

The life and times of writer and Switzerland critic Walter Matthias Diggelmann.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Walter Matthias Diggelmann was born on 5 July 1927 in a mother-and-baby home, grew up in Grisons and fled to Italy at the age of 17 after engaging in petty theft. There he was arrested and sent to Germany, where he experienced bombs, prison and terror. He returned to Switzerland with his tail between his legs, resolving thereafter to make something of his life. Emerging from this hopeless situation, Diggelmann was one of the few of his generation with the courage to turn the accepted view of Switzerland on its head.



Walter Matthias
Diggelmann
(1927–1979)

A bona fide author

“The stories you tell, and the way you tell them, prove that you are a wordsmith,” proffered a student to whom Diggelmann recounted his experiences in 1947. Without further ado Diggelmann ensured that “writer” was added to his identity card. Diggelmann had written 17 unpublished novels by 1954, often receiving support from the writers’ guild. Only then, by that time employed at Dübendorf military airfield, did he find a publisher for his aviation novel “Mit F 51 überfällig”. “I am a civil servant at Dübendorf,” he proudly told the author Erwin Heilmann, “who is writing more and better than ever, is happily married, and can do without any support.” But this prosaic contentment did not last long. Diggelmann’s faith in Swiss society was shaken to the core when, in 1959, working as a copywriter for PR agency Farner, he learned how easy it was to manipulate public opinion.

He condemned Switzerland’s asylum system

“Das Verhör des Harry Wind”, the novel with which Diggelmann made his breakthrough, uncovered the machi-

“I am not the one in this novel, it is the world I love that is contained in it, in every word and in every utterance. I committed grave sins for it and went through no little suffering to experience this purification. Some people will be shocked. Yet by no means is it nihilism that I preach, but faith – the simple faith that comes from heaven and leads back there, beyond any form of legislation.”

Diggelmann, 1951, in a letter about his unpublished novel “Sohn ohne Vater”.

nations at Farner in 1962. “Die Hinterlassenschaft”, the 1965 book in which Diggelmann denounced Switzerland’s asylum system in the years 1933 to 1945, was likewise based on material from his time as a copywriter. The novel itself was not particularly successful, and its attempt to equate the anti-Semitism of the war years with the anti-communism of 1956 went down like a lead balloon. Diggelmann also made the mistake of allowing changes to the book’s East German edition in order to placate the communist regime in East Berlin. He was called a traitor. In 1973, this culminated in what Reni Mertens and Walter Marti dubbed “The self-destruction of Walter Matthias Diggelmann” in their film profile of the same name.

His later work hit a nerve

Yet, by the end of the 1970s, Diggelmann had risen from the abyss of desperation, loneliness and alcoholism into which he had fallen. Freed from ideological baggage and the urge to prove himself, he was able to tell stories imbued with wonderful coherence, poise and authenticity. Such works in-

clude “Aber den Kirschbaum, den gibtes” (There really is a cherry tree), “Filippinis Garten” (Filippini’s garden) and the moving diary “Schatten”, (Shadow) which the cancer-stricken author dictated to Klara Obermüller – his partner in his final years – before his death on 29 November 1979. The secret wish that he had formulated quite casually in a 1952 letter to the secretary of the former Swiss writers’ guild would eventually come true after all: “I always want to be able to speak, not contradict. Everything that lives is sacred to me.”

All the aforementioned titles are available in a six-volume collection of Diggelmann works, published in German by edition 8, Zurich.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZURICH

This is the last in Charles Linsmayer’s series of literary articles, which are all still available in our online archive at www.revue.link/books

Deadly inferno leaves Switzerland reeling

The devastating Crans-Montana fire claimed at least 41 lives, with over 100 injured, most of them seriously. People at home and abroad are asking how something like this could happen in a country that prides itself on rules, organisation and precision.



CHRISTOF FORSTER

What should have been a night of revelry turned within a few minutes into a tragedy of historic proportions that continues to reverberate months later. Forty-one people lost their lives; over 110 were injured, most of them seriously.

We know the blaze began at 1.27 in the morning. Teenagers and young adults from Switzerland and abroad were celebrating New Year's Eve at "Le Constellation", a bar in Crans-Montana. Mobile phone footage shows a waitress sitting on the shoulders of a male colleague and holding a bottle with sparklers in each hand. According to the later reports in the media, the cantonal police incident report said that it was customary at "Le Constellation" to serve bottles with sparklers attached to the neck. The waitress's bottles are too high in

Flowers and candles remembering the victims of the Crans-Montana bar fire. At least 41 people died celebrating the new year in the resort, with over 110 injured. Photo: Cyril Zingaro, Keystone

the air. Flames begin to lick across the flammable foam ceiling of the basement bar. Party-goers begin to flee the smoke. A "flashover" occurs at 1.28 and 12 seconds, suddenly transforming the fire into an inferno. The conflagration shoots up as far as the door to the veranda on the ground floor. Thirty-seven people are stranded in the basement and die. Three other victims lose their lives on the ground floor.

Temperatures of over 1,000 degrees

When a fire heats its surroundings to around 300°C, combustible gases from the fire can ignite violently. This triggers what firefighters call a flashover, with temperatures potentially rising to over 1,000°C. This can result in death or horrific burn injuries for

anyone in close vicinity at the moment of ignition.

Treating such injuries is extremely complicated and often takes months if not years. Many victims are likely to have breathed in toxic gases that can lead to severe lung damage. In a show of European solidarity, other countries offered Switzerland support, enabling some of the injured to be transferred to specialist burns units abroad. Switzerland has insufficient hospital capacity for an emergency of this nature.

It was not only because the victims come from various countries that the Crans-Montana fire made headlines worldwide. The timing was particularly tragic: a moment of hope and optimism, barely an hour and a half into 2026. Most of the victims are young people, who not only had the new year but their whole

lives ahead of them. The 41 fatalities include 20 minors, some of whom were only 14 or 15 years of age. For their families, life has been irrevocably divided into two parts: before and after the tragedy.

No inspections for six years

The disaster has shaken Switzerland, with a picture slowly emerging of a catastrophe that could have been avoided. Firstly, Jacques Moretti, who ran “Le Constellation” with his wife, had installed flammable sound-proofing foam on the ceiling of the basement bar during renovation work in 2015. Safety officers from Crans-Montana council failed to notice anything untoward at the time – or thereafter. After 2019, the council no longer inspected the bar at all. And the canton, which has a supervisory duty, apparently did not check whether municipalities in Valais were complying with fire safety regulations.

Switzerland’s cantons have since suspended this year’s plans to relax fire safety regulations, which would have reduced the frequency of inspections and given greater autonomy to venues. The Crans-Montana tragedy has shown where a more *laissez-faire* approach can lead.

Cracks in Switzerland’s image

How could there have been so many lapses in a country that puts a premium on perfection as well as adherence to the rules? Aren’t disasters like these only supposed to happen abroad? We have seen deadly nightclub fires in North Macedonia and Brazil, where the rules, if there even were any in the first place, were nonchalantly ignored. But surely not Switzerland. The brutality and tragedy of the Crans-Montana inferno are

Forty-one people lost their lives; over 110 were injured, most of them seriously. How could such a disaster happen in Switzerland of all places?

difficult to stomach as it is, but a blinkered view makes dealing with the disaster a whole lot harder.

Maybe it also explains why some have been quick to point the finger at Valais, accusing the canton of lax controls and insufficient oversight. Because practically everyone knows everyone else and turns a blind eye in Valais. And then they keep quiet about it, don’t they? It is easy to forget that chumminess exists almost everywhere else in tightly knit Switzerland, where much depends on municipal autonomy, the principle of

Switzerland observed a national day of mourning on 9 January 2026, with firefighters from Crans-Montana also holding a minute of silence at 2 p.m. in memory of the victims.

Photo: Laurent Gillieron, Keystone



subsidiarity – and on people who take on public duties and responsibilities on a part-time or voluntary basis (militia system). A disaster like this, where more or less everything that could have gone wrong went wrong, probably could also have happened elsewhere in Switzerland.

The image of Swiss reliability has also taken a hit abroad, with an increasing amount of opprobrium coming from Italy in particular. Six Italian teenagers died in the fire, and over ten of their compatriots were injured, some seriously. The Valais public prosecutors have been slammed by their southerly neighbours for their allegedly error-ridden, amateurish approach, which, critics say, includes not taking the husband-and-wife owners of the bar immediately into custody, not confiscating mobile phones, and being slow to execute a search warrant that had already been issued on New Year’s Day.

Cultural breakdown

Some may find this a bit rich from a country where levels of trust in the judiciary are among the lowest in Europe. Giorgia Meloni’s government has also been accused of using the tragedy to score political points at home – ahead of a March 2026 referendum on judicial reform that would broaden the executive’s influence over prosecutors and the courts – and of stoking anger to convey a specific message to Italian voters: look no further than Switzerland to see what can happen when you have an overly independent judiciary.

Others have struck a softer note. Italian newspaper “La Repubblica” writes: “Not only is it a tragedy, it is cultural breakdown. An illusion shattered by brutal reality. Even the most civilised country can fail if its attention lapses.”



“Vote of confidence” for public broadcaster

Funding for the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) will not be slashed by nearly half, after voters and cantons rejected the “CHF 200 is enough” initiative at the ballot box on 8 March. The public broadcaster still has to cut costs. But how?

SUSANNE WENGER

The “CHF 200 is enough” initiative was one of five proposals on a busy voting Sunday. On all issues – public broadcaster; tax system; cash; climate action – voters followed the recommendations of the government and parliament (see visual data). Turnout was higher than usual, at over 55 per cent. In particular, “CHF 200 is enough” drove people to the polls. A right-wing campaign led by the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) had wanted to cut the annual Swiss television and radio licence fee from 335 to 200 Swiss francs per household and exempt companies from the levy entirely. SRG SSR, which broadcasts in all four language regions and produces content for the “Fifth Switzerland”, would have seen its budget nearly halved (see “Swiss Review” 1/2026). However, 61.9 per cent of voters rejected the plan. None of the cantons voted yes. The expatriate no was even clearer than the national average, at 65.8 per cent. SRG SSR Director General Susanne Wille called the result a “firm vote of confidence”. Voters had already lent the public broadcaster their support in 2018, when a thumping majority rejected an initiative to abolish the licence fee.

Cost-cutting remains imperative

But the director general cannot rest on her laurels, as SRG SSR has to save around 270 million francs, or 17 per cent of its budget, by 2029. This is because Wille still has to contend with a drop in the licence fee along with dwindling advertising revenue: even before the March 2026 vote, the federal government had opted to reduce the licence fee gradually to 300 francs from 2027 onwards and make more companies exempt. SRG SSR will, therefore, make less money despite the vote, but not to the extent originally feared. This is the “alternative outcome”, said one of the parliamentarians who championed the initiative, government minister Albert Rösti (SVP), whose portfolio covers the media.

How to interpret the result of the vote is already a point of contention, because the SRG SSR broadcasting licence expires in 2028 – a remit that the Federal Council regularly renews as required by the constitution and the law. Rösti has already stated that, from 2029, SRG SSR is to focus more



SRG SSR Director General Susanne Wille was visibly relieved after the vote – but she cannot rest on her laurels.

Photo: Alessandro della Valle, Keystone

on information, culture and education and less on sport and entertainment.

Anger in the no camp

This has enraged opponents of the initiative, who say that people voted for a broad-based SRG SSR providing a full range of content. It is also worth noting that the SRG SSR digital offer will be a factor in the next licence agreement. Private-sector media groups insist that SRG SSR should not crowd out the online content of commercial providers. The government makes decisions on the broadcasting

licence, but political parties, interest groups and other organisations will be able to submit their views during a consultation process in 2027.

The extent to which cost-cutting will affect the public broadcaster’s international content and the ten-language swissinfo platform in particular is still unclear. Although parliament has already had its own say: the

Basel suspends e-voting after glitch

The canton of Basel-Stadt was unable to check any online votes on Sunday 8 March due to technical problems affecting the USB sticks that are needed for decryption. This meant that 2,048 votes from Swiss Abroad and from voters with physical or mental impairments remained uncounted. At the time of our editorial deadline, it was unclear whether the online votes would be counted in time for the official confirmation of the voting results by the federal government later in March. There was no tangible effect on the overall results, given that none of the votes were tight. Nevertheless, this annoying glitch has consequences.

The Basel-Stadt cantonal government has suspended its e-voting pilot until the end of 2026 and ordered an external inquiry. There were even suggestions of foul play a few days after the vote. Public prosecutors have launched an investigation into possible fraud. The authorities asserted that the glitch had nothing to do with the e-voting system as such. Nevertheless, critics of online voting felt vindicated. Four cantons are currently piloting e-voting: Basel-Stadt, St Gallen, Thurgau and Grisons.

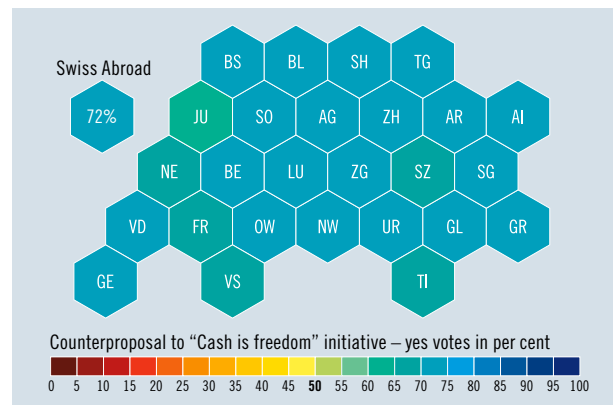
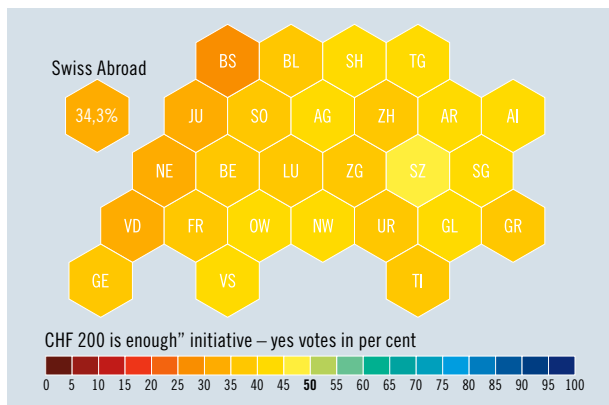
(SWE)

Council of States voted in winter to maintain state funding of international content; the National Council did likewise this spring. The government had wanted to cancel the subsidy as part of its federal budget relief

package. International content is funded on a fifty-fifty basis by the state and the licence fee. Half of this money is now ring-fenced, thanks to parliament’s decision.

No to the “CHF 200 is enough” initiative

Cash in the constitution – yes to counterproposal

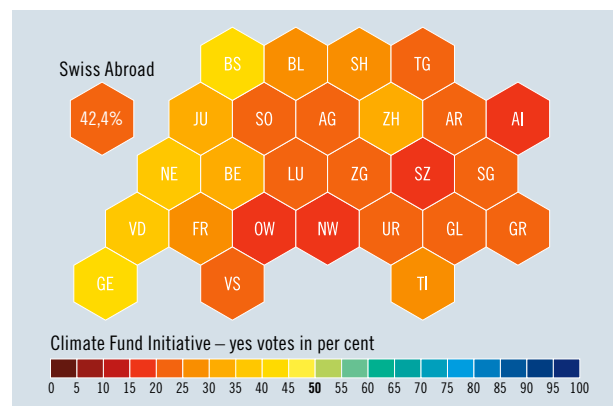
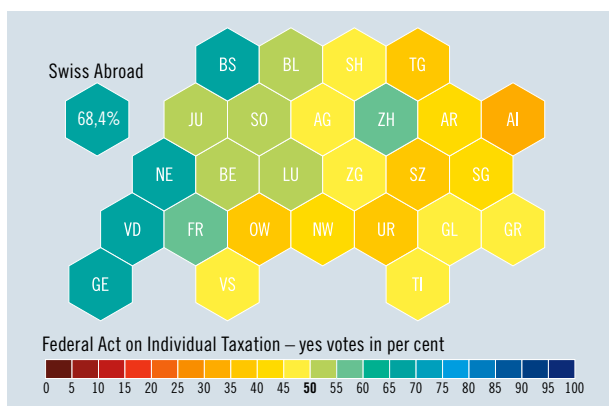


Only 38.1 per cent of the electorate voted yes to halving the SRG SSR licence fee. The proposal from the SVP and the Swiss Trade Association was similarly rejected by all the cantons. The narrowest result was in the canton of Schwyz. Swiss Abroad were even less in favour.

Cash (see “Swiss Review” 5/2025) is now enshrined in the constitution, but not to the extent proposed by the “Cash is freedom” initiative, which was rejected. The more moderate counterproposal by the Federal Council and parliament attracted wide support, as the map shows. Some 73.4 per cent were in favour; the percentage of yes votes in the “Fifth Switzerland” was slightly lower.

Yes to individual taxation

No to the Climate Fund Initiative



The electorate approved a change in tax law, with 54.3 per cent voting yes. Every person will now be taxed individually, regardless of their marital status. The expatriate yes was even more emphatic. This marks the end of the so-called “marriage penalty” – which some cantons had wanted to maintain by calling a referendum in the first place. The Confederation and cantons must implement the reform by 2032.

Free up billions of francs for a fund on climate action (see “Swiss Review” 1/2026)? The electorate rejected this idea from the Greens and the SP, with 70.7 per cent voting no. Swiss Abroad were more receptive to the proposal but also voted no. Compared to the other votes, the issue barely attracted any public debate.



Tightening access to civilian service

Our world has become more dangerous. Yet more and more young people in Switzerland are signing up for civilian instead of military service. Lawmakers now want to make access to civilian service more restrictive.

EVELINE RUTZ

Between 6,000 and 7,000 people join the civilian service every year, to do things like caring for people with dementia, working at farms or helping teachers in the classroom – too many, according to the Federal Council and a majority in parliament.

The argument is that the army is in urgent need of this manpower, given that the world has become much more dangerous in recent years. “At a time when we are talking about rearmament, mobilisation capacity and staying power, these figures are nothing short of scandalous,” says SVP National Councillor Stefanie Heimgartner, adding that Switzerland simply can no longer afford so few conscripts. In 2025, federal politicians voted to tighten access to civilian service by restricting the number of new admissions to 4,000 a year – out of some 30,000 to 35,000 young men deemed fit for military service. The electorate is set to vote on the matter in a referendum on 14 June.

More civilian service applications since 2008

The number of people in civilian service has increased significantly since a change in the system in 2008. Before then, those who

wanted to join the civilian service had to prove to a review board that they had sincere, deep-seated moral or religious grounds for doing so. Around 1,700 people were earmarked for civilian service every year. From the beginning of 2009, civilian service applicants no longer had to justify their reasons before a commission, but the “proof by action” principle applied instead, i.e. anyone choosing civilian service had to prove their good faith by accepting a longer duration of service that was 1.5 times the duration of military service (368 instead of 245 days). Access to civilian service was made too easy, argue those in favour of the decision to restrict numbers.

Understaffed army

“Civilian service was never meant to be an option for all,” Centre Party National Councillor Martin Candinas stresses – rather, an exception for those who cannot perform military service on grounds of conscientious objection. “Personal preferences or convenience should not be the deciding factor.” SVP politician Thomas Hurter believes that the flood of civilian service admissions is unconstitutional: “The way the system is now interpreted is that individuals are, essen-

tially, free to choose between military and civilian service.” This could lead to an understaffed army and affect Switzerland’s ability to defend itself.

Preventing late switches

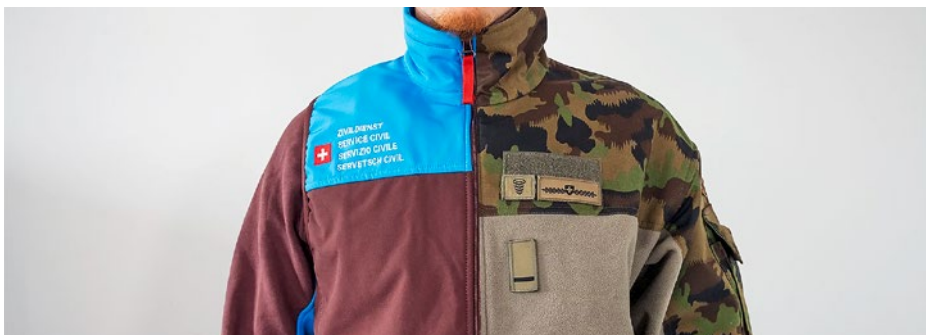
In particular, the plan is to make it less likely for soldiers to switch to civilian service at a later stage. This group accounted for about a third of all applications in 2023. In future, they would be required to do at least 150 days of civilian service. Trained officers who switch would likewise have to do a 1.5-times longer service stint. To retain medics in the army, there would be no more civilian assignments requiring medical, dental or veterinary studies.

Anyone who chooses not to complete their basic military training could in future have to start civilian service within the same year. Until now, individuals have been able to delay this for up to three years.

The measures are counterproductive, say critics

Those behind the referendum – an alliance consisting of the SP, the Greens, the EVP, and professional associations – criticise the way in which civilian service would become less appealing. “It will not make the army automatically more attractive either,” says SP National Councillor Priska Seiler Graf. A different approach is needed, because the measures are counterproductive: “At best, it will lead to more cases of medical discharge.” Young people who take this route will then be lost to both strands of the conscription system.

According to Green National Councillor Gerhard Andrey, civilian service is an important pillar of our society. Every year, thousands of young people perform their service in “areas where the shortage of skilled workers is now acute and will become even more noticeable in future”, he says. Tightening access to civilian service would lead to cuts in precisely these areas. “It would be detrimental to society and not benefit the army.”



The situation for Swiss Abroad

Swiss Abroad are exempt from conscription and military service in peacetime, but they can join the army voluntarily – which is what increasing numbers of them are doing. In 2025, 114 people were recruited directly from abroad – up from just 57 in 2021. Some of these volunteers could conceivably switch to civilian service during the draft or basic military training on grounds of conscientious objection. However, such cases are likely to be isolated. Photo: Federal Office for Civilian Service

(ERU)

Are the Olympics about to return to Switzerland?

Switzerland could soon be going all out to host the 2038 Winter Olympics and Paralympics, advocating an innovative, decentralised approach to win over the public.



Ruth Metzler-Arnold, president of Swiss Olympic, left, and Ruth Wipfli Steinegger, co-chair of Switzerland 2038 – pictured here shortly before hosting a Switzerland 2038 press conference to update the media on the “Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Switzerland” bid. Photo: Peter Klaunzer, Keystone

EVELINE RUTZ

Curling in Geneva, ski jumping in Engelberg, luge in St Moritz. The sporting elite will congregate across the length and breadth of the country at the 2038 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games – if Swiss organisers get their way. Switzerland is already in “privileged dialogue” with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), reserving it the right to host the Winter Games – if it wants to, and provided it fulfils IOC requirements – without facing competition from other bidders.

“We have a real chance,” says Ruth Wipfli Steinegger, co-chair of the Switzerland 2038 bid, who explains that Switzerland was granted this exclusive arrangement after impressing the IOC with a unique plan that aims to show that there is an alternative to expensive, outsized venues. “The Games will be smaller and more sustainable.”

Switzerland 2038 wants to make use of existing sports and transport infrastructure, with the games spread across all parts of the country and all four language regions. The idea is to have eight venues, with athletes based in three distinct geographic hubs: French-speaking Switzerland, Lucerne, and

“Switzerland’s unique plan offers an alternative to expensive, outsized venues, proposing a smaller and more sustainable Olympics and Paralympics.”

Ruth Wipfli Steinegger, co-chair of Switzerland 2038

Grisons. It would be the first time there is a host country instead of a host city or region. For Ruth Metzler-Arnold, president of Swiss Olympic and a former federal councillor, this is a “project for the whole of Switzerland” and its inhabitants, contributing to society far beyond the duration of the Games itself.

Olympic scepticism

Yet voters were less enamoured by similar plans not so long ago, fearing spiralling costs for host municipalities as well as mass tour-

ism and a damaging environmental footprint. Local projects in Grisons and Valais fell foul of the electorate in 2013 and 2018 respectively. To minimise adverse effects on the population, organisers are now focusing on a nationwide event that would forgo any new infrastructure and rely on the private sector to provide over 80 per cent of the necessary outlay and cover future losses. The federal government would have to come up with about 200 million Swiss francs, with cantons and municipalities contributing the same amount.

Switzerland must submit its candidacy in 2027, so time is of the essence. Parliament is expected to vote on the project by the end of the year, so that the bid can be submitted officially to the IOC thereafter. There will also be votes at cantonal and local level, but these plebiscites are likely to take place after the IOC has already named Switzerland as the host. If individual cantons or municipalities reject the project, any affected Olympic discipline would have to move to a different venue. Yes, we have the flexibility to do this, says Ruth Wipfli Steinegger. “We also have a lot of convincing to do – at all levels of society.”

The heavy metal church

Services of worship at the social club, pastoral care at music festivals, Bible classes over beer. At the beginning of 2026, the Metalchurch became Switzerland's first-ever recognised congregation based on a specific style of music. Facing decline, Switzerland's official churches are looking at ways to reinvent themselves.

SUSANNE WENGER

Metalchurch pastor Samuel Hug talks to us in his little office in Kirchberg near Berne, not far from the Protestant Reformed church that has dominated the village landscape for more than 500 years – although Switzerland's most recently formed congregation has no church building of its own. “It keeps us on our toes,” he says. Hug's black hoodie has a band logo. Music flyers hang on the wall, next to shelves containing books on heavy metal as well as hundreds of CDs. Physical audio formats are popular among metal fans. When writing his sermons, Hug listens to heavy metal and looks for ways to connect this music with the gospel. “I always find something.”

Hug, an ordained minister in the Reformed Church, is married and has four sons. He used to serve two rural parishes in Berne, the canton with the most Reformed Church members. After the Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformed Church is Switzerland's biggest religious denomination. Hug discovered heavy metal as a teenager in eastern Switzerland – despite warnings that this was “the

devil's music”. He fell in love with its powerful, rebellious sound. Metal legends Judas Priest, who hail from Birmingham in the UK, remain one of his favourite bands.

Hug and other like-minded individuals founded Metalchurch in 2012 – firstly as a side venture, all of their own accord. “We wanted to build a bridge between the church and the metal scene,” he explains. But this took time. Hug and his friends had to win over both sides: metal fans who were sceptical, as it were, of joining the flock, and, on the other hand, members of the congregation who felt uneasy about the Protestant Reformed Church being associated with such a project.

Recognition

Following years of – in Hug's words – “both sides getting to know each other”, the Berne-Jura-Solothurn Reformed Churches appointed Hug as their full-time “pastor of innovation” in 2022. In November 2025, the Synod – the secular church parliament – officially recognised the Metalchurch with only one opposing vote,

promising it 180,000 Swiss francs in annual funding along with Hug's salary. The reason it gave was that the Metalchurch attracts people who would otherwise barely have any connection to the church. The Metalchurch operates within the broad spectrum of a mainstream church, says Berne-Jura-Solothurn media relations officer Markus Dütschler, adding that the Metalchurch has steadily found its footing and grown since being founded. The Synod can see that it offers people a spiritual home.

This is a remarkable first in Swiss ecclesiastical history. Switzerland's three officially recognised churches – Roman Catholic, Protestant Reformed, and Christian Catholic – have traditionally been run along regional lines. Instead of being organised around people's place of residence, Hug's is the first church to be geared to a specific group of people. Unlike local parishes, it cannot collect taxes from its members, hence it receives

Communion wine served in drinking horns – Pastor Samuel Hug, left, leads a Metalchurch service, with Noemi Stoller on the microphone. Photo: provided/Marcel Gisin



money directly from the cantonal church. Donations still account for a proportion of its funding.

Why heavy metal?

That the church's theme is heavy metal – a sub-culture of screeching riffs, made famous by “Prince of Darkness” Ozzy Osbourne – is something that Hug considers not miraculous but entirely logical. “Metal covers the big themes in life,” he says. Like the Bible itself, it does not shy away from things like pain, doubt and the depths of human existence. It shares the same Christian message of hope, he adds. The only difference is the way in which this message is delivered. “What unites us is faith.”

A social deaconess works with Hug in an employed role as part of an eight-person leadership team, while 125 volunteers provide support – twice as many as four years ago. There is no membership list: it is a fluid congregation that gathers wherever it sees fit. Over 100 people attend the Metalchurch's monthly services of worship, which feature live music, take place at a social club and are broadcast on an online radio channel called “Drachenblut” (dragon blood). The Metalchurch also provides pastoral care at music festivals – it clocked up nearly 30 such events last year – and hosts discussions like Bible, Beer & Metal in people's living rooms. Metal-themed baptisms, weddings and funerals are less in demand. This reflects the decline in traditional rituals, says Hug.

A shrinking flock

The Metalchurch has been recognised at a time when Switzerland's religious landscape is in a state of flux. For decades, the once dominant official churches have been losing members. Federal statistics show that 47 per cent of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church in 1980. Now the figure is 30 per cent. Protestant Reformed Church membership fell even further, from 45 to 19 per cent. Religious diversity grew in the same period due to migration. But most notably, the number of people with no religious affiliation increased, making up the biggest share of the population in 2024 – the first time this has happened – at nearly 37 per cent compared to only around four per cent in 1980.

The haemorrhaging mainstream churches are consequently losing income. Parishes have merged and sold their building stock, including churches. The consensus



in some quarters – and not only in increasingly secular Switzerland – is that fresh ways to spread the gospel are needed to stop the rot. Churches should “contextualise” their message more, i.e. adapt it to real life, they say. Conventional and alternative congregations, e.g. forest churches, have existed on an equal footing in the Church of England since 2008. Such approaches remain nascent in Switzerland, where the cantonal churches make their own decisions.

Antidote to the church malaise?

“We want to embrace new expressions of worship,” says Markus Dütschler. Berne-Jura-Solothurn have a dedicated innovation fund to promote over 30 projects, ranging from a hip-hop centre and a queer parish office, to an urban monastery located in a repurposed set of church buildings. Recognising the Metalchurch as an official congregation is the most significant step taken by a cantonal church to date. Whether more dedicated communities follow remains to be seen. Metal fan Hug, a decidedly proactive minister of the cloth who is smart at getting his message across, already has the answer: “Churches cannot afford to wait for people to come to them. They must go to where the people are.”

Metal band Melodic Confession – live music is an integral part of every Metalchurch service.
Photo: provided/
Marcel Gisin

A “Pharmacy of Songs” to treat souls

La Chaux-de-Fonds musician Louis Jucker has set up a recording studio in a former pharmacy in Lausanne. Based on conversations with the public, he composed 50 pop songs that he made into a record and a book.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The clinic was held for a whole month in 2024, in a former Lausanne pharmacy converted into a recording studio. Seated behind a bank of instruments made from odds and ends, including suitcases, Swiss musician Louis Jucker offered visitors a “consultation”: a conversation with people aged eight to 88, as he puts it, about life’s problems, ending with a pop song recorded on vinyl. Every patient left with their own record under their arm. Another copy of the record was then added to the library of the jukebox, which was eventually put on display in two galleries, in Nyon and Biemme. Visitors to these exhibitions could listen to the songs, synchronised with a black and white VHS video of Jucker singing. This was the zany, hand-crafted and touching project A Pharmacy of Songs, published in November 2025.

Pieces of music as cures

DIY and a taste for experimentation: this project behind a shop window contains some of the favourite things of the musician from La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchâtel). The soul consultation campaign, which took place first in Lausanne and then in Fribourg, produced 50 pieces of music and “pharmaceutical package leaflets” from the 50 consultations. You can listen to (and buy) the songs on the author’s website. The experiment also led to the publication of a 200-page book. The book contains all the “leaflets” written in the pharmacies and describes the “cures” proposed, all listed by the illness addressed, the parts of the body concerned and the recommended dose. This musical and literary work also features the lyrics to the songs. On the other hand, the pieces of music have not been published on streaming sites such as Spotify. “I didn’t want them showing up by chance just because the algorithm decided to select them. That’s not what this pro-



Louis Jucker writes poetic pop songs in his “pharmacy” and works with artists from various backgrounds.
Photo: Michael Hartwell

ject is all about,” explains the multitasking creator, who likes everything to be “hand-made”.

A “consultation” where you pay what you want

On the musician’s website, visitors are asked to choose a piece at random by picking a letter and a number. We ended up with “Undaunted” (A2). What was the problem a patient described? A toxic relationship, which according to him manifested itself in his lungs. Here are the lyrics of the cure proposed by the musician: “Your body is a miracle, your soul is a gift, and your story is not yet written. No shame, no blame, no pain: you deserve the best.” The title comes from an actual conversation. It is a good song, but results are not guaranteed. “Sometimes I’d spend an hour listening to the person and up to six hours composing, recording, mixing and pressing the record,” the artist says. Consultations were held during the week, at specific times. Every patient got their own chart, which was completed by machine then stamped for validation. When patients came to pick up their medication, armed with their musical prescription, they were asked to pay what they saw fit for the consultation.

Fear of progress

Louis Jucker is one of a seam of creators who share a love of DIY and analogue machines. The whole aesthetic is known as “lo-fi”, and vinyl records, these analogue objects that hiss and deteriorate over time, are one of its signature components. “I’m afraid of progress that overwrites everything that’s been done in the past, as well as of anything commercial, where new things are the biggest sellers,” says the singer and guitarist, who prefers to use things until they wear out. Among the inspi-

“Your body is a miracle, your soul is a gift, and your story is not yet written. No shame, no blame, no pain: you deserve the best.”

Excerpt from the song “Undaunted”

rations he cites is the American musician Daniel Johnston, who used to send audio cassettes of his songs to listeners.

Son of a puppeteer

Louis Jucker was born in 1987 to a teacher father passionate about classical music and a puppeteer mother. The musician started his musical journey at the conservatoire, where he learned the cello. He studied architecture in Lausanne, then moved to Berlin to make music. At 39, he already has 12 albums under his belt. He throws himself into one project after another without worrying about the financial side more than he absolutely has to. “I pay my rent and get rich by bringing my dream projects to life,” he says. The musician lives in a flatshare north of Neuchâtel, a city where rents are low. “This lets local artists devote more of their time to unpaid artistic projects,” he explains. “If I ever start doubting myself, someone always shows up with a new idea. It’s a bit like crop rotation to let one field lie fallow,” the inventor smiles.

Louis Jucker, “A Pharmacy of Songs” (Humus Records/Editions Ripopée), 2025



Musician Louis Jucker expresses human emotions through all his instruments. Photo: Michael Hartwell

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 11 February 2026 to submit the following proposals to the people on 14 June 2026:

- Federal Popular Initiative “No to a Switzerland of 10 million! (Sustainability Initiative)” (BBI 2026 17)
- Amendment of 26 September 2025 to the Federal Act on Alternative Civilian Service (Civilian Service Act, CSA) (BBI 2025 2896).

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 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 the protection of fundamental rights and democracy in the digital space (Internet Initiative)” (3 September 2027)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in French, German and Italian at <https://www.bk.admin.ch/> > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



Provide your Swiss representation with **your email address(es) and mobile phone number(s) and/or any changes** thereto and register at the online counter (link on FDFA homepage www.eda.admin.ch or via www.swissabroad.ch), to select your preferred method of delivery of “Swiss Review” and other publications. If you encounter any problems registering, please contact your representation.

You can read and/or print the current edition of “Swiss Review” as well as back copies since 2006 at www.revue.ch. “Swiss Review” (or “Gazzetta Svizzera” in Italian) is available electronically (via email, free of charge) or in print for all Swiss Abroad households, or through the iOS-/Android app.

“Swiss Review” (or “Gazzetta Svizzera” in Italy) is sent electronically (by email or by iOS or Android app) or in paper form free of charge to all Swiss Abroad registered with an embassy or consulate.

Over 200 years of operations around the world

For over 200 years, Swiss charitable organisations have been supporting their compatriots abroad. Previously born of necessity, they are now living networks of solidarity, cultural preservation and mutual assistance throughout the world.



A testimony to cultural vitality and the way Swiss values are passed down through the generations. The Swiss organisation Helvetia San Jerónimo Norte today – Argentina.
Photo provided

AMANDINE MADZIEL

Today, there are numerous associations and organisations around the world, known as “Swiss charitable organisations”, “Swiss philanthropic associations” or “Swiss fraternal benefit societies”, that are dedicated to the Swiss Abroad.

Switzerland’s long history of emigration

Swiss charitable organisations arose to meet the need for connections and support in the wake of a major emigration movement in the 18th and 19th centuries. At that time, the harshness of rural life, the scourge of poverty and the general deprivation drove many Swiss citizens to leave in search of a brighter future. Many families chose to cross the Atlantic and set up home in the US, Canada, Argentina and Brazil, amongst other places. The countries neighbouring Switzerland,

such as France and Germany, were also popular destinations. This migration saw associations spring up in the four corners of the globe. Many of these associations are still operating today, from Canada to the Philippines, via Latin America, Oceania and even Europe. They arose both in destination countries and in countries along the way, such as in large sea ports like Bordeaux and New York.

200 years at the service of the Swiss

Some associations, such as the Swiss charitable organisations in Paris and Bordeaux, have celebrated 200 years in operation! The charitable organisation in Berlin is over 180 years old and that in Vienna is 160.

These long-standing, structured communities have developed a profound humanitarian awareness. The chief motivation behind the fundamental work of Swiss charitable or-

ganisations has often been to “support the needy Swiss” far from their native land. This way of reknitting the social fabric lost to emigration bears witness to the commitment made to help fellow citizens. The volunteer work performed supplemented the efforts made by the state to provide social rights for its citizens (and still supplements them), sometimes coordinating these efforts as well. The link provided by the associations mitigates the limits of the support that official aid from the state can offer and recreates, in an appropriate form, the network of acquaintances lost by people leaving their country of origin. The chief task of coming to the aid of Swiss without resources has changed considerably. Currently, the activities carried out by charitable organisations around the world are very diverse.

What are the main activities of these charitable organisations today?

Economic and social support to compatriots in need

Many associations still offer tangible economic support to fellow Swiss citizens in need, when they are vulnerable in some way: ad hoc financial assistance may be possible, and social support for isolated elderly people or even help with administrative procedures is available in many organisations. These associations thus handle vital additional tasks over and above what official bodies can cover.

Young Swiss Abroad

Support for young Swiss Abroad is also provided by numerous associations. Partial grants or financial assistance with education may be available in certain circumstances. Advice and recommendations for administrative procedures can be provided.

Maintaining ties with Swiss cultural heritage

Celebrations, typical recipes and traditional or folk festivals perpetuate Swiss local customs and traditions. This is how traditions live on outside the home country. Organising events like these lets people feel that they belong to the diaspora.

Promoting Swiss languages

Multilingualism, which is so characteristic of Switzerland, is also supported by Swiss charitable organisations, which often offer

bilingual or inclusive activities in Switzerland's different national languages.

Community networking among Swiss

Meeting places for the diaspora are venues for having discussions, sharing interests and preserving contact among fellow citizens. Links between expats, offering a welcome to newly arrived families or support for students coming from Switzerland can be a starting point for fellow citizens abroad.

“Our goal is to do good. In doing so, let us draw inspiration from the noble deeds of those before us who have passed down the traditions we follow. Let us help our suffering brothers, with insight, patience and above all true charity.”

Edouard Berthoud, president of the Société helvétique de Paris from 1907 to 1912

Representing the interests of the Swiss Abroad

Charitable organisations work hand-in-hand with Swiss representations abroad, such as consulates and embassies, as well as the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. The interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” are defended and promoted.

A word on the other Swiss institutions abroad

Other institutions, such as the Hôpital Suisse de Paris in France, established in 1970, are still in operation. This hospital, created

mainly by Swiss people and binationals, was initially designed to cater to Swiss living in the region but, of course, is open to everyone. The Hôpital Suisse de Paris is the only Swiss hospital operating outside Switzerland. There is also a Swiss senior care home near the hospital, in Issy-les-Moulineaux, just outside Paris.

What does the future hold for organisations for the Swiss Abroad?

One can only admire the way in which the work done by these associations to bring people together has survived the test of time and how the activities of charitable organisations have stayed current.

This solidarity, adopted by multiple associations in a large number of countries, bears witness to an organisation for the Swiss Abroad that is unique in its genre and profoundly philanthropic. This solidarity beyond national borders is inspiring in many respects.

If this link is to survive, the next generations must also commit to volunteering, and the keen hope is that they will take an interest. The information in this article is general and non-exhaustive. We encourage you to contact the charitable organisations operating in your country of residence, if you feel the need, or if you would like to lend a hand by signing up!

This article is an update to the article published in July 2022 (“Review” 3/22) and available here: www.revue.link/aid

Studying at university after an apprenticeship?

The Swiss education system is known for its permeability and enables flexible education and training pathways. Vocational apprenticeships are particularly popular. And following an apprenticeship, the path to university studies remains open.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Vocational apprenticeship as a base and starting point

Around two thirds of all young people in Switzerland opt for a vocational apprenticeship after compulsory schooling. They can choose from about 250 different trades, ranging from technical professions to health and social occupations, as well as commercial or creative roles. The apprenticeship lasts three or four years and concludes with the Federal Diploma of Vocational Education and Training. During training, apprentices typically work three to four days a week in the training company and attend vocational school for one to two days. In this way, they acquire both practical skills and theoretical specialist knowledge. During their training apprentices also receive a modest salary.

Vocational baccalaureate as a gateway

During or after the apprenticeship, about one quarter of young people complete a vocational baccalaureate, which supplements basic vocational training with expanded general education. This qualification allows graduates to study at a university of applied sciences. Those aiming for a university or one of the Swiss federal institutes of technology (ETH) can achieve access via the supplementary Passerelle exam.

Studying at a university of applied sciences

Universities of applied sciences offer practice-oriented degree programmes in fields such as engineering, business, health, social work, art, design, and music. Like the more research- and theory-oriented universities, they provide a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a master's of 3–4 semesters. Some programmes are also offered in English.

Admission to a university of applied



Universities of applied sciences regularly offer interested students information events to learn about the courses on offer.
Photo: Pati Grabowicz, Academy of Art and Design Basel, provided

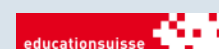
sciences generally requires an apprenticeship plus vocational baccalaureate. It is also possible with a high school diploma plus one year of internship in the future field of study. Some universities of applied sciences also offer practice-integrated bachelor's programmes lasting four years.

A proven system

The combination of a vocational apprenticeship followed by studies at a university of applied sciences is a path that is proving increasingly successful. On one hand, it enables young people to enter the world of work in a practical and flexible manner; on the other, it provides companies with well-trained specialists and managers. This pathway embodies permeability, equal opportunities, and a strong connection between

theory and practice—and opens up diverse prospects for the future.

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.



educationsuisse
education in Switzerland
Alpenstrasse 26
3006 Berne, Switzerland
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04
info@educationsuisse.ch
www.educationsuisse.ch



New Year in the snow with the SJAS

The SJAS winter holiday camp took place some time ago, and we're still talking about it. Our participants made new friends, played games in the evening and had fun on the slopes – whether improving their skiing or snowboarding, or starting from scratch.

Anyone who wants to attend the next winter holiday camp in Valbella or at the JUSKILA youth camp in Lenk can now secure their place: bookings have started for the 2026/2027 winter season, when we look forward to welcoming new and familiar faces from around the world.

Training for course instructors

Our combined training course, which weaves the Youth+Sport leadership training and the Youth+Sport camp leader course into a single programme, took place at the beginning of April, with 18 prospective leaders and four lead instructors taking part. In mixed small groups, the participants benefited from a brainstorming session in which they drew on their own experiences to plan a holiday camp. A two-day

excursion, coupled with the participants' shared journey, reinforced the sense of togetherness. Swiss Abroad, individuals performing civilian service, and other camp leaders came together to make the course an international, multilingual event.

Digital information event for parents

The SJAS is hosting an online information event from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. on 4 June 2026 for parents whose children have not yet participated in an SJAS camp. We will start by giving a brief presentation about the holiday camps, after which we will be happy to take your questions. The meeting will be in English and recorded. There is no need to sign up for it.

RAYA KELLER

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 (SJAS)
Alpenstrasse 24
3006 Berne, Switzerland
+41 31 356 61 16
info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch



Our winter holiday camps offer the best possible environment for participants to improve on the slopes or learn from scratch. Photo: Pixofluna

Important travel information concerning ETIAS



The new European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) could also affect entry requirements for travellers arriving in Switzerland. Photo: iStock

REBEKKA THEILER-RUF

After the new European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) is rolled out at the end of 2026, certain travellers wishing to enter Schengen Area countries, including Switzerland, will be subject to additional requirements.

Specifically, nationals from visa-exempt countries outside the Schengen Area who wish to travel to Europe for a short-term stay of up to 90 days will need to apply for an ETIAS travel authorisation.

These new requirements do not affect Swiss nationals who want to enter a Schengen Area country with a valid passport. Yet they could have implications for Swiss Abroad with dual or multiple nationality who use the passport of a visa-exempt country when travelling. The sticking point here is that anyone who completes an ETIAS application must provide details of all their nationalities.

As things stand, this means that any Swiss citizens who are

also nationals of other countries such as the United States, Canada or Australia will in future also have to show their valid Swiss passport when entering the Schengen Area. We therefore recommend that you keep an eye on the latest entry requirements and work out in good time which travel documents you need before travelling to the Schengen Area.

For the latest official information, visit: www.revue.link/etias

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad will itself keep a close eye on further developments. We will let you know via our usual channels as soon as we have definitive information on how the new system works in practice.

ETIAS will also be the subject of a webinar hosted by the FDFA and Soliswiss on 16 June 2026. www.revue.link/webinars

APRIL 2026

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



A little piece of home – thanks to your support

Dear readers,

Every “Swiss Review” gives you a little piece of home. In our December edition, we asked you to help us secure the future of our magazine. Your response was overwhelming – thank you!

In the first two months after our appeal, we received over 50,000 Swiss francs in donations. This money will go directly into helping us to continue offering our usual journalistic content. We are touched by the many readers who also expressed their support in the form of smaller five-franc donations. Every cent given is a gesture of solidarity that shows how much the “Fifth Switzerland” and our readers support our magazine. This is extremely gratifying.

In “Swiss Review”, we provide an independent and expert journalistic take on the latest political, economic and social issues in Switzerland – and make this content relatable to the Swiss Abroad. Our experienced editorial team facilitates this work, carrying out diligent research to produce a magazine that is available in different languages. Your donation helps us to continue delivering this quality journalism.

Our print edition, in particular, entails significant printing and mailing costs. Mone-

tary contributions from those who regularly read our print version and want to continue doing so are, therefore, especially important. “Swiss Review” is funded by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), the body that fulfils key responsibilities for the “Fifth Switzerland” on behalf of the federal government. OSA’s remit comes from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, with federal money currently accounting for over 80 per cent of OSA’s funding. This heavy reliance on subsidies means that any cuts in state funding have a direct impact on OSA and, by extension, “Swiss Review”.

This is why OSA wants to improve its ability to fund itself and strengthen its financial base. Donations specifically in support of “Swiss Review” make a tangible contribution to achieving this goal.

Going forward, support from readers will continue to be crucial in maintaining the quality, independence and publication frequency of our magazine long-term. We thank everyone who helps us through their donations.

Filippo Lombardi, OSA President
Daniel Hunziker, OSA Director

Your donations to “Swiss Review” remain as important as ever

Your donations are a great help to us. They give us huge motivation to provide the Swiss Abroad with top-quality content. Every “Swiss Review” is your own little home from home, regardless of where you live in the world. But “Swiss Review” also costs money – and is still feeling the squeeze. Please show your solidarity and donate. With your help, we hope to safeguard the magazine’s future and continue to produce the independent, quality journalism that our editorial team stands for. Can we count on your support?

WALTER SCHMID, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Please donate now – every little helps in securing the future of “Swiss Review”.

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Varied activities in store at our holiday camps

This year's Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) holiday camps are already booked out. On 21 and 22 February, our Youth Service camp organisers met to get preparations under way.



Mapping out the "Swiss Challenge" route during this year's preparatory weekend.

Photo: Clément de Vaulchier

MARIE BLOCH

We want participants to have an unforgettable experience at our summer camps. OSA is working with camp organisers to draw up a varied programme combining sporting, cultural, outdoor and social activities.

Most camp organisers came together in February for a working weekend spent preparing a memorable holiday for all our young attendees. Some met in person, while others were connected online from abroad – underscoring the commitment shown by Swiss Abroad within the team.

We will continue to flesh out the camp schedules in the weeks and months ahead, visiting venues, working out hiking routes, planning logistics and preparing all the entertainment.

Many thanks to the organisers for their tremendous commitment on behalf of our young Swiss Abroad. Their energy, creativity and enthusiasm are key to delivering a holiday of adventure, discovery and new friendships.



Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Alpenstrasse 26
3006 Berne, Switzerland
+41 31 356 61 25
youth@swisscommunity.org
www.swisscommunity.org



1/800 000



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

... **Caterina Ines Fusi, 15 years old, living for the past 12 years in New York City, USA. She is a current committee member of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA).**

Is it possible to have several homelands?

Yes, I think it is possible to have several homelands as a homeland is where you are from or a nation you are a part of. In my case, I am Swiss, Italian, and American and I do feel that all three of those countries are my "homeland".

Which film makes you think of home?

The 1975 animated "Heidi" film makes me think of home.

Is regularly meeting other Swiss people important to you?

Yes, it is very important to me as it is easy to feel foreign in both your current place of residence and Switzerland at the same time. Talking to other Swiss Abroad can help one feel at home as well as tethered to your home.

What is your native language and which language do you speak the most often?

My native language is Italian, but I speak English most often.

Do you often think about relocating?

Yes, I often think about moving to Switzerland, or to Italy. The current political climate in America is not very welcoming, so I often consider attending university in the European Union or Switzerland.

Visit the website of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA): www.ypsa.ch

More: www.revue.link/puzzle3



Find out more:
switzerland.com/swisstainable

swi+zerland

I need pure
nature.
I need Switzerland.