



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
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The Swiss Confederation

a brief guide – 2026





“Asking questions, contributing to discussions and getting involved: democracy needs us all to play our part.”

Viktor Rossi, Federal Chancellor

Dear Reader

To thrive, our democracy needs people who engage in debate rather than simply approve decisions. It thrives on us asking questions, listening and working together to find solutions. It is only by asking questions that we contribute to the greater good and thereby strengthen democracy. Especially in times of rapid change and growing uncertainty, it is clear that our democracy cannot be taken for granted. We all need to nurture it and ensure that it is able to develop.

Today, questions surrounding information and disinformation are often at the heart of public debate. What information is trustworthy and what can we rely on as a basis for our discussions? Who is involved in finding solutions and making decisions, and who influences those choices? To answer these questions at a time when algorithms help shape opinions, political education is essential. Only by understanding the ins and outs of an issue can we fulfil our responsibilities, whether at school, in the professional world or at the ballot box.

Our institutions will remain strong if we are familiar with them and support them, and if we stay informed, debate and vote. To achieve this, we need spaces where all generations can get involved and be heard. The 2025 Federal Youth Session brilliantly illustrated what can be achieved when the voices of dedicated young people are taken seriously.

This brochure aims to encourage you to get to know Switzerland and its institutions better and find out about our own role in our system of government. Democracy needs us all to play our part by asking questions, contributing to discussions and getting involved.

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'V' followed by a horizontal line and a small dot.

Viktor Rossi
Federal Chancellor



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**This publication reflects the status at the editorial
deadline (12.1.2026). Latest figures and information
can be found on the websites mentioned.**



Complementary resources to accompany the brochure:
www.bk.admin.ch

- CH info app for smartphones and tablets
- Website www.ch-info.swiss
- Teaching material
- Barrier-free PDF for the visually impaired

Switzerland

Around 350,000 spectators attended the 2025 Swiss Wrestling and Alpine Festival in the canton of Glarus. The fact that one of Switzerland's biggest sporting events could take place

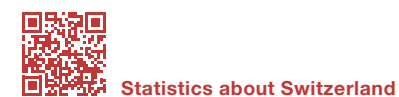
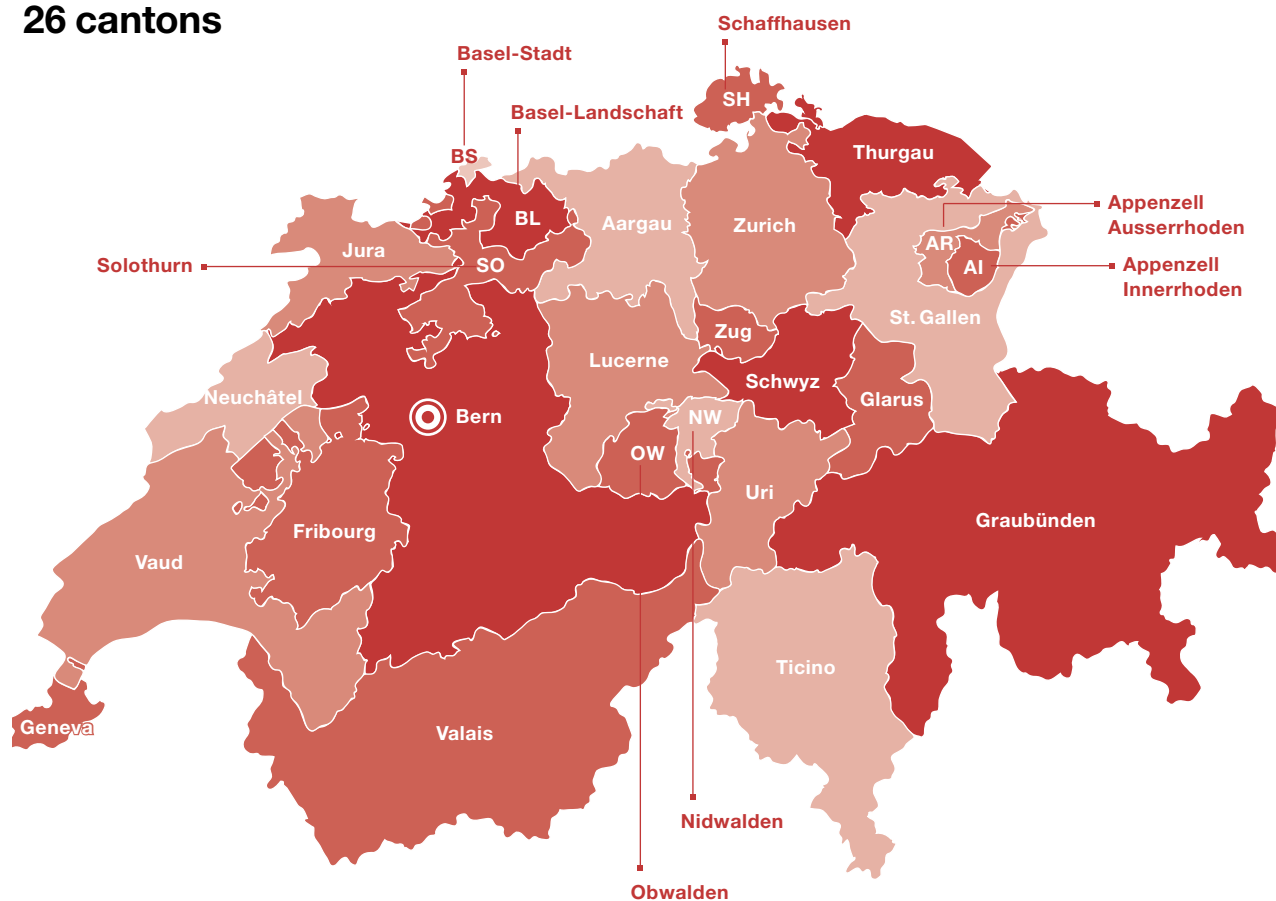
in one of its smallest cantons is down to a democratic decision: the people of Glarus voted on the matter at a Landsgemeinde (people's assembly).



Switzerland

Switzerland is a small country with a population of around 9.1 million people. It has 4 language regions and 26 cantons, which are largely independent and consist of numerous local authorities or communes. Multilingualism and federalism have their roots in the past, yet still shape Switzerland today. Its neutrality is recognised by all states of the world.

26 cantons



9.1 million people

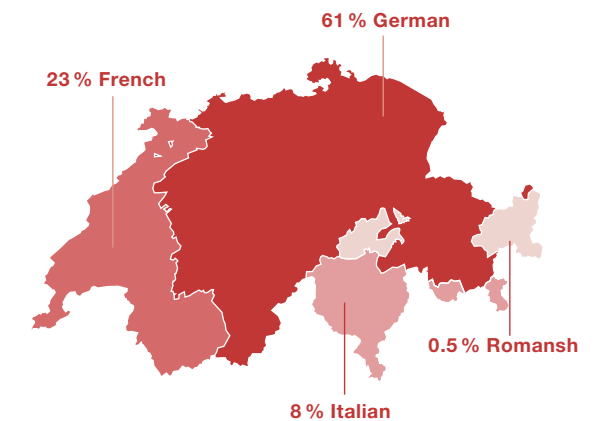
There are around 9.1 million people living in Switzerland, 28 per cent of them without a Swiss passport. More than half of these foreign nationals were either born in Switzerland or have been living here for at least ten years. The majority of the foreign population comes from an EU country. The largest foreign national groups are from Italy, Germany and Portugal.



Swiss citizens 6 588 652
Non-Swiss citizens 2 515 411

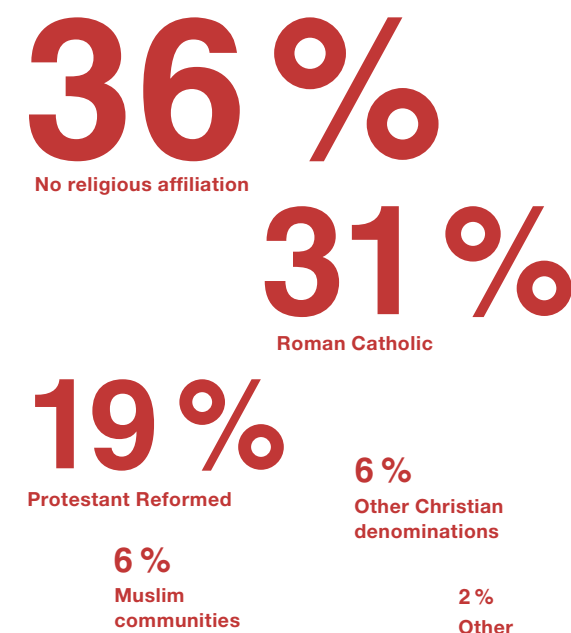
4 national languages

Switzerland is a multilingual country. The four national languages are German, French, Italian and Romansh. 61 per cent of the population primarily speak (Swiss-) German, 23 per cent French, 8 per cent Italian and 0.5 per cent Romansh. For 24 per cent of the population, their mother tongue is not one of Switzerland's national languages. Many people state that they have two main languages, i.e. they are bilingual.



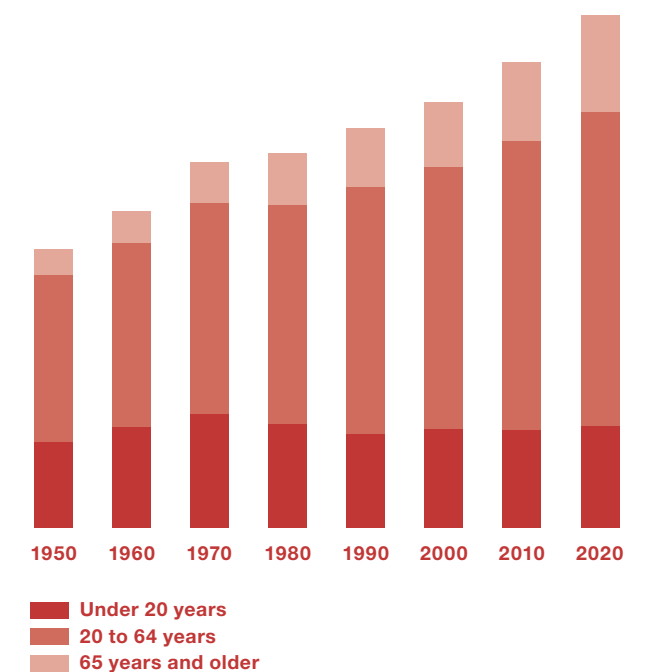
Freedom of religion

Switzerland is a predominantly Christian country: 56 per cent of its population are either Catholic or Protestant or belong to another Christian community. Freedom of religion in Switzerland also allows other religious communities to practice such faiths as Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. The number of people with no religious affiliation is growing – particularly in urban areas.



High life expectancy

People in Switzerland are getting older and older and have fewer children than before. Average life expectancy is one of the highest in the world: it is 82 years for men and 86 years for women. Women have 1.3 children on average. The proportion of people over 64 years of age in the population has increased, while that of people under 20 years of age and 20 to 64 years of age has declined.



The history of Switzerland

Switzerland developed over the centuries from a collection of different alliances to a confederation of states and finally to the federal state we know today. **Its national borders and neutrality were established and recognised internationally in 1815. Its political system dates back to the Federal Constitution of 1848. Since then the powers of the federal government, political rights and political diversity have increased significantly.**



1291 Old Confederation Alliances

To ensure internal and external security, cities and regions formed various alliances. The alliance between Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden in 1291 is considered the origin of the Swiss Confederation. Over the centuries, the Confederation grew through further alliances and territorial conquests.



1798–1802 Helvetic Republic Unitary state under foreign control

Following the French invasion in 1798, the Confederation was transformed into the Helvetic Republic: a unitary state ruled from Paris.



1803–1814 Mediation Loose foreign control

After civil wars broke out between federalists and supporters of the Helvetic Republic, Napoleon ordered a constitution based on the Act of Mediation, which restored some autonomy to the cantons and set most of the cantonal borders.



1815 Federal Treaty Neutrality and alliance of states

With the defeat of Napoleon, the great European powers recognised Swiss neutrality and set Switzerland's borders as they are today. The Federal Treaty of 1815 brought together the various federal alliances into a single confederation of states.



1847–1848 Sonderbund War Liberals against conservatives

Diverging views on how the Confederation would be organised led to a civil war between liberal and Catholic conservative cantons. It was a war from which liberal forces emerged victorious.



1848 Federal Constitution Democratic federal state

The Federal Constitution provided most citizens (men) with various rights and freedoms, including the right to vote and be elected. The bicameral system was introduced at federal level with the National Council and Council of States electing the Federal Council. Some powers were centralised. Switzerland developed into a unitary judicial and economic area.



1874, 1891 Expanded democracy Initiative, referendum

The revised Federal Constitution transferred more tasks to the federal government and broadened democratic rights at federal level. The referendum was introduced in 1874 and the popular initiative in 1891. (→ p. 22)



1914–1918 First World War, General strike Socialist ideas

Poverty and unemployment during the First World War and socialist ideas from the Russian Revolution culminated in a general strike in 1918.



1919, 1929 Proportional representation Towards consensus democracy

In 1919, the National Council was elected on a proportional basis and a second Catholic Conservative (The Centre today) entered the Federal Council. A member of the Farmers', Trades' and Citizens' Party (SVP today) entered the Federal Council in 1929.



1939–1945 Second World War Inclusion of the left

Against the backdrop of the Second World War, the political forces from left to right moved closer together. In 1943 Parliament elected a Social Democrat into government, and in 1951 the left-wing party gained a second seat on the Federal Council. Since 1959, the Federal Council has comprised members from four political parties (→ 'magic formula' p. 51).



1971 Equal opportunities Women's franchise

In February 1971, 66% of the electorate, then exclusively male, voted in favour of the women's franchise at federal level. Most cantons and communes also gave women the vote following this decision.



1979 New canton Jura

In 1978, 82% of Swiss voters say 'yes' to the creation of a new canton – the Canton of Jura. Since 1979 Switzerland has consisted of 26 cantons.



2000 Third Federal Constitution Separation of powers

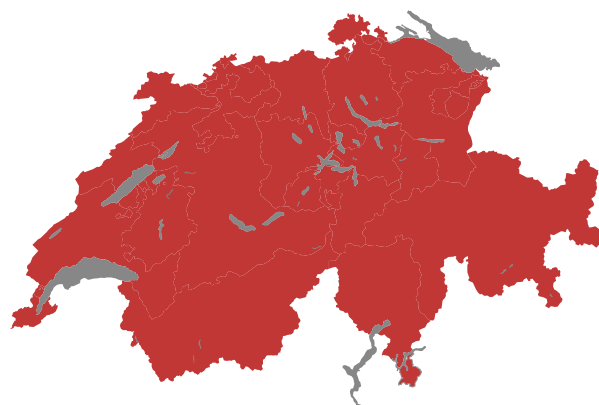
The totally revised Federal Constitution regulates the division of powers between the federal government and the cantons: more responsibilities are transferred to the federal government and the Federal Administration is expanded. In 1999, voters approved the third Federal Constitution. It came into force in 2000 and is still in force today.

Federalism

Switzerland is a federal state: state power is shared between the federal government, the cantons and the communes. **The cantons and communes have broad scope in carrying out their responsibilities. Federalism makes it possible for Switzerland to exist as one entity – in spite of four linguistic cultures and varying regional characteristics.**

1

Switzerland, which is also referred to as the Swiss Confederation, has been a federal state since 1848.



Confederation

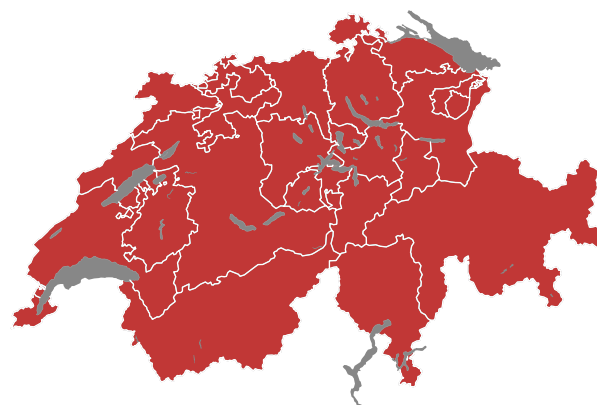
The Federal Constitution defines the Confederation's tasks and responsibilities. These include Switzerland's relations with the outside world, defence, the national road network, and nuclear energy. Switzerland's Parliament, the Federal Assembly, is made up of the National Council and the Council of States; the government comprises seven federal councillors, and the Federal Supreme Court is responsible for national jurisprudence. The Confederation is financed among other means through direct federal tax.

85 % of the domestic population lives in urban areas.

11 % of all Swiss citizens live outside Switzerland: 827 000 'Swiss Abroad'.

26

The Confederation is made up of 26 cantons.



Cantons

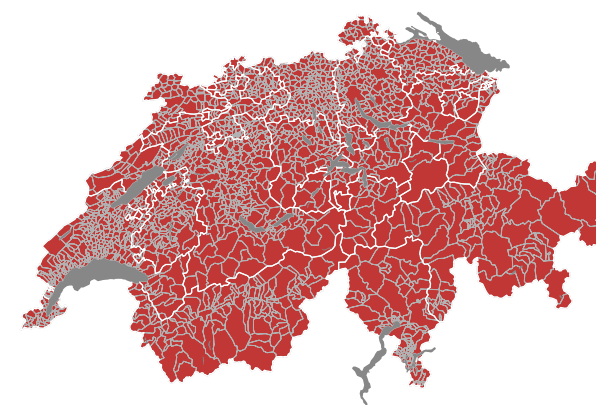
Each canton has its own parliament, government, courts and constitution. The cantonal constitution may not contradict the Federal Constitution. The cantons implement the requirements of the Confederation, but structure their activities in accordance with their particular needs. They have broad scope in deciding how to meet their responsibilities, for example in the areas of education and health-care, cultural affairs and police matters. Each canton levies its own cantonal taxes.

Four cantons are officially multilingual: Bern, Fribourg and Valais have two official languages, Graubünden even has three.

People's assemblies (Landsgemeinde) are still held in the cantons of Appenzell Inner- rhoden and Glarus.

2110

The 26 cantons are divided into 2110 communes.



Communes

Each canton determines itself the division of responsibilities between it and the communes. The responsibilities of the communes include local planning, running schools, social welfare and the fire service. Larger communes and cities have their own parliaments, and organise their own referendums. In smaller communes, decisions are made by the citizens at communal assemblies. Each commune levies a communal tax.

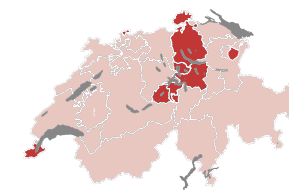
The number of communes is gradually falling as more and more merge.

The National Fiscal Equalisation system is an important instrument in ensuring Switzerland's cohesion and reflects its desire for solidarity. The economically stronger cantons and the federal government assist the financially weaker cantons.

The most populous commune is the city of Zurich, where around 437,000 people live. The least populous is Kam-mersrohr in the canton of Solothurn (32 people).

When it comes to fulfilling their tasks, each canton starts with a different set of circumstances: there are smaller, larger, more urban, more rural and more mountainous cantons. The National Fiscal Equalisation system is designed to reduce the economic disparities between the cantons.

The federal government and nine of the cantons are net contributors: ZH, SZ, OW, NW, ZG, BS, SH, AI, GE. The remaining 17 cantons receive equalisation payments (net beneficiaries).



● Net contributors (9)
● Net beneficiaries (17)

In 2026, CHF 6.4bn flow into the fiscal equalisation system: 4.3bn from the federal government, 2.1bn from the cantons.

2.1
4.3
6.4

The examples of Valais and Zug

The Canton of Valais, which is financially weaker, receives CHF 861m in fiscal equalisation, or CHF 2395 per inhabitant. The Canton of Zug, which is financially stronger, contributes CHF 467m, or CHF 3571 per inhabitant towards fiscal equalisation.

Fiscal equalisation
(in German)



Video on Federalism
(in German)



International agreements and memberships

Switzerland is a neutral country with worldwide connections: it has ties with the European Union through a network of bilateral agreements, and it is a member of the United Nations and other international organisations. Experts and politicians from around the world meet in Geneva to work together internationally.

Europe

Agreements with the European Union EU

Switzerland is not a member of the EU, but pursues close relations with it under a bilateral approach governed by over 100 bilateral agreements primarily concluded in two packages (Bilaterals I and II):

The first package of bilateral agreements was accepted by Swiss voters in 2000. The 7 agreements mainly cover economic matters. The main aim is to facilitate market access for both sides (goods, services, labour). The EU member states and especially the neighbouring countries are Switzerland's most important trading partners. Switzerland is the fourth most important trading partner for the EU.

The second package of bilateral agreements was signed in 2004. It governs further economic aspects, as well as cooperation in the fields of asylum, security, the environment and culture. There are 9 agreements, including the Schengen-Dublin agreement. Schengen facilitates transnational mobility and cooperation on justice and police. Dublin facilitates coordination on asylum proceedings.

In 2025, the Federal Council approved the 'Stabilisation and further development of Swiss-EU relations' package (**Bilaterals III**) negotiated with the EU. It mainly includes the updating of five existing agreements from the Bilaterals I package, participation in EU research programmes and three new agreements (electricity, health and food safety). This is intended to ensure that Switzerland continues to have unhindered access to the EU market. Parliamentary deliberations on the package will begin in 2026.

27 member states
Headquarters in Brussels
Since 1951 (ECSC)

Memberships

EFTA

The European Free Trade Association promotes free trade between its members Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway. Together with the EU countries, the EFTA countries – excluding Switzerland – form the European Economic Area (EEA). Swiss voters rejected membership of the EEA in 1992.

4 member states
Headquarters in Geneva
Founded in 1960, Switzerland a founding member

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe focuses its work on promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is one of the Council of Europe's major achievements. It gives every citizen the right to lodge a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights if rights guaranteed by the ECHR have been violated – provided that all judicial avenues in Switzerland have been exhausted.

46 member states
Headquarters in Strasbourg
Secretary General: Alain Berset (CH)
Founded in 1949, Switzerland a member since 1963



Neutrality

World

Memberships

United Nations UN

193 states of the world belong to the UN. It is committed to promoting peace and international security, sustainable development and respect for human rights. Switzerland has been a member of the UN since 2002 after 55 % of voters supported accession in a referendum.

193 member states
Main headquarters in New York, European headquarters in Geneva and Vienna
Founded in 1945, Switzerland a member since 2002

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, with its participating states in North America, Europe and Asia, is the world's largest regional security organisation. As a political forum for dialogue, it addresses a broad range of regional security issues encompassing politico-military matters, economic and environmental issues and human rights. In 2026, Switzerland will assume the chairmanship of the OSCE for the third time, after 1996 and 2014.

57 participating states
Headquarters in Vienna
Founded in 1975, Switzerland a founding member

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, also active in the field of communication, is a forum for international cooperation and the development of global standards. Its aim is to promote solidarity among people and thereby contribute to peace, security and sustainable development.

194 member states
Headquarters in Paris
Founded in 1945, Switzerland a member since 1949

WTO

The World Trade Organization regulates and promotes global trade relations. The aim of the WTO agreements is to ensure transparent, functioning and non-discriminatory trade. WTO members undertake to comply with certain basic rules in shaping their trade relations.

166 member states
Headquarters in Geneva
Founded in 1995, Switzerland a founding member

OECD

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development is a forum for exchanging knowledge in a wide variety of fields. Its goal is to promote prosperity, quality of life and equal opportunities. The OECD develops international standards and regularly publishes international statistics and studies, including the PISA studies.

38 member states
Headquarters in Paris
Founded in 1961, Switzerland a founding member

Partnership

NATO Partnership for Peace

As a neutral country, Switzerland is not permitted to enter into a military alliance with a mutual defence obligation. As such, Switzerland is not a member of NATO but has cooperated with it since 1996 within the framework of the Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. NATO is a political and military defence alliance of 32 European and North American countries. Together with partner countries, it works for security and peace in the transatlantic area.

32 members
Headquarters in Brussels
Founded in 1949

Direct democracy

Post for the Federal Council: In a petition, young people are calling for 8 weeks of holidays for apprentices instead of 5. A petition is a request or demand made to a federal, cantonal or communal

authority. It is usually submitted in the form of a signature list. Anyone can submit a petition – including young people and those without a Swiss passport.

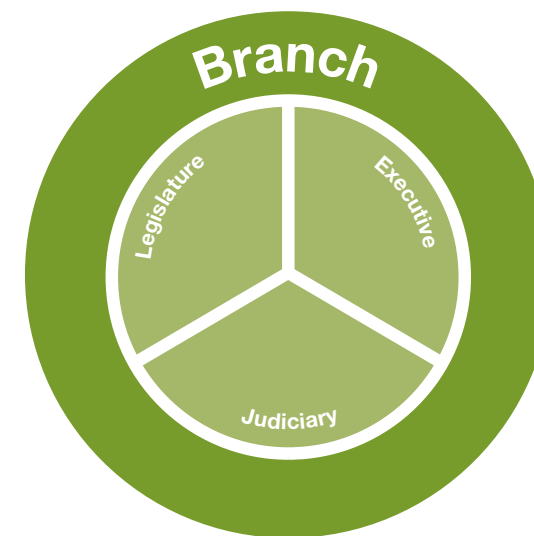


Direct democracy

Is there any other country where people have as many democratic rights as in Switzerland? **People vote on specific issues three to four times a year. Every four years there are parliamentary elections. The separation of powers ensures that power is not concentrated in the hands of any single person or political party: this is a fundamental principle of Swiss democracy.**

Separation of powers

Power is divided among the three branches of the State, the legislature (Parliament), the executive (Federal Council) and the judiciary (courts).



Right to vote and to be elected

Swiss citizens aged 18 and over have the right to vote at national level. And they can also stand as candidates for public office. Around 5.6 million people are eligible to vote.



Popular votes

The Swiss are world champions at voting: they vote on every amendment to the Constitution. By launching a popular initiative or calling for a referendum, citizens can demand that a vote be held on a political issue.



A wide range of parties

Switzerland's political landscape is home to a diverse range of parties, none of which has a majority at federal level – neither in Parliament nor in the Federal Council.



Turnout for votes and elections

Usually around 46 % of those eligible to vote cast their ballots in federal votes. Voter turnout may be higher or lower depending on the issue that is being voted on. Turnout is similar in elections: just under 50 % of Swiss women and men normally vote in federal elections.

Casting your ballot

Voters have various ways of casting their ballots:

- **By post:** voters send their ballot paper by post in the official envelope or pop it in the mailbox at their local council offices.
- **At the ballot box:** voters can put their ballot paper in the ballot box at the local polling station.

E-voting

The federal government enables the cantons to offer online electronic voting to a section of their voters. These trials have to meet rigorous requirements. The federal government and the cantons are supported in this by the scientific community.

People's assemblies (Landsgemeinden)

In the cantons of Glarus and Appenzell Innerrhoden, several thousand voters gather outdoors once a year to vote in a people's assembly (Landsgemeinde). They vote to elect their representatives and to decide on proposals that affect their canton. The people's assembly is an ancient form of Swiss democracy.



Political system

Separation of powers

The separation of powers prevents a concentration of power in the hands of any individual person or institution. **It is a basic principle of democracy: power is divided among the three branches of state, the legislature, executive and judiciary. No one may serve more than one of the three branches of state at any given time.**

The Sovereign
The Swiss people



The Swiss people elect the Parliament (the legislature):
The 200 members of the National Council and the 46 members of the Council of States.



National Council



Council of States

The Legislature Parliament

Passing laws

Parliament decides on new laws and oversees the Federal Council and the Federal Administration as well as the federal courts and the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland. It comprises two chambers: The National Council represents the People, while the Council of States represents the 26 cantons. The two Councils have equal powers. Together they make up the United Federal Assembly. (→ p. 30ff.)

Parliament also appoints the Attorney General: he or she heads the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland, which prosecutes offences involving explosives and espionage as well as offences committed by federal employees while carrying out their official duties.
www.attorneygeneral.ch



The Judiciary The Courts

Laying down the law

There are four federal courts. The highest court is the Federal Supreme Court: it hears appeals against the judgments of the other courts and issues the final judgment in most cases. The Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court are the federal courts of first instance. Most of their decisions can be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court. (→ p. 74ff.)



The Executive The Government



Implementing laws

The Federal Council is Switzerland's government: it draws up new laws and ensures that the decisions of Parliament are implemented. It comprises seven equal members; they reach their decisions together. Each Federal Councillor heads a department. The seven departments and the Federal Chancellery make up the Federal Administration. (→ p. 48ff.)



Parliament elects the government (the executive):

The seven members of the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor.



Parliament appoints the judges (the judiciary):

The president of the Federal Supreme Court and the judges of the four federal courts.

Votes

The electorate decides on political issues up to four times a year. Votes are held on popular initiatives and on certain parliamentary decisions, in most cases having to do with constitutional or legislative amendments.

Changing the Constitution

In Switzerland, every amendment to the Constitution must be put to a vote (**mandatory referendum**) – whether the proposed amendment was passed by Parliament or put forward by popular initiative. For a new constitutional article to come into force, the consent of a majority of the People (popular majority) and the cantons (majority of the cantons) is needed (**double majority**). A popular vote is also ‘mandatory’ for Switzerland to join an organisation for collective security or a supranational community (e.g. the UN or the EU). Switzerland can only join such an organisation or community if a double majority is achieved.

Putting a stop to a new law

If Parliament passes a new law or approves an international treaty, those eligible to vote may request a referendum against it (**optional referendum**). If they are successful, a referendum is held in which the law or treaty in question is put to a vote. A majority of voters must approve the law or referendum for it to come into force (**simple majority**).

2026 voting dates
Votes are scheduled to take place on the following Sundays in 2026:

8 March
14 June
27 September
29 November

Instruments of direct democracy

Popular initiative

Anyone who has the right to vote in Switzerland can launch or sign a popular initiative to amend the Constitution. For a vote to be held on a popular initiative, 100,000 valid signatures must be collected within a period of 18 months.

Popular initiatives were introduced at federal level in 1891. 237 have been voted on since then. 26 have been accepted.

As of 31 December 2025, 11 initiatives were at the signature-gathering stage, 20 were pending before the Federal Council or Parliament and 4 were ready to be put to a vote.

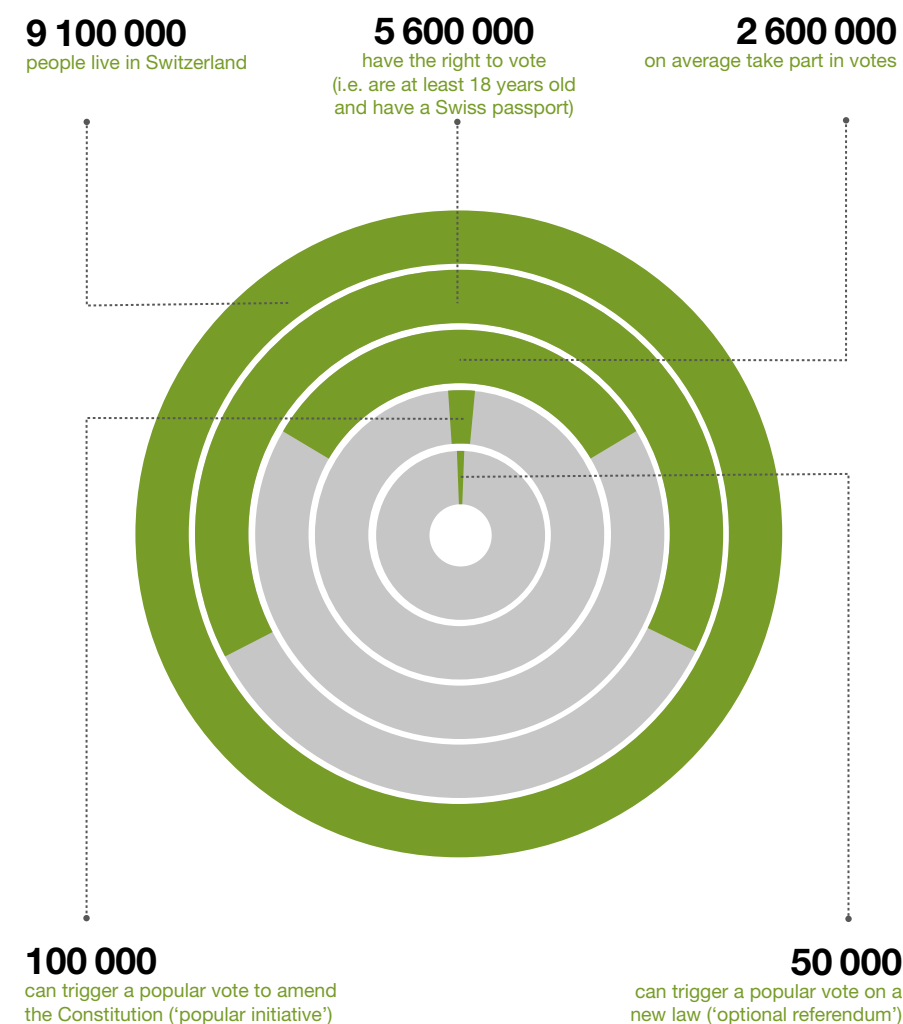
Optional referendum

To bring a decision made by Parliament to a vote (e.g. to stop a new law from passing), anyone who has the right to vote can launch an optional referendum. To do so, they must collect 50,000 valid signatures within 100 days. An optional referendum is also held upon request by eight cantons (‘referendum requested by the cantons’).

The optional referendum was introduced in 1874. 219 have been held since then; 91 of the proposals were rejected by voters.

As of 31 December 2025, the referendum period was running for 22 federal acts and decrees. Signatures were being collected against one proposal.

Number of people entitled to play a part in political life as a proportion of the overall population



Votes held in 2025

9 February 2025
Environmental Responsibility Initiative
No 69.8 %

28 September 2025
Federal decree on cantonal property taxes on second homes
Yes 57.7 %

Federal Act on Electronic Identity (e-ID Act)
Yes 50.4 %

30 November 2025
Civic Duty Initiative
No 84.2 %

Initiative for a Future
No 78.3 %



Videos on proposals
submitted to the vote of
the People (in German)

Elections

Elections to the Federal Assembly are held every four years. Voters aim to elect the 246 members of parliament that best represent their views. They have a large number of candidates from a wide range of parties from which to choose.

Elections to the National Council

Elections to the National Council are federal elections. The provisions of the Federal Act on Political Rights apply in all cantons.

Right to vote and to be elected

Swiss citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote: not only can they vote for the members of the National Council (right to vote), they can also stand for election to the National Council (right to be elected).

Elections based on proportional representation

Elections to the National Council in most cantons are based on a system of proportional representation: seats are allocated in proportion to the number of votes each party or party list receives.

Dates

The most recent federal elections were held on 22 October 2023. The next elections to the National Council and (in most cantons) the Council of States will be held on

24 October 2027.

Elections to the Council of States

Elections to the Council of States are governed by cantonal law: each canton has its own rules on who is eligible to vote, when elections are held, what the election procedure is and how ballot papers are completed. However, the following rules are the same in all 26 cantons: elections to the Council of States are held every four years and candidates for election to the Council of States must be at least 18 years old and hold Swiss citizenship.

Elections based on the simple majority system

Elections to the Council of States in almost every canton are based on the simple majority system: the person who receives the most votes is elected.

- **Absolute majority:** the person who receives more than half of all the votes cast is elected.
- **Relative majority:** the person who receives more votes than any of the other candidates is elected.

Examples of cantonal differences

In the canton of Glarus, Swiss citizens aged 16 and 17 can also vote in elections to the Council of States. Candidates for the Council of States must be under the age of 65. In Appenzell Innerrhoden, voters elect their member of the Council of States at an outdoor assembly ('the Landsgemeinde'). In the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel, a system of proportional representation is used, while in the other cantons the simple majority system applies.



Electoral
vocabulary



Voting rights
(with video)



Official information on the
federal elections
2023



Infographics
of the Federal
Statistical
Office

Parties from left to right

In the elections to the Swiss parliament, there are quite a number of parties to choose from, some very different from others. They differ from each other in their views on the role of the state, society and the economy.

Whereas left-wing parties (SP, the Greens) favour a highly developed social state, right-of-centre parties (FDP, SVP) advocate a liberal economic policy and personal responsibility. Certain political issues are neither distinctly left nor right-wing, i.e. environmental protection, the question of how open Switzerland should be towards the EU and international organisations, and issues regarding liberal values. Depending on the issue, centre parties (The Centre) will cooperate with either left or right-wing parties.

What does 'left-wing' mean?

- A strong social state that levels social disparities
- Emphasis on workers' interests
- Price controls, public services
- More peace policy, less military

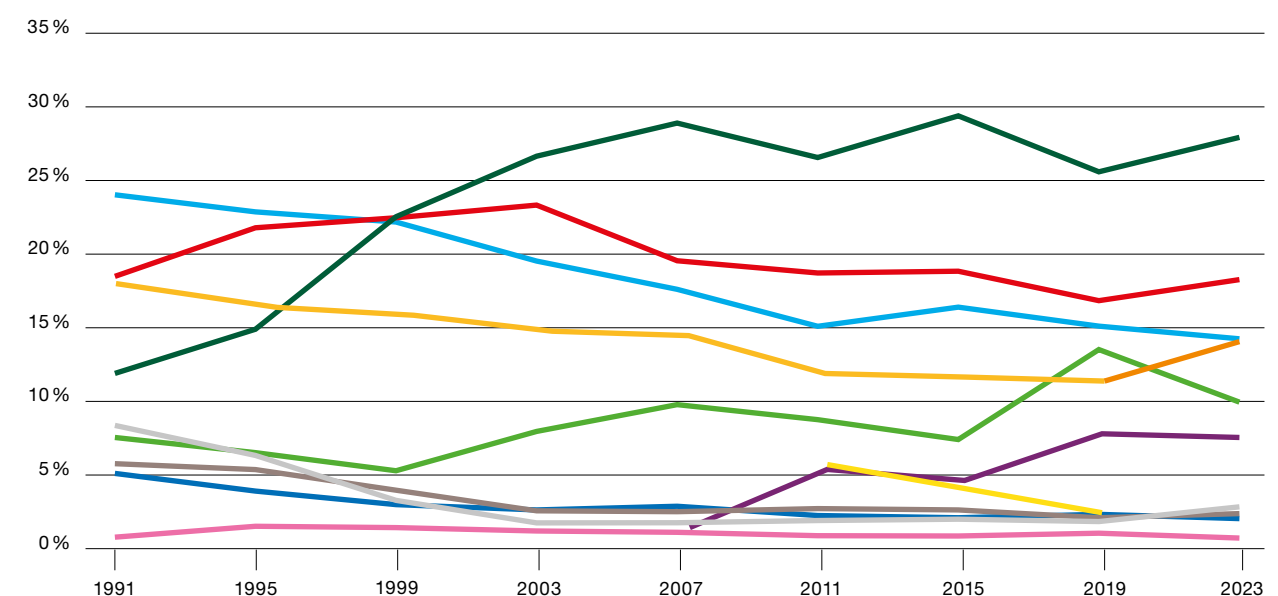
What does 'right-wing' mean?

- Freedom and personal responsibility; the state intervenes only where absolutely necessary
- Emphasis on employers' interests
- Free enterprise, economic incentives
- Strong national defence

Elections are decisive

Even in Switzerland most issues are decided by Parliament or the government. However, between the elections in 2019 and 2023, the electorate was called on to vote on 36 specific proposals. In the same period, Parliament passed 515 laws, including 187 federal acts and 83 federal decrees. It also elected the government, the members of the federal courts and the Attorney General.

Party strengths (shares of the vote in elections to the National Council 2023)



Political parties in the Federal Council and in Parliament

Switzerland's political landscape comprises many different parties, of which none holds a majority at federal level: There is no majority or opposition party in the country. In the 2023–2027 legislature period, 10 political parties are represented in the National Council. 7 of those are also represented in the Council of States, 4 in the Federal Council.

Political parties help to form political opinion, nominate candidates for public office and launch initiatives and referendums. Parties differ from each another in their views on the role of the state, society and the economy.

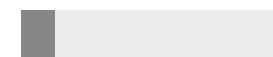


The GREENS Switzerland



Party President
Lisa Mazzone

Share of the vote* **9.8 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	23
Council of States	3

www.gruene.ch

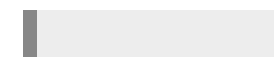


glp – Swiss Green Liberal Party



Party President
Jürg Grossen

Share of the vote* **7.6 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	10
Council of States	1

www.gruenliberale.ch

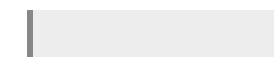


EVP – Swiss Evangelical People's Party



Party President
Lilian Studer

Share of the vote* **2 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	2
Council of States	0

www.evppev.ch

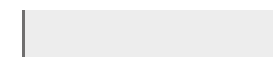


EDU – Federal Democratic Union



Party President
Daniel Frischknecht

Share of the vote* **1.2 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	2
Council of States	0

www.edu-schweiz.ch

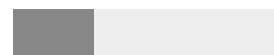


SVP – Swiss People's Party



Party President
Marcel Dettling

Share of the vote* **27.9 %**



Federal Council	2
National Council	62
Council of States	6

www.svp.ch

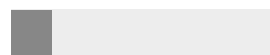


SP – Swiss Social Democratic Party



Co-Presidents
Matteo Meyer
Cédric Wermuth

Share of the vote* **18.3 %**



Federal Council	2
National Council	41
Council of States	9

www.sp-ps.ch

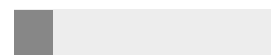


FDP – FDP.The Liberals



Co-Presidents
Susanne Vincenz-Stauffacher
Benjamin Mühlemann

Share of the vote* **14.3 %**



Federal Council	2
National Council	28
Council of States	11

www.fdp.ch

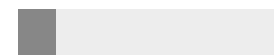


The Centre**



Party President
Philipp Matthias Bregy

Share of the vote* **14.1 %**



Federal Council	1
National Council	29
Council of States	15

www.die-mitte.ch

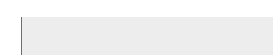


LdT – Lega dei Ticinesi



Coordinator
Daniele Piccaluga

Share of the vote* **0.6 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	1
Council of States	0

www.lega-dei-ticinesi.ch

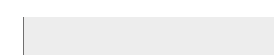


MCG – Mouvement Citoyens Genevois



Party President
François Baertschi

Share of the vote* **0.5 %**



Federal Council	0
National Council	2
Council of States	1

www.mcge.ch

Parties with similar political convictions come together in parliamentary groups (→ p. 36).

Party presidents are not elected by the electorate, but by the members of the respective parties.



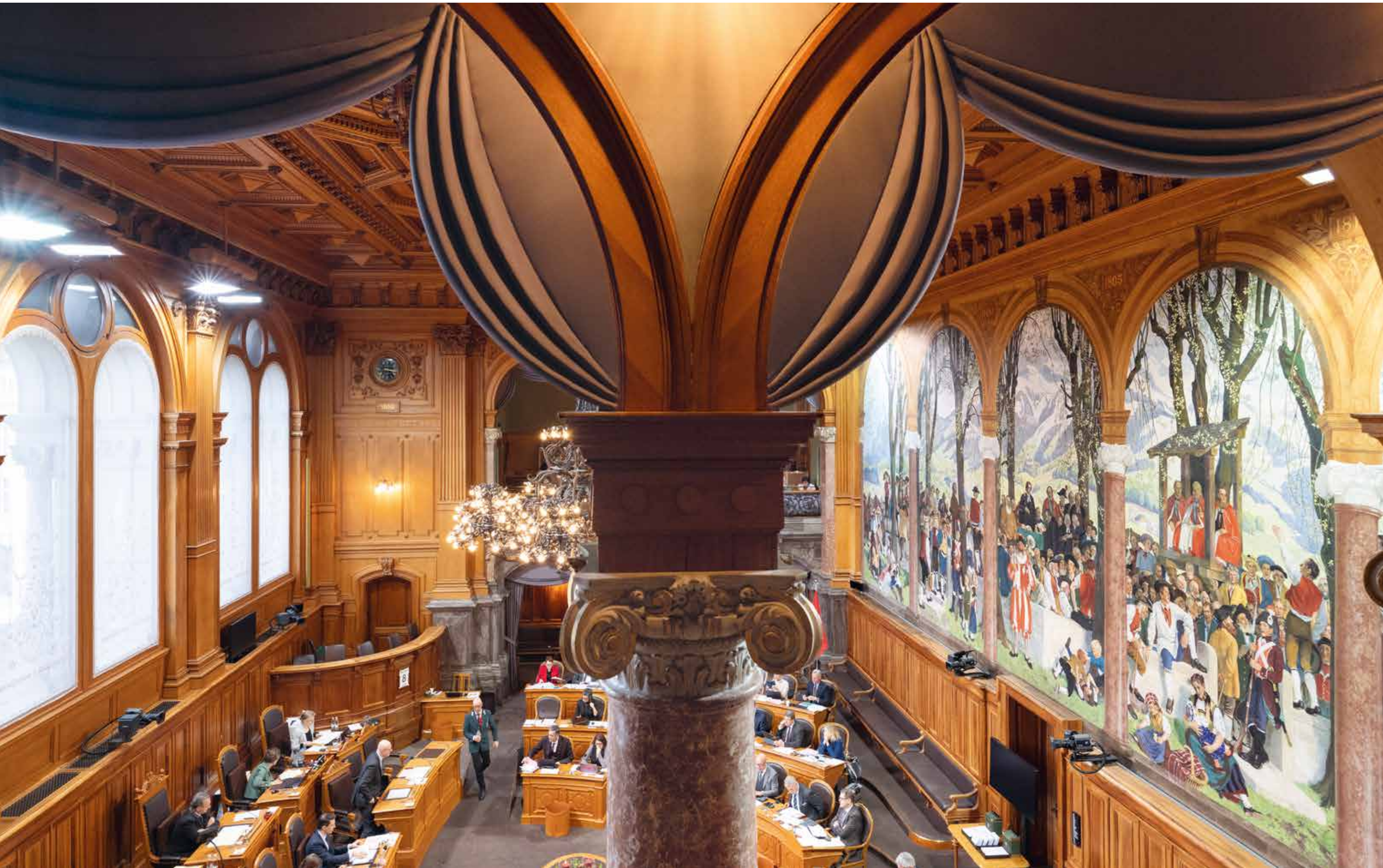
Political parties
in Switzerland

* Share of the vote at the 2023 parliamentary elections ('party strength') → p. 25

The Legislature **Parliament**

A glimpse inside the Council of States chamber during a session as the 46 representatives of the cantons discuss current parliamentary business. The fresco on the wall to the right

depicts a Landsgemeinde (people's assembly) in central Switzerland, linking Switzerland's political tradition with its representation of direct democracy.



The Legislature Parliament

Parliament passes laws and elects the members of the federal government and the federal courts. It is responsible for the federal budget and exercises oversight over the Federal Administration. Parliament is elected by the People. It consists of two chambers: the National Council and the Council of States. The National Council represents the people of Switzerland; the Council of States represents the 26 cantons. Each chamber has the same powers, and they conduct the same business. When sitting together in joint session, they constitute the United Federal Assembly.

www.parl.ch

The home of Swiss political life

The seat of Switzerland's parliament is the Parliament Building in Bern. It was built between 1894 and 1902 according to plans drawn up by Hans Wilhelm Auer, and was inaugurated by the United Federal Assembly on 1 April 1902.

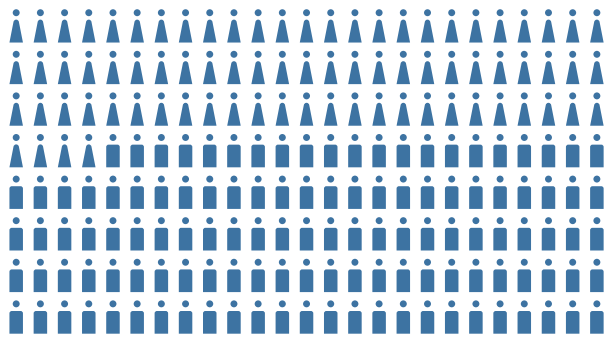
The architect had the aim of creating a national monument. 95 % of the materials used were sourced within Switzerland; contracts were awarded to 173 Swiss firms, while 38 Swiss artists were able to leave their mark in the Parliament Building for posterity. Naturally, Auer was careful to ensure that all of the cantons were represented when awarding the contracts.

The whole building is a reminder that Switzerland is a nation founded on the will of its people, in which different cultures, different linguistic areas and different geographical regions have come together of their own free will to form a political, national entity.



Video about Parliament – 'Erklär mir das Parlament' (in German)

Members in the National Council and the Council of States

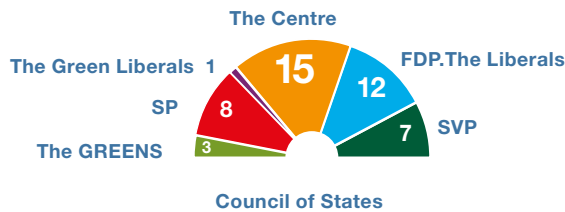
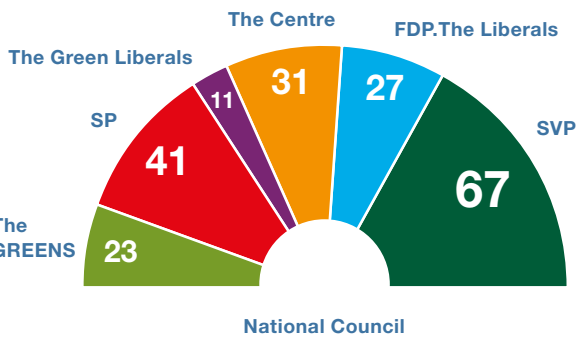


200 members of the National Council



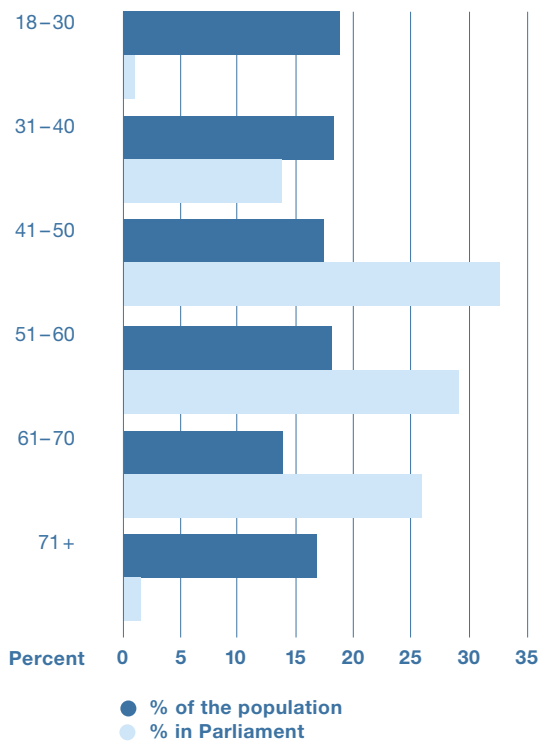
46 members of the Council of States

Strength of parliamentary groups

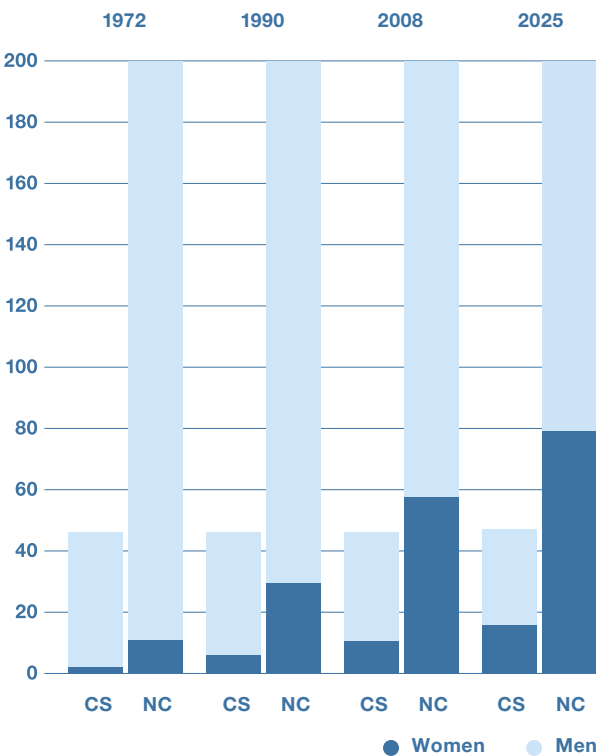


Graphics: status 19.12.2025

Age groups in the Swiss population and in Parliament



Women and men in Parliament



The roles of Parliament

Parliament is responsible for enacting legislation, releasing funding, electing the members of the highest federal authorities and overseeing the Federal Council, the Federal Administration and the federal courts.



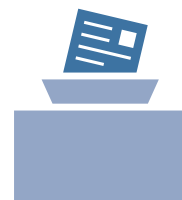
Legislation

Parliament enacts legislative provisions in the form of federal acts or ordinances. Amendments to the Federal Constitution must be put to the vote of the People and the Cantons.

The Federal Constitution forms the bedrock of the Swiss Confederation. The People and the Cantons are the gatekeepers of the Constitution. Parliament can draft amendments to the Federal Constitution, but must put them to the vote of the People and the Cantons (→ mandatory referendum, p. 22). People can launch a popular initiative to amend the Constitution (→ p. 22).

Federal acts formulate in detail the provisions of the Constitution. They are enacted by Parliament, but are subject to an optional referendum (→ p. 22): If 50,000 eligible voters or eight cantons request a referendum, the act is submitted to the People for a vote. A majority of voters must approve the act for it to come into force.

How new laws come about
→ p. 42/43

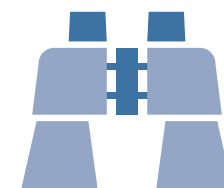


Election of federal authorities

The National Council and the Council of States come together for elections to form the United Federal Assembly, which elects the members of the federal government and the federal courts and, in the event of war, appoints a general. During the winter session, it elects one member of the Federal Council as president of the federal government, and another as vice president, each for a one-year mandate. The United Federal Assembly also elects the Federal Council's chief of staff, also known as the Federal Chancellor, the Attorney General of Switzerland and the Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner.

Federal Council → p. 50/51

Federal Courts → p. 74–85



Budget control and oversight

Parliament has sovereignty over federal finances: it determines the budget for the following year, takes note of the Federal Council's budget and approves the state accounts of the previous year. Parliament votes on the budget during the winter session. The items of business move quickly from one chamber to the other. In the event that the National Council and the Council of States are unable to reach an agreement on the federal budget, the lower amount is accepted. The finance and control committees and their delegations are in charge of overseeing the Federal Budget. They check the work of the Federal Council, the Federal Administration and the federal courts, and thereby also examine the effectiveness of these authorities.

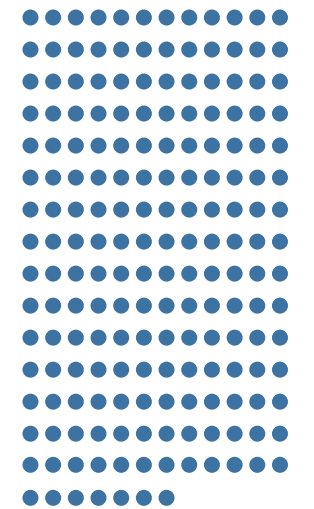
Federal revenues and expenses: p. 48/49



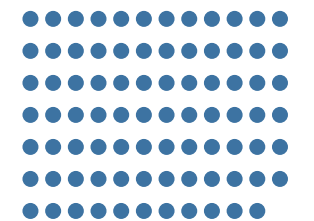
Video about the roles
of the Federal Assembly
(in German)

In the 51st legislature period
(2019–2023) Parliament
enacted 515 decrees:

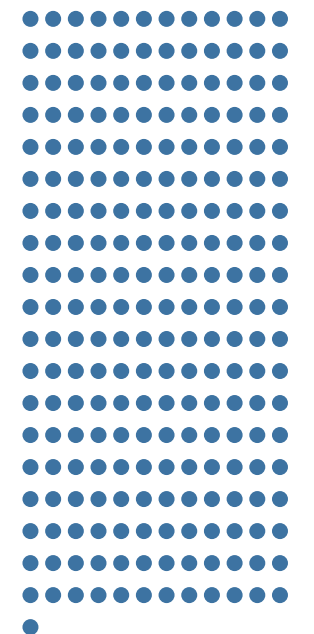
187 federal acts



83 federal decrees



229 simple federal decrees



16 ordinances



Legislative provisions are enacted in the form of federal acts and ordinances. The other form of enactment is the federal decree. Referendums are required only for a small number of federal acts. Simple federal decrees and ordinances cannot be stopped by a referendum.

Organisation of Parliament

The Swiss parliament consists of two chambers: the National Council and the Council of States. The National Council represents the Swiss population, while the Council of States represents the 26 cantons. The two Councils have equal powers: All items of business are handled both by the National Council and the Council of States. The Councils must agree on all items of business before their decisions can come into force.



The large chamber is the National Council

The National Council represents the people living in Switzerland. It has 200 seats. Cantons with a larger population have more seats. Each canton is entitled to at least one seat. Each member of the National Council represents around 45,000 people. The National Council is also known as the 'large chamber' or the 'people's chamber'.

President of the National Council for 2026

Every year, a different member acts as president of the National Council. Pierre-André Page (SVP) will preside over the National Council in 2026. The president plans and directs National Council deliberations, heads the Council Office and represents the National Council externally.

Election based on proportional representation

National Council elections are held every four years in most cantons on a proportional basis. This means that the seats held by a canton are distributed among the different political parties based on the votes they receive. This makes it possible for smaller political forces to be represented in the people's chamber.

National Council elections schedule

The next elections will be held on **24 October 2027**.



Video about the most important bodies of the Federal Assembly (in German)



The small chamber is the Council of States

The Council of States has 46 seats and represents the cantons. Twenty cantons have two seats, and six cantons have one seat. The six cantons with only one seat were until 1999 listed as 'half cantons' in the Federal Constitution. They are Obwalden and Nidwalden, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Appenzell Innerrhoden, and Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft. The size of a canton's population is not a determining factor in its number of seats in the Council of States. The canton of Uri, which has a comparatively small population, has the same number of two seats as does the populous canton of Zurich. This system balances out the voting power of the populous cantons in the National Council. The Council of States is often referred to as the 'small chamber' or the 'chamber of the cantons'.

President of the Council of States for 2026

Every year a different member acts as president of the Council of States. Stefan Engler (The Center) will preside over the Council of States in 2026. The president plans and directs the Council of States deliberations, heads the Council Office and represents the Council of States externally.

Election based on the simple majority system

Council of States elections are held every four years, in most cantons at the same time as the National Council elections. Council of States elections are almost always based on the simple majority system. This means that the candidate who receives the most votes is elected. The cantons decide individually when and how they elect their representatives to the Council of States.

Council of States elections schedule

The next elections will be held in **April or October 2027**.



The United Federal Assembly

The National Council and the Council of States convene as the United Federal Assembly to handle specific items of business. The United Federal Assembly elects the members of the federal government and the Federal Supreme Court, the Federal Chancellor, and the Attorney General of Switzerland. It also meets to take note of statements made by the Federal Council, and rule on conflicts of jurisdiction.

Sessions

The National Council and the Council of States meet for three-week sessions in spring, summer, autumn and winter to deliberate and rule on items of business. The two chambers meet separately, but under the same roof of the Parliament Building in Bern. Council Office, parliamentary group and committee meetings take place in-between sessions.

Schedule of sessions for 2026

Spring session:

2–20 March

Summer session:

1–19 June

Autumn session:

14 September–2 October

Winter session:

30 November–18 December

Special session (if required):

27 April–1 May

Election of the presidents of the National Council and of the Council of States:

30 November

Election of the President of the Swiss Confederation and of the Vice President of the Federal Council: **9 December**

The meetings are open to the public. The debates are broadcast live on the Parliament website, and published after around an hour as a verbatim report with a video in the Official Bulletin: www.parl.ch



President of the National Council for 2026
Pierre-André Page, Fribourg
SVP

What are your priorities for your year as president?

My priorities are to ensure that our country can maintain and strengthen its sovereignty, stability and position in the international community. My international meetings will provide an opportunity to offer our good offices, so that we can work together to shape our future.

What inspired you to enter politics?

I am a farmer by trade, and at first I got involved in my commune to make sure that the people working the land had a voice at the local level. Later I was fortunate enough to be elected to the Cantonal Parliament, where I was also president in 2009, and then went on to represent the interests of my region as a member of the National Council. Staying close to people and the land has always been my priority.

How do you recharge your batteries?

In my spare time, I enjoy hiking and spending time with my family. My political work often requires me to be away, so I like to gather my loved ones together as much as possible when I return.



President of the Council of States for 2026
Stefan Engler, Graubünden
The Centre

What are your priorities for your year as president?

The top priority is to ensure that debates in the Council of States are run efficiently and professionally. The credibility of this institution depends largely on its debating culture, and on how that is perceived beyond Parliament. I would also like to draw attention to the importance of quality in drafting legislation.

What do you do to unwind from political life?

The same things a lot of other people do – I try to put everything into perspective, make the most of the time I have to spend with friends and family. Doing what I choose, rather than what I am obliged to do.

What do you think Switzerland will be like in 20 years?

I hope that our generation can leave future generations enough freedom and scope to master their own challenges independently and without constraints. We must protect ourselves as much as possible from all forms of dependence if this vision is to become a reality. A liberal social order based on equal opportunities, personal responsibility and solidarity maximises people's chances for a happy life.

Political parties and parliamentary groups

10 parties are represented in Parliament, none of which holds a majority (→ p. 26).

Parliament is divided politically into **6 parliamentary groups**. They are made up of council members from the same party or from parties with similar views. Even members of small cantonal parties or independents tend to join a parliamentary group. At least five members are needed to form a parliamentary group.

The parliamentary groups are important for the formation of political opinion. They discuss important items of business of the Councils with the aim of agreeing on a common position which can be supported by the council members in the chamber and before the media and the general public.

In the National Council, membership of a parliamentary group is particularly important, since it is a prerequisite for being granted a seat on a committee. The more members a parliamentary group has, the more seats they are entitled to on committees and the greater the influence they have in Parliament. In the Council of States, parliamentary groups play a less important role.

Debates in the Councils

Despite the fact that the two Councils have the same rights, there are clear differences – not least because of their difference in size. In the National Council, debates are more rigorously regulated, and speaking time is restricted. Members of the National Council wishing to express an opinion must step up to the lectern to do so, while members of the Council of States may speak from their seats and are not subjected to speaking restrictions. During Council of States debates, anyone may take the floor. This leaves more room for spontaneity.



National Council chamber

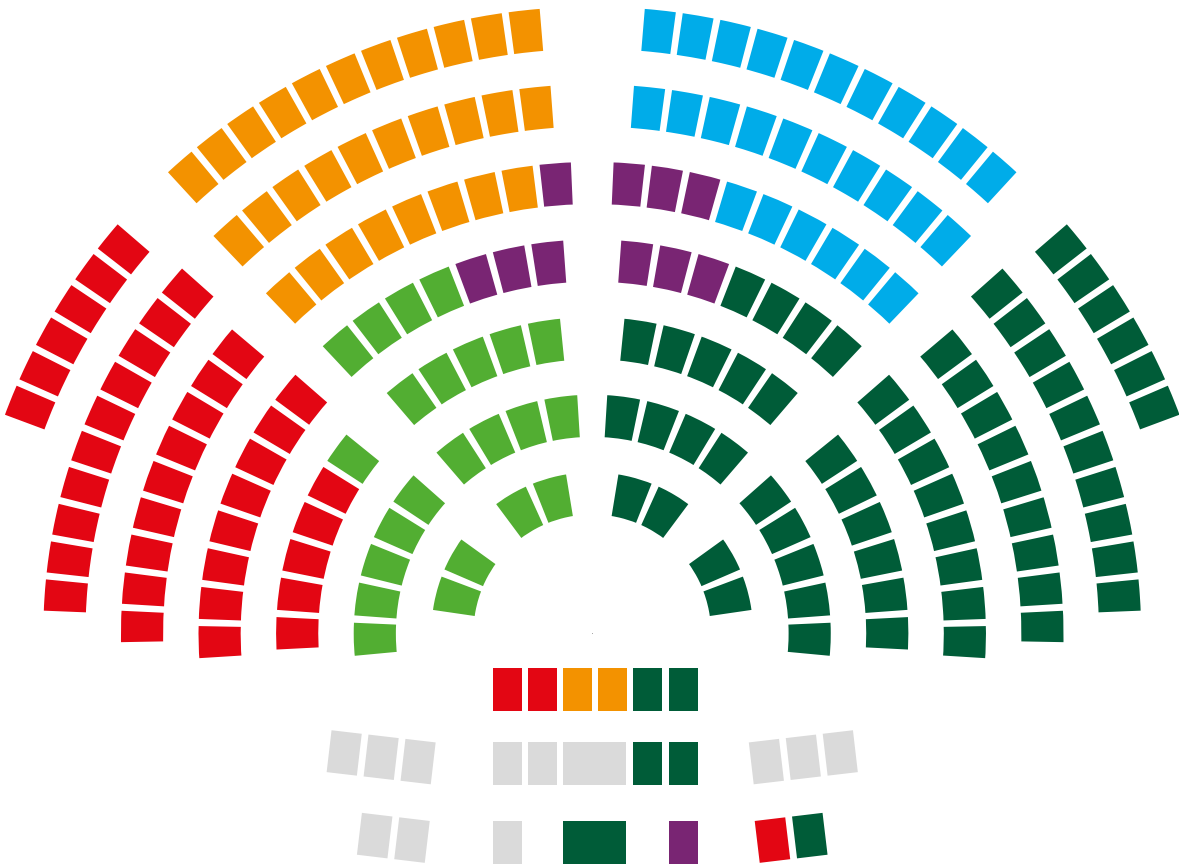


Council of States chamber

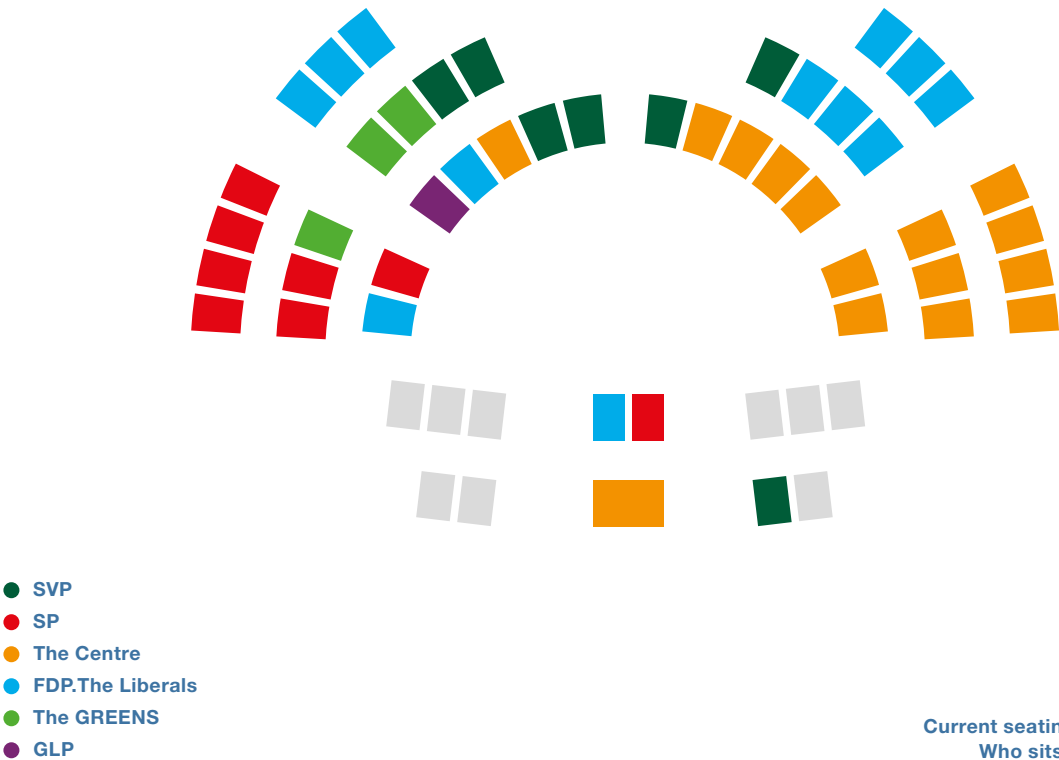
Parliamentary group (status 19.12.2025)	President	Composition / party	Total	NC	CS
● Group of the Swiss People's Party	Thomas Aeschi	68 SVP, 1 Lega, 2 EDU, 3 MCG	74	67	7
● Social Democratic Group	Samuel Bendaham Samira Marti	49 SP	49	41	8
● Centre group (The Centre-EVP)	Yvonne Bärgin	44 The Centre, 2 EVP	46	31	15
● FDP.The Liberals Group	Damien Cottier	39 FDP.The Liberals	39	27	12
● Green Group	Aline Trede	26 The GREENS	26	23	3
● Green Liberal Group	Corina Gredig	12 GLP	12	11	1

Allocation of seats in the National Council

Status 19.12.2025

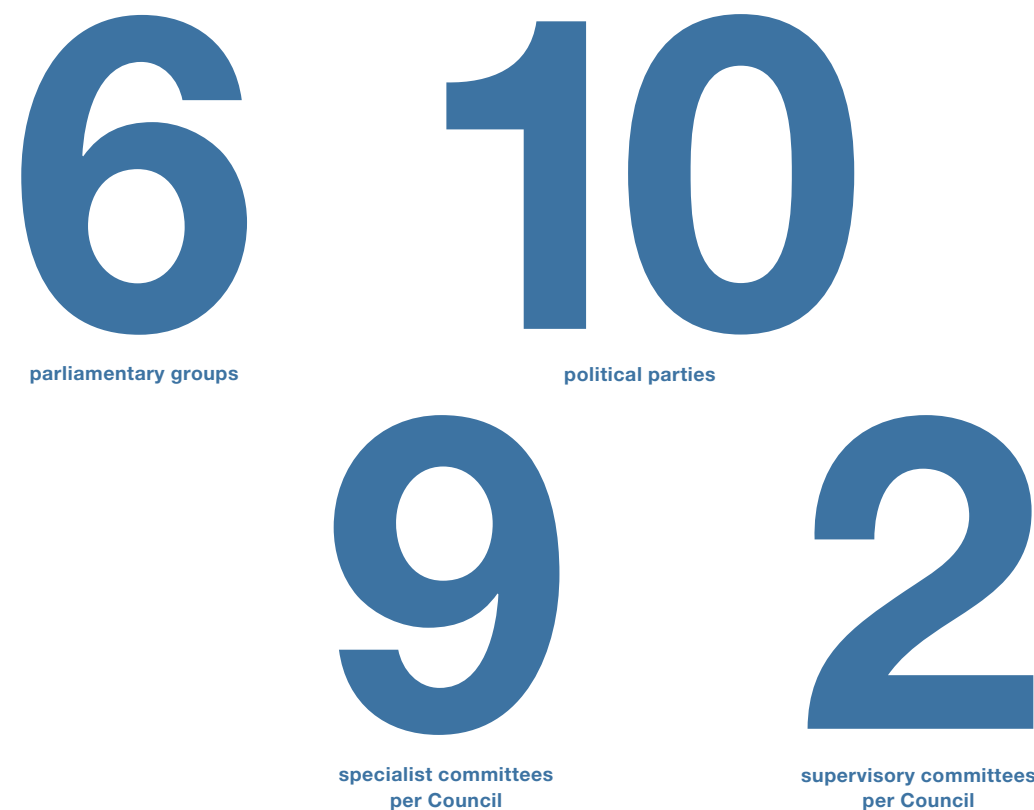


Allocation of seats in the Council of States



Current seating plans:
Who sits where?





Committees and delegations

The full Parliament is made up of 246 members. It would be difficult for so many people to deliberate an item of business. This is why initial discussions on all items of business take place in committees, which hold their meetings in camera. National Council committees comprise 25 members each, while those in the Council of States comprise 13 members. There are different types of committees:

Specialist committees

The National Council and the Council of States have nine committees that deal with specific areas. They discuss items of business related to their specific area and stay up-to-date on any relevant social and political developments.

Specific areas:

- Legal affairs
- Security policy
- State policy
- Economy and taxes
- Social security and healthcare
- Science, education and culture
- Transport and telecommunications
- Environment, spatial planning and energy
- Foreign policy

Supervisory committees

Each chamber has two supervisory committees: one to oversee federal finances and the other to examine the business of other federal authorities (Finance Committees and Control Committees).

The most rigorous means of parliamentary oversight is the Parliamentary Investigation Committee (PlnC).

Delegations

Delegations are composed of members of both chambers. Three delegations perform supervisory functions; seven delegations represent the Swiss parliament in international parliamentary assemblies; and five additional delegations are in charge of fostering relations with foreign parliaments.

Video
'Committee room 287 – Where policymaking happens. A Swiss Parliament film'



Parliamentary instruments

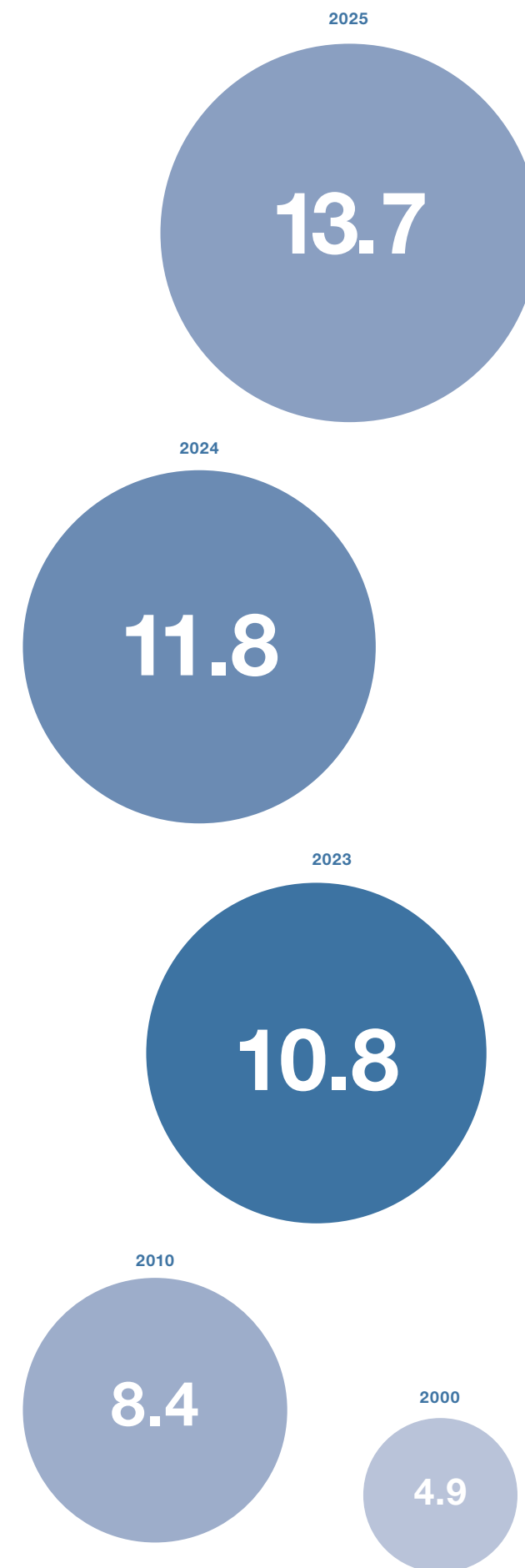
Members of the Federal Assembly, parliamentary groups and committees can initiate measures, propose new legislation and request information or reports. These procedural requests are generally addressed to the Federal Council.

- Members of the Federal Assembly, parliamentary groups and committees can table a **parliamentary initiative** to propose draft legislation. If both Councils agree, a committee will draw up the draft legislation.
- A **motion** is used to instruct the Federal Council to draft legislation (an act or an ordinance) or to take a specific measure. A motion must be approved by both Councils.
- A **postulate** is used to instruct the Federal Council to examine and report whether a new law should be drafted or measures taken. A postulate is accepted if a Council agrees to it.

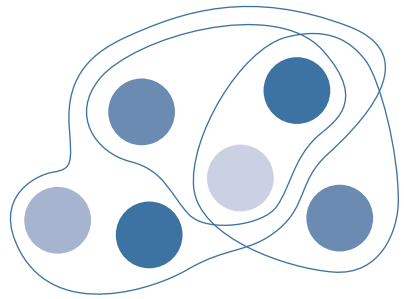
Before a motion or a postulate is submitted to the Council, the Federal Council puts forward a recommendation. The procedural requests recommended for adoption are expedited. The recommendation is prepared by the relevant department.

- An **interpellation** is a request to the Federal Council for information on important incidents in Switzerland and abroad, and on federal government matters. The Federal Council's response is then sometimes discussed in the Council of States and, in the case of urgent interpellations, also in the National Council.
- **Questions** are used to request information from the Federal Council. The Federal Council answers questions in writing. They are not dealt with in the Council. Urgent questions must be answered by the Federal Council in the same session.
- During **question time in the National Council**, Council members can ask the Federal Council questions on current issues. The questions must be submitted in writing one week in advance and will be answered orally by the responsible head of department.

Procedural requests tabled by each Council member



Particularities of Parliament



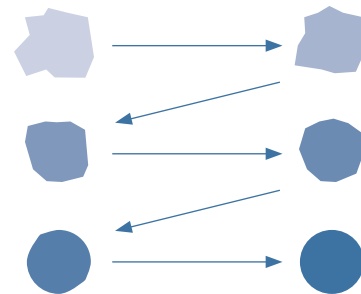
Shifting majorities

Several parties are represented in Parliament, none of which holds a majority. Parliament does not have a lasting majority nor a permanent opposition, as is the case in many other countries. Majorities are built on the basis of the issues and depend on which parties agree on an issue.



Two councils with equal powers

In many countries, parliament is unicameral. In Switzerland, Parliament has two chambers – the National Council and the Council of States – which have exactly the same powers and responsibilities. The two chambers deal with the same business in the same way. They must agree on all points for a bill to come into force, and must use the same wording to adopt legislation. Approval by only one chamber is not enough. It often takes time for the National Council and the Council of States to reach an agreement.



Resolution of differences

In the event that the National Council and the Council of States are unable to reach an agreement on an item of business, the business is sent from one chamber to the other for a resolution of differences, where it is examined by the preliminary consultation committees. If the National Council and the Council of States are still not in agreement about the business after three rounds, a reconciliation conference is held. If there is no agreement on the business, it is abandoned. (→ p. 43)

Guten Tag!
Bonjour!
Buon giorno!

Three official languages

Parliament debates and enacts laws in the country's three official languages (German, French, Italian), and in certain cases also in Romansh. In the National Council, statements are translated simultaneously into the three official languages. Multilingualism reflects the respect for minorities, which is the basis for living together in Switzerland. Every statement is published in the language in which it was submitted in the Official Bulletin.



Voting recommendations

Popular votes are held regularly in Switzerland. Parliament and the Federal Council provide voting recommendations on each proposal in an explanatory pamphlet that is sent to all voters before the vote. The pamphlet is also available online.



Stability

The government and Parliament are elected for a period of four years, and cannot be dissolved. Parliament's decisions are not an expression of confidence or no confidence in the government. Parliament can send back, amend or reject draft legislation, without the government having to step down. This gives Parliament a strong position. In addition, Parliament is the only body at national level that is directly legitimised by the People.



The People have the last word

In Switzerland, it is not Parliament that has the last word, but the electorate. In addition to the right to vote, voters have two options for directly influencing national politics:

- Referendums (→ p. 22)
- Popular initiatives (→ p. 22)



Semi-professional Parliament

Most of the members of the Swiss parliament are not full-time politicians. Part-time politicians bring hands-on expertise to debates due to their professional experience, and they are more grounded and accessible to the people. However, council members spend more and more time on their parliamentary work, some even full-time. This gives Switzerland a mixture of part-time and full-time politicians.

How new laws come about

Enacting new legislation takes time and consists of several stages. Many different actors are involved in the legislative process. Only once they have all shared their views, and the National Council and the Council of States agree on the wording of the law can the Federal Council bring the law into force. And, of course, only once the People have given their approval.

Legislation: When speed is of the essence

“Federal acts whose entry into force cannot be delayed (emergency federal acts) may be declared urgent by an absolute majority of the members of each of the two Councils and be brought into force immediately. Such acts must be of limited duration.” That is the wording of Article 165 of the Federal Constitution. In certain cases, the people can vote on ‘emergency federal acts’ retrospectively.



Swiss voters



The Federal Council and the Federal Administration

1 Impetus
It is the Federal Council or Parliament that gives the impetus (in the form of a parliamentary initiative, a motion or a postulate → p. 39) for a new law. The cantons may also request a new law (cantonal initiative).

2 Preliminary draft
The Federal Council instructs Department X to draw up a preliminary draft for a law. All departments and federal offices are consulted on this preliminary draft (office consultation procedure).

4 Draft legislation
Department X prepares the preliminary draft law and adapts it on the basis of the results of the consultation procedure. It then submits the bill to the Federal Council.

3 Consultation procedure
Department X submits the preliminary draft to the Federal Council, which initiates the consultation procedure. The consultation procedure allows all citizens, cantons, communes, political parties, federations, trade unions, associations, churches and interest groups to comment on the preliminary draft.

5 Federal Council Dispatch
The Federal Council examines the bill and sends it to Parliament.

7 Consultation in the first chamber (e.g. the National Council)
The first chamber has three options: it may consider the law to be superfluous and request that it not be considered; it can reject the text and instruct the Federal Council or the committee concerned to revise it; or it can discuss the law in detail and make a decision.

6 Preliminary examination by the committee of the first chamber
The presidents of the National Council and the Council of States decide whether the bill is dealt with first in the National Council or in the Council of States. A committee of the first chamber discusses the text and submits a proposal to its Council (first chamber). (Committees → p. 38).

8 Preliminary examination by the committee of the second chamber
The committee of the second chamber discusses the text approved by the first chamber and submits a proposal to its Council (second chamber).

9 Consultation in the second chamber (e.g. Council of States)
The second chamber has the same options as the first chamber: a decision not to consider the law, rejection of the text; or point by point deliberation before making a decision.

10 Resolution of differences in the first chamber
If the decisions of the National Council and the Council of States differ, a procedure for the resolution of differences is initiated. The committee of the first chamber makes a proposal to the first chamber.

13 Final vote in the first and second chambers
The jointly reached agreement is put to a final vote in the National Council and the Council of States. Parliament votes in favour of the new law.

12 Conference of conciliation
In the event of unresolved differences between the National Council and the Council of States after three rounds, a conference of conciliation is held. The conference is composed of members of the preliminary consultation committees who work together to find an agreement. The agreement is then submitted to the first chamber, and then to the second chamber.

11 Resolution of differences in the second chamber
After discussing and voting on this proposal, the preliminary consultation committee of the second chamber addresses the remaining differences and makes a proposal to the second chamber.

14 Optional referendum
The law adopted by Parliament is brought back to the People for a vote. The People have the last word (Referendum → p. 22). If a referendum is not sought within 100 days, the Federal Council may bring the law into force.

15 Popular vote
If a referendum is launched against the law, the law will be put to the vote of the People.

16 Entry into force
If the majority of voters approve the new law, the Federal Council can bring it into force.



Parliament

The Parliamentary Services

In the Parliamentary Services, Parliament has its own staff office independent of the rest of the Federal Administration. **It works on behalf of the National Council and the Council of States and ensures continuity from one legislature to the next.**

Organising Council and parliamentary committee meetings

Before the Councils can take decisions in the sessions, all business is discussed in advance in the committees. The Secretariats therefore have to plan and organise a large number of meetings.

Advising Council members

In order to delve deeper into specific issues, Council members can submit research requests to the parliamentary library and have information compiled for them.

Documenting the legislative process

The Councils often take divergent decisions. To ensure that the legislative process and the lines of argument are comprehensible for the ongoing deliberations and for future generations, all committee and Council meetings are minuted. As Council meetings are public, these minutes are published on the Parliament website, almost in real time.

Assuring access to information

The Parliamentary Services operate a digital platform where all information and functions for parliamentary work are available in one place: information on items of business and meetings, on the biographies of Council members, on planning and conducting meetings, etc. The Parliamentary Services also maintain the digital presence of the National Council and the Council of States and inform the public about Parliament and its activities.

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
112m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
245



www.parl.ch

Supporting Parliament in fostering international relations

Relations with foreign countries increasingly take place on a parliamentary level. The Parliamentary Services support the Council presidents and the corresponding delegations in planning and carrying out visits abroad and in hosting visits by foreign guests and delegations to Switzerland.

Opening Parliament's doors to the public

Around 100,000 people visit Parliament every year. During the sessions, it is possible to follow Council debates from the galleries. Between sessions, the Parliamentary Services offer guided tours of the building. Open days are also held several times a year. It is worth booking early for session visits and guided tours.

Open Day schedule 2026

20 March (Museum Night)
2 May (children's programme)
1 August (national holiday)
24 October



Visiting the Parliament Building



Parliamentary Services,
Secretary General:
Philippe Schwab

Parliament in the digital age

Digitalisation is making Parliament's work more efficient, transparent, and accessible.

Parliament is constantly adapting to new demands and ways of working, which is why it relies on digital solutions to streamline its processes and increase transparency. For example, members of the National Council and the Council of States now vote electronically, meaning that voting in both chambers is now publicly traceable. With the help of artificial intelligence (AI), debates are transcribed faster and can be published sooner than before. AI-assisted subtitling also makes debates accessible to people with hearing impairments. In the event of a crisis, Parliament can hold virtual sessions.

Although not all processes are fully digital yet, the Parliamentary Services have managed to cut paper use by a quarter in the past five years.

Parliament has a special responsibility to society and democracy, so it is crucial that it safeguard its digital sovereignty – that is, retain control over its own data. And of course, the technology must always work properly, because Parliament never stops.

Staff at the Official Bulletin continuously record the debates in the National Council and Council of States, now with the help of artificial intelligence.



On the first day of each new year, the Federal Chancellery publishes the official Federal Council photo. The 2026 edition was produced by four students commissioned by President

Guy Parmelin: Nathan Bugniet, Eileen Fraefel, Samantha Keller and Léo Margueron. They are studying photography at the Centre d'enseignement professionnel de Vevey (CEPV).



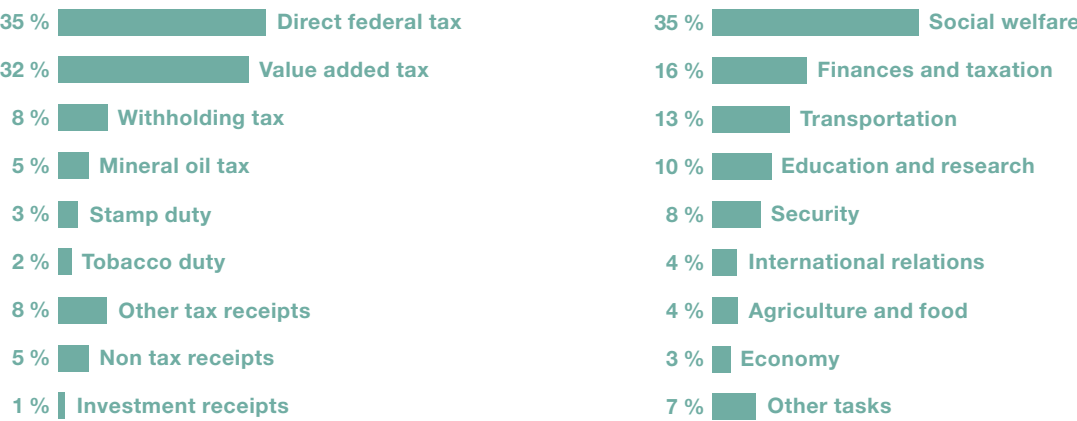
The Executive

The Government

The Federal Council is Switzerland's government. It consists of seven members, who take decisions and defend their decisions in a collegial manner. The presidency rotates every year. The Federal Council is assisted in its tasks by the Federal Administration. The Confederation's expenditure may not exceed its receipts over the longer term: this is ensured by the debt brake mechanism. Parliament decides on the federal budget.

www.admin.ch

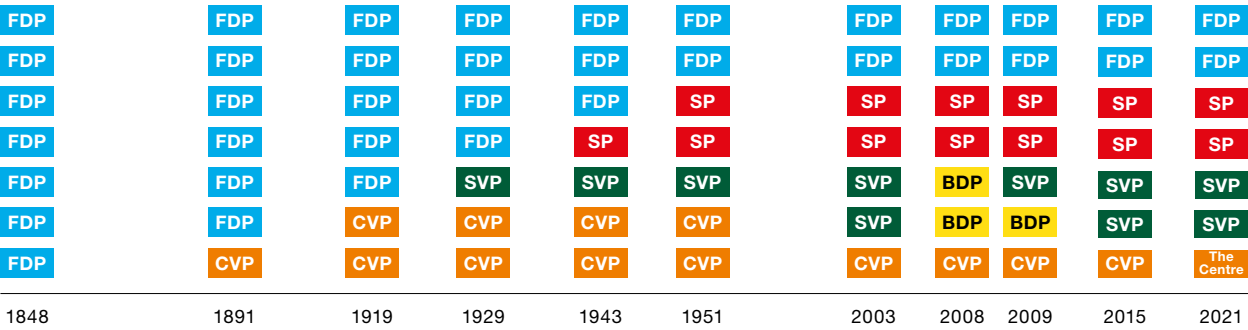
Federal receipts and expenditure 2024



Receipts of 84 billion
Direct federal tax and VAT are the Confederation's main sources of receipts. Direct federal tax is raised on the income of private individuals (progressive, max. 11.5 %), and on business profits (8.5 %). VAT is 8.1 % on most goods and services.

Expenditure of 84 billion
One third of federal expenditure is spent on social welfare. 50 % of this goes to old-age provision (OASI), 15 % to invalidity insurance (II). In addition, there are supplementary benefits, unemployment insurance (UI), premium reductions for health insurance and expenditure related to the costs of migration.

Political party composition of the Federal Council since 1848



1848 The Federal Council was composed of seven members of the Free Democratic Party (today FDP.The Liberals). The party governed alone for 43 years.

1891 The first member of the Catholic Conservatives (today CVP) joined the government; the second joined in **1919**.

1929 Parliament elected a member of the Farmers', Trades' and Citizens' Party (today SVP) to the Federal Council.

1943 The first Social Democrat (SP) entered the government; the second followed in **1951**.

1959 The four strongest parties agreed to form a government by applying the 'magic formula': 2 FDP, 2 CVP, 2 SP, 1 SVP. The formula remained unchanged for 44 years.

2003 At the Federal Council elections, the SVP won a seat at the expense of the CVP.

2008 The two representatives of the SVP joined the newly founded Conservative Democratic Party (BDP).

2009 A member of the SVP was elected in place of a retiring BDP representative.

2015 The BDP representative stepped down. Parliament elected an SVP representative in her place.

Since then The Federal Council has again been composed of members from four different political parties – according to the 2:2:2:1 formula. Since 2021 the CVP has been represented in the Federal Council under its new name 'The Centre' (since its merger with the BDP).

Federal finances: Parliament has the final say
In order to fulfil its tasks, the Confederation needs money. The Federal Constitution sets out what taxes the government can raise. When it comes to spending money, the Federal Council cannot just do as it sees fit: there is a legal basis for every item of expenditure that is the result of a democratic process. Parliament has sovereignty over federal finances: it decides the budget and approves the state financial statement of the previous year (→ p. 33, p. 38).

Debt brake mechanism
The Confederation is required to balance its expenditure and receipts over the longer term. It is required to run a surplus when the economy is thriving and may spend more than it collects in receipts when the economy is weak. The debt brake does allow for an exception to be made in extraordinary situations such as serious economic crises, pandemics and natural disasters; the government may then undertake additional expenditure. That was the case between 2020 and 2022, for example, when it made around CHF 30 billion available to cushion the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in high deficits during those years.

The Federal Council

The Federal Council comprises seven members of equal standing. They are elected by Parliament every four years, with a different member holding the post of president each year. The current members of the Federal Council are drawn from four different parties. Four come from the German-speaking part of Switzerland, two from the French-speaking part and one from the Italian-speaking region.

The Federal Council normally meets every week. Especially demanding issues are discussed in special sessions. Each year, it decides on more than 2,500 items of business. The seven departments and the Federal Chancellery support the Federal Council by helping to prepare the meetings.

Important dates
Election of the president of the Swiss Confederation and vice president of the Federal Council: 9 December 2026
Election of the Federal Council: mid-December 2027 following the parliamentary elections



Video
Presidency
(in German)



Guy Parmelin
President of the Swiss Confederation

Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
Member of the Federal Council since 2016

Party affiliation
SVP

The president is of equal standing to the other members of the Federal Council, but chairs the meetings and represents the government in its external dealings



Ignazio Cassis
Vice President

Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Member of the Federal Council since 2017

Party affiliation
FDP



Karin Keller-Sutter

Head of the Federal Department of Finance
Member of the Federal Council since 2019

Party affiliation
FDP



Albert Rösti

Head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications
Member of the Federal Council since 2023

Party affiliation
SVP



Elisabeth Baume-Schneider

Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs
Member of the Federal Council since 2023

Party affiliation
SP



Beat Jans

Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police
Member of the Federal Council since 2024

Party affiliation
SP



Martin Pfister

Head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport
Member of the Federal Council since 2025

Party affiliation
The Centre



Viktor Rossi
Federal Chancellor

In office since 2024

Party affiliation
GLP

The Federal Chancellor is the Federal Council's chief of staff and heads the Federal Chancellery (→ p. 56). He is also elected by Parliament.

What is special about the Federal Council?

Collegiality

Switzerland is the only country in the world that has a collegial body as its government: the seven members of the Federal Council are each members of the college and have equal rights. The president of the Swiss Confederation chairs the meetings and represents the government in its external dealings. The presidency rotates each year.

Consensus

The members of the Federal Council often have conflicting views and values. However, they always seek a consensus and reach their decisions together. Outwardly, the Federal Council presents a united front: the members of the Federal Council defend the decisions they have taken jointly, even if these decisions are contrary to their own opinions or the position taken by their party.

Consociationalism

The Federal Constitution requires Switzerland's regions and languages to be 'appropriately represented' in the Federal Council. The parties are expected to propose both male and female candidates for election. Normally Parliament allocates seats on the Federal Council according to the strength of the political parties: as a result, all the largest parties are represented in the government.

Magic Formula

2:2:2:1 is the endlessly debated formula for the political composition of the Federal Council: the largest three parties each hold two seats in the Federal Council, while the fourth largest party has one seat. For 44 years (1959–2003), the Federal Council was made up of 2 FDP, 2 SP and 2 CVP representatives, and 1 SVP representative. Since 2003, there has been a minor shift: 2 FDP, 2 SP, 2 SVP, 1 The Centre ('CVP' until 2020).

Stability

The members of the Federal Council are elected by Parliament to serve a four-year term of office and cannot be removed. They can be re-elected any number of times. Normally a member of the Federal Council remains in office until he or she retires or chooses not to stand again for election.

Not elected by the People

The Swiss electorate has already voted three times on whether the Federal Council should be elected by the Swiss people: in 1900, 1942 and 2013. On each occasion, both the People and the cantons voted against. An election by the People has also been proposed several times in Parliament, but each of these proposals was rejected.

The Federal Council's tasks



Preparing legislation

The Federal Council submits new laws to Parliament and proposals on how to implement decisions taken in popular votes. Its proposals receive broad support: they take account of the views of the cantons, parties, associations and concerned groups, which are expressed in a consultation process. After these consultations, the Federal Council submits its bill to Parliament for debate and a decision.



Providing information

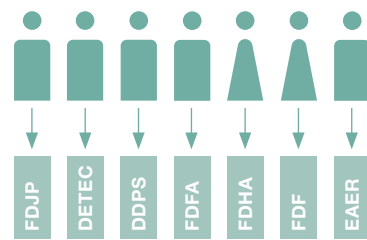
The Federal Council informs the cantons, Parliament and the public about its decisions via a range of channels. It explains proposals that are being voted in a red booklet, which is posted to voters with their ballot papers and published on the internet.

Instagram: @gov.ch
X: @SwissGov, @BR_Sprecher
YouTube: Swiss Federal Council
Web: www.admin.ch, www.ch.ch
Apps: VoteInfo, CH info



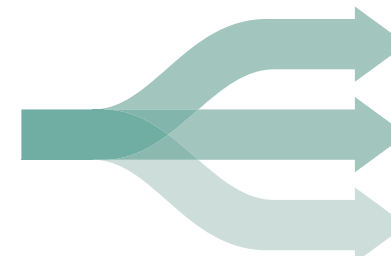
Implementing the decisions of Parliament

As soon as Parliament has decided on a new law, the Federal Council issues the required ordinances. They set out the specifics on how the new law should be implemented. If Parliament requests particular measures, the Federal Council ensures that these are taken.



Heading the Federal Administration

The Federal Council is in charge of the Federal Administration, which has around 40,000 employees. The Administration is organised into seven government departments. Each member of the Federal Council is the head of a department (→ p. 54/55).



Planning for the future

The Federal Council sets the agenda for the future: it issues a mission statement, sets goals and indicates how it plans to invest federal funds. It has to find majority support for its plans, in Parliament and if need be among the People and the cantons.

Federal Council mission statement for the legislature period 2023–2027

1. Switzerland secures its long-term prosperity and harnesses the opportunities of digitalisation.
2. Switzerland promotes national and intergenerational cohesion.

3. Switzerland safeguards security, is committed to peace and acts coherently and reliably in the world.

4. Switzerland protects the climate and takes care of natural resources.



President of the Swiss Confederation 2026
Guy Parmelin

As president of the Swiss Confederation, you hold a special position as the head of government for a year. What does this office mean to you?

It is a great honour for me to be able to hold this office for a second time, and I undertake this responsibility with the utmost respect. During my presidential year, I chair the weekly Federal Council meetings and engage in even more dialogue with citizens than usual. The office of president is also important in terms of international relations. I represent Switzerland at important events abroad and also meet with other heads of state.

You already had a term as president in 2021. What will be different in 2026?

In 2021, we were still in the grip of the COVID pandemic. That had a major impact on my first term, affecting both the agenda and practical aspects. I was only able to meet people in person to a limited extent. Since then, the geopolitical situation has changed significantly, resulting in a very different set of priorities for the current presidential year. And because the world is changing so rapidly, it is impossible to predict at the beginning of the year, how it will end.

What is particularly important to you when working with the other members of the Federal Council?

Collegiality. In Switzerland, we have a unique political system with a government that enjoys very broad support. Before and during a Federal Council meeting, we each express our own points of view. But once the Federal Council has taken a decision as a body, we all stand behind it – collegially and loyally.

Governing in times of crisis

If Switzerland's internal or external security is endangered and if there is an imminent threat, the Federal Council has the power to issue emergency ordinances of limited duration if it is unable to take measures based on existing legislation (Federal Constitution Art. 185). In the event of there being an exceptional risk to public health, the Epidemics Act confers wide-ranging powers on the Federal Council. In the event of severe shortages, the Federal Council may order measures to ensure the national economic supply of essential goods and services (National Economic Supply Act). In addition, the Asylum Act, the Debt Enforcement and Bankruptcy Act, the Customs Tariff Act and the Telecommunications Act also provide the Federal Council with powers to deal with crisis situations.

Federal Administration

Staff office

FCh
Federal Chancellery

Viktor Rossi
Federal Chancellor

Autonomous organisation

Office of the Federal Data
Protection and Information
Commissioner

FDFA
Federal Department
of Foreign Affairs

Ignazio Cassis
Head of Department

General Secretariat

State Secretariat

Directorate of International
Law

Consular Directorate

Swiss Agency for
Development and
Cooperation

Directorate for Resources

FDHA
Federal Department
of Home Affairs

Elisabeth Baume-Schneider
Head of Department

General Secretariat

Federal Office of Culture

Federal Office of Meteorology
and Climatology MeteoSwiss

Federal Office of Public
Health

Federal Food Safety and
Veterinary Office

Federal Statistical Office

Federal Social Insurance
Office

Federal Office for Gender
Equality

Swiss Federal Archives

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Agency for Therapeutic
Products Swissmedic

Swiss National Museum

Swiss Arts Council
Pro Helvetia

FDJP
Federal Department
of Justice and Police

Beat Jans
Head of Department

General Secretariat

State Secretariat for Migration

Federal Office of Justice

Federal Office of Police fedpol

Post and Telecommunications
Surveillance Service

Autonomous organisations

Federal Institute of
Intellectual Property

Federal Institute of Metrology

Swiss Institute of
Comparative Law

Federal Audit Oversight
Authority

Federal Gaming Board

Federal Commission on
Migration

Federal Arbitration Commis-
sion for the Exploitation of
Copyrights and Related
Rights

National Commission for the
Prevention of Torture

The Federal Administration supports the Federal Council in its tasks. It consists of seven government departments and the Federal Chancellery. While each department is headed by a federal council-
lor, the Federal Administration as a whole is supervised by the full Federal Council.

DDPS
Federal Department of
Defence, Civil Protection and
Sport

Martin Pfister
Head of Department

General Secretariat

State Secretariat for Security
Policy

National Cyber Security
Centre

Federal Office for Civil
Protection

Federal Office for Defence
Procurement armasuisse

Federal Office of Topography

Federal Office of Sport

Defence sector

Federal Intelligence Service

Office of the Armed Forces
Attorney General

FDF
Federal Department
of Finance

Karin Keller-Sutter
Head of Department

General Secretariat

State Secretariat for
International Finance

Federal Office for Customs
and Border Security

Federal Office of Information
Technology, Systems and
Telecommunications

Federal Office for Buildings
and Logistics

Federal Finance
Administration

Federal Office of
Personnel

Federal Tax Administration

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Financial Market
Supervisory Authority

Swiss Federal Audit Office

Federal Pension Fund
PUBLICA

EAER
Federal Department of
Economic Affairs, Education
and Research

Guy Parmelin
Head of Department

General Secretariat

State Secretariat for
Economic Affairs SECO

State Secretariat for Educa-
tion, Research and Innovation

Federal Office for Agriculture

Federal Office for National
Economic Supply

Federal Office for Housing

Federal Office for Civilian
Service

Autonomous organisations

Office of the Price Supervisor

Competition Commission

Board of the Federal Institutes
of Technology ETH

Swiss Federal Institute for
Vocational Education and
Training

Swiss Innovation Agency
Innosuisse

DETEC
Federal Department of the
Environment, Transport,
Energy and Communications

Albert Rösti
Head of Department

General Secretariat

Federal Office of Transport

Federal Office of Civil Aviation

Swiss Federal Office
of Energy

Federal Roads Office

Federal Office
of Communications

Federal Office for the
Environment

Federal Office for Spatial
Development

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety
Inspectorate

Federal Inspectorate for
Heavy Current Installations

Swiss Transportation Safety
Investigation Board

Federal Electricity
Commission

Federal Communications
Commission

Independent Complaints
Authority for Radio and
Television

Federal Postal Services
Commission

Rail Transport Commission

43,513 (38,962 full-time equivalents) staff work in the Federal Administration. 1,074 of those are apprentices, 650 are graduate interns.

Federal Chancellery

The Federal Chancellery is the staff office of the Federal Council: it ensures that the Federal Council is able to make informed decisions and actively communicates those decisions to the public. It is responsible for coordination within the Federal Administration and supports it in the digital transformation process and in crisis management. As guardian of the people's rights, the Federal Chancellery organises federal elections and referendums.



Training for emergency situations: The Federal Chancellery conducts exercises together with the cantons to strengthen national crisis management. The Federal Council also takes part.



Viktor Rossi,
Federal Chancellor since 2024

Preparing Federal Council decisions

The Federal Council usually meets once a week and takes decisions on numerous items of business. The departments and federal offices can comment on these proposals in advance. The Federal Chancellery coordinates this consultation and joint reporting procedure. The Federal Chancellor and the vice chancellors always attend Federal Council meetings.

- **Vice Chancellor:** Rachel Salzmann
- **Vice Chancellor and Federal Council Spokesperson:** Nicole Lamon

Informing the public about Federal Council decisions

The Federal Council Spokesperson informs the media about the decisions taken by the Federal Council. Federal decrees and reports are published in the Federal Gazette, while acts and ordinances are published in the Official Compilation of Federal Legislation.

Planning for the future

The Federal Chancellery monitors national and international developments and uses this information to determine where political action is needed. It is responsible for annual objectives and legislature planning and for the Federal Council's activity report.

Strengthening the federal government's crisis management capabilities

The Federal Chancellery supports the Federal Council and the departments in preparing for and responding to crises. It ensures that the federal government is prepared for potential crises. It organises nationwide crisis exercises to strengthen Switzerland's crisis resilience.

Supporting the President

In 2026, Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin will assume the role of President of the Swiss Confederation. The Federal Chancellery provides support and ensures continuity from one presidential year to the next.

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
80m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
311



www.bk.admin.ch

Coordinating and digitalising the Federal Administration

The Federal Chancellor chairs the monthly meetings of the Conference of Secretaries General, which coordinates the work of the departments. The Federal Chancellery plays a central role in the Federal Administration's digital transformation process: it sets standards, coordinates digitalisation projects and supports their implementation.

Overseeing democratic rights

The Federal Chancellery ensures that federal elections and referendums are conducted correctly. It informs initiative and referendum committees about the correct procedure. Together with the cantons, it works to ensure that political rights can also be exercised electronically in Switzerland (e-voting and e-collecting).

Promoting multilingualism

All legal and official texts published by the federal government must be available in the official languages of German, French and Italian, and in certain cases also in Romansh. Texts of international relevance are also available in English. The Federal Chancellery is responsible for the quality of the texts.

Publishing information across all channels

The Federal Chancellery ensures that the public receives information from the government directly and through various channels, in multiple languages and in an accessible format:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Instagram: | @gov.ch |
| X (Twitter): | @SwissGov, @BR_Sprecher |
| YouTube: | Swiss Federal Council |
| Web: | www.admin.ch , www.ch.ch |
| Apps: | admin.ch , ch.ch , fedlex.admin.ch |
| Print: | Explanatory material on popular votes,
National Council election guide,
The Swiss Confederation: a brief guide |

Autonomous organisation

Office of the Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner FDPIC:
Adrian Lobsiger
www.edoeb.admin.ch

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

The FDFA safeguards Switzerland's foreign policy interests. It maintains relations with other states and international bodies such as the EU and the UN. It provides services for Swiss citizens abroad. The FDFA is also responsible for Switzerland's development cooperation and humanitarian aid. There are around 170 Swiss representations around the world.



Contribution to peace and security: Switzerland's 2026 chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is taking place against a challenging geopolitical backdrop.



“Our country will move forward if we all decide to move forward together.”

Ignazio Cassis, head of the FDFA.
Member of the Federal Council since 2017.

Vice President of the Federal Council 2026.

The world is going through a time of war, crisis and conflict: in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan as well as other countries and regions. Switzerland is committed to dialogue as a means of developing political solutions. To this end, it will be chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2026. The organisation has 57 member states including the US, Russia and Ukraine, all sitting at the same table.

When the situation around the world is uncertain, good neighbourly ties are crucial. This also applies to Switzerland's relationship with the European Union. The Federal Council intends to stabilise and develop the bilateral approach, as it has made a significant contribution to Switzerland's success over the last 25 years. Following last year's consultation process, the Federal Council is set to adopt the dispatch to Parliament on the Swiss-EU negotiating package in 2026. This new package is aimed at customised sectoral participation for Switzerland in the EU single market as well as cooperation in selected areas.

Wide-ranging global issues are discussed in Geneva – from peace, human rights and the rule of law to international humanitarian law, health and innovation. Indeed, International Geneva serves as a major hub for interaction between states, international organisations, NGOs and other actors from the worlds of business and science, for example. To enable this dialogue to continue, the Federal Council is committed to bolstering Geneva's position in a targeted and effective manner, even in times of limited resources.

General Secretariat GS-FDFA

Secretary General: Markus Seiler
www.fdfa.admin.ch

State Secretariat StS

State Secretary:
Alexandre Fasel

Directorate of International Law DIL

Director: Franz Perrez

Consular Directorate CD

Director: Marianne Jenni

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Director: Patricia Danzi
www.fdfa.admin.ch/sdc

Directorate for Resources DR

Director: David Grichting

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
3.19bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
5,352



www.fdfa.admin.ch

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA

The FDHA works to ensure the country has an efficient and effective health system that is accessible to all. It is also committed to protecting the pension system – state and occupational pensions – into the future. Its areas of activity include promoting cultural diversity and cohesion in society, gender equality and the inclusion of people with disabilities.



“Equality, inclusion, solidarity and diversity are fundamental values that the FDHA champions every day.”

Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, head of the FDHA.
Member of the Federal Council since 2023.



Eradicating violence against women and domestic violence is one of the key objectives of the Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE). The image shows the national campaign without-violence.ch.

The FDHA works to strengthen social cohesion by ensuring gender equality and solidarity between generations, improving the inclusion of people with disabilities and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. A further priority is the fight against racism.

The tasks performed by the staff of the FDHA have a direct impact on people’s everyday lives in a wide range of fields: social security and occupational pensions, containing costs in the health sector and authorising new medicines, promoting culture, food safety and animal health, providing reliable weather forecasts and statistics.

The Department is currently implementing numerous reform projects to ensure an efficient, financially sustainable healthcare system that is accessible to all in the long term, to guarantee favourable conditions for the cultural sector and to ensure sustainable financing of social security for current and future generations.

General Secretariat GS-FDHA

Co-secretaries general: Stefan Hostettler and Jean-Christophe Kübler
www.edi.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for Gender Equality FOGE

Co-Directors:
Stéphanie Lachat and Gian Beeli
www.ebg.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Culture FOC

Director: Carine Bachmann
www.bak.admin.ch

Swiss Federal Archives SFA

Director: Philippe Künzler
www.bar.admin.ch

Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology MeteoSwiss

Director: Stefan Uhlenbrook
www.meteoschweiz.admin.ch

Federal Office of Public Health FOPH

Director: Anne Lévy
www.bag.admin.ch/en

Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO

Director: Laurent Monnerat
www.blv.admin.ch

Federal Statistical Office FSO

Director: Georges-Simon Ulrich
www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en

Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO

Director: Doris Bianchi
www.bsv.admin.ch/en

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products Swissmedic

Director: Vincenza Trivigno
www.swissmedic.ch

Swiss National Museum SNM

Director: Denise Tonella
www.nationalmuseum.ch/en

Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

Director: Michael Kinzer
prohelvetia.ch/en

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
20.98bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
2,809



www.edi.admin.ch/en

Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP

The FDJP draws up laws to respond to societal challenges and create equal opportunities. It monitors compliance with the law and so guarantees legal certainty. It regulates the conditions under which foreign nationals may enter Switzerland, live and work here or receive asylum. It also coordinates national and international police cooperation with the aim of safeguarding the security of the entire population.



Staff at fedpol's Operations and Alarm Centre coordinate cooperation between police forces in Switzerland and with other countries around the clock.



“In Switzerland, we know that we can only move forward together.”

Beat Jans, head of the FDJP.
Member of the Federal Council since 2024.

One of the FDJP's main priorities is migration policy. Migration takes place between countries, which means that migration policy must be coordinated at international level. The FDJP therefore advocates for a migration policy based on solidarity at international level. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is a milestone. The pact aims to make Europe's migration and asylum system, and thus also that of Switzerland, more efficient and solidarity based. In 2025, Parliament decided that Switzerland would participate, including in the solidarity framework with other Schengen states.

Another of the FDJP's priorities is Switzerland's internal security. Here, too, cooperation with various national and international partners is essential. The Federal Office of Police (fedpol), which is part of the FDJP, is the point of contact for police forces in Switzerland and abroad and facilitates coordinated actions to tackle crime. Combating domestic and sexual violence is important to the FDJP, which is why it is pressing ahead with a partial revision of the Victim Support Act. Victims should have access to more support and be even better protected.

In terms of digitalisation, the FDJP is aiming to introduce an electronic means of identification (e-ID) by the end of 2026. In future, users will be able to identify themselves quickly and securely online.

General Secretariat GS-FDJP

Co-secretaries general: Nora Bertschi
and Sebastian Kölliker
www.ejpd.admin.ch/en

State Secretariat for Migration SEM

State Secretary:
Vincenzo Mascioli
www.sem.admin.ch

Federal Office of Justice FOJ

Director: Michael Schöll
www.bj.admin.ch

Federal Office of Police fedpol

Director:
Eva Wildi-Cortés
www.fedpol.admin.ch

Post and Telecommunications Surveillance Service PTSS

Director: Daniela Schär
www.li.admin.ch

Autonomous organisations

Federal Institute of Intellectual Property IIP

Director:
Catherine Chamartin
www.ige.ch/en

Federal Institute of Metrology METAS

Director: Philippe Richard
www.metas.ch

Swiss Institute of Comparative Law SICL

Director: Nadjma Yassari
www.isdc.ch/en

Federal Audit Oversight Authority FAOA

Director: Reto Sanwald
www.rab-asr.ch

Federal Gaming Board FGB

Responsible: Thomas Fritschi
www.esbk.admin.ch

Federal Commission on Migration FCM

President: Manuele Bertoli
www.ekm.admin.ch/en

Federal Arbitration Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights

President: Cyrill Rigamonti
www.eschk.admin.ch

National Commission for the Prevention of Torture NCPT

President: Martina Caroni
www.nkvf.admin.ch

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
4.69bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
3,206



www.ejpd.admin.ch/en

Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS

The DDPS is responsible for Switzerland's security policy – that policy is implemented through the Armed Forces, the State Secretariat for Security Policy, the Federal Office for Civil Protection, the Federal Intelligence Service, armasuisse and the National Cyber Security Centre. The role of the DDPS also involves promoting sport through the Federal Office for Sport and producing geoinformation through swisstopo.



“We have to understand that we are living in a period of upheaval. And this is reflected in our security policy.”

Martin Pfister, head of the DDPS.
Member of the Federal Council since 2025.

The security situation in Europe has steadily deteriorated since Russia's attack on Ukraine. Power politics is shaping international relations. International law is increasingly being disregarded. In addition, conflict is taking on hybrid forms, even against modern states such as Switzerland: disinformation, cyberattacks and acts of sabotage are on the rise. The DDPS analyses the situation and develops measures to protect and defend the country.

These different threats come from outside and inside Switzerland. They can originate from state actors, terrorist groups or radicalised individuals. The response to this is more comprehensive security. This involves the political, economic and scientific actors, society and the government at federal, cantonal and communal levels. This comprehensive cooperation is intended to make Switzerland resilient, capable of defending itself and repelling attacks.

The DDPS is committed to strengthening resilience, i.e. increasing early detection and crisis awareness among the population. Our civil and military protection and defence capabilities must be strengthened in order to counter current and future threats.

The aim of Swiss security policy is to ensure a free, independent and secure Switzerland and to promote a peaceful and just international order.

Promoting sport and generating geoinformation also contribute significantly to Switzerland's security: Sport strengthens health, resilience and operational capability, while swisstopo's precise geographical data provides an important basis for planning, disaster preparedness and military and civil security.

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
6.45bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
12,279



www.vbs.admin.ch/en

General Secretariat GS-DDPS

Secretary General: Daniel Büchel
www.vbs.admin.ch/en

State Secretariat for Security Policy SEPOS

State Secretary:
Markus Mäder
www.sepos.admin.ch/en

National Cyber Security Centre NCSC

Director: Florian Schütz
www.ncsc.admin.ch

Federal Office for Civil Protection FOCP

Director: Michaela Schärer
www.babs.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for Defence Procurement armasuisse

Chief of Defence Procurement:
Urs Loher
www.ar.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Topography swisstopo

Director: Fridolin Wicki
www.swisstopo.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Sport FOSPO

Director: Sandra Felix
www.baspo.admin.ch

Defence sector

Chief of the Armed Forces:
Lieutenant General
Benedikt Roos
www.vtg.admin.ch/en

Federal Intelligence Service FIS

Director: Serge Bavaud
www.fis.admin.ch

Office of the Armed Forces Attorney General

Armed Forces Attorney
General: Stefan Flachsmann
www.aa.admin.ch/en

Federal Department of Finance FDF

Federal finances, financial market stability, taxes – at the FDF, there is a lot of emphasis on the state budget and on financial policy. The department collects taxes and customs duties, and checks the cross-border movement of people and goods. It also provides services for the entire Federal Administration, from IT to human resources to buildings and logistics.



“Sound finances give the state the ability to act for the wellbeing of its population”.

Karin Keller-Sutter, head of the FDF.
Member of the Federal Council since 2019.

Sound finances and rigorous fiscal policy give the state the necessary room for manoeuvre to act in the service of everybody. The Federal Council conducts fiscal policy based on the requirements of the debt brake. This obliges the Confederation to not live beyond its means over the long term.

The 2026 budget respects these requirements, but with limited room for manoeuvre in the ordinary budget. It now includes extraordinary expenditure to deal with unforeseen expenses, such as those related to the war in Ukraine. From 2027 onwards, the Federal Council plans to end this practice in order to return to exclusively ordinary budget management.

The financial outlook remains difficult. The increase in expenditure, particularly on AHV and the Armed Forces, as well as certain political decisions, will weigh permanently on the federal accounts in an international environment marked by high economic and geopolitical uncertainty. To maintain stable public finances, the Federal Council focuses on rigorous budgetary discipline.

Sound finances remain one of Switzerland's major assets: they guarantee public confidence and bolster the country's attractiveness as an economic centre. Keeping this balance, despite growing pressure, is the Federal Department of Finance's main goal for 2026.

General Secretariat GS-FDF

Secretary General: Barbara Hübscher Schmuki
www.efd.admin.ch/en

State Secretariat for International Finance SIF

State Secretary:
Daniela Stoffel
www.sif.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for Customs and Border Security FOCBS

Director: Pascal Lüthi
www.bazg.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunications FOITT

Director: Dirk Lindemann
www.bit.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics FOBL

Director: Pierre Broye
www.bbl.admin.ch

Federal Finance Administration FFA

Director:
Sabine D'Amelio-Favez
www.efv.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Personnel FOPER

Director: Rahel von Kaenel
www.epa.admin.ch

Federal Tax Administration FTA

Director: Tamara Pfammatter
www.estv.admin.ch/en

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority FINMA

Director: Stefan Walter
www.finma.ch/en

Swiss Federal Audit Office SFAO

Director: Pascal Stirnimann
www.efk.admin.ch/en

Federal Pension Fund PUBLICA

Director: Emmanuel Vauclair
www.publica.ch/en

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
20.89bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
8,853



www.efd.admin.ch/en

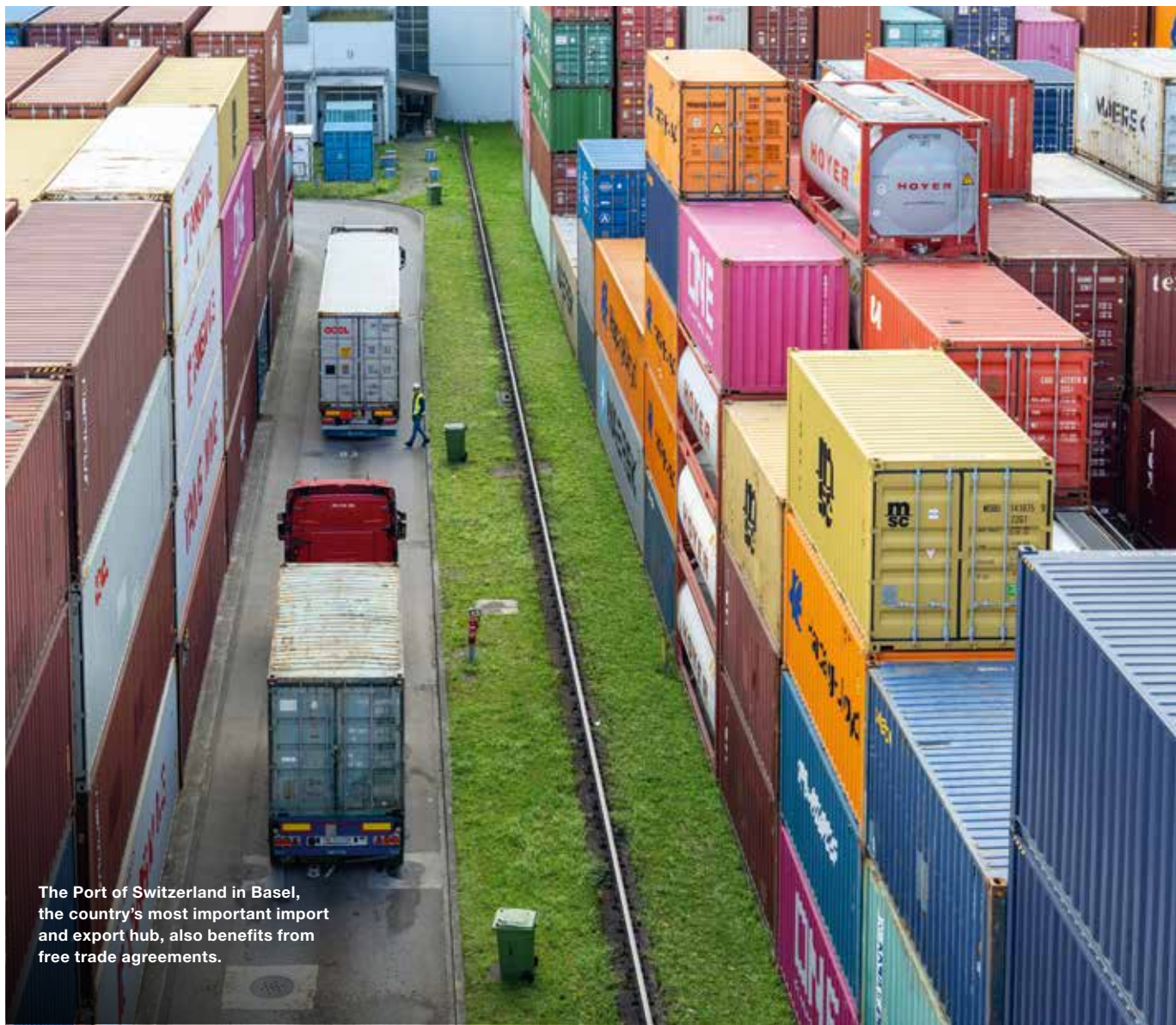


Around 100 well-coordinated teams – the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security uses service dog handlers and their dogs to search for narcotics, protected species and much more.
 Die Schweizer Eidgenossenschaft unterstützt Kurse

Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

EAER

The EAER defines the framework conditions for the economy, the labour market and agriculture, and represents Switzerland's economic and scientific interests internationally. The EAER is responsible for organising vocational education and training and promotes research. It also secures Switzerland's supply of vital goods.



The Port of Switzerland in Basel, the country's most important import and export hub, also benefits from free trade agreements.



“Free trade agreements have a particular advantage in times of uncertainty in trade policy.”

Guy Parmelin, head of the EAER.
Member of the Federal Council since 2016.

President of the Swiss Confederation in 2026.

Switzerland is an open economy with a small domestic market. Particularly in turbulent times for trade policy, it is important that Swiss exporters have broad, well-regulated access to foreign markets. This is why Switzerland – in addition to its participation in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) convention and its agreements with the European Union (EU) – maintains a network of 35 free trade agreements (FTAs) with 45 partners. FTAs saved Swiss companies around CHF 2.2 billion in customs duties in 2023, with more than half of these savings going to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Diversifying trade relations and opening up new markets are important goals of Swiss foreign trade policy. In recent years, Switzerland has concluded new FTAs with India, Kosovo, Thailand, Malaysia and the MERCOSUR countries, and modernised its existing agreements with Chile and Ukraine. Negotiations are also under way to conclude a new FTA with Vietnam and to modernise those with China and the United Kingdom.

The new FTAs with India (in force since October 2025) and the MERCOSUR states of South America (signed in September 2025) could lead to annual savings of around CHF 350 million.

General Secretariat GS-EAER

Secretary General: Nathalie Goumaz
www.wbf.admin.ch/en

State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

State Secretary:
Helene Budliger Artieda
www.seco.admin.ch

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI

State Secretary:
Martina Hirayama
www.seri.admin.ch

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

Director: Christian Hofer
www.blw.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for National Economic Supply FONES

Delegate: Roland Pfister
www.fones.admin.ch

Federal Office for Housing FOH

Director: Martin Tschirren
www.bwo.admin.ch

Federal Office for Civilian Service CIVI

Director: Christoph Hartmann
www.zivi.admin.ch

Autonomous organisations

Office of the Price Supervisor

Price Supervisor:
Stefan Meierhans
www.preisueberwacher.admin.ch

Competition Commission COMCO

Director: Patrik Ducrey
www.weko.admin.ch

Board of the Federal Institutes of Technology ETH

President:
Michael O. Hengartner
ethrat.ch/en

Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training SFUVET

Director: Barbara Fontanellaz
www.sfuvet.swiss

Swiss Innovation Agency Innosuisse

Director:
Dominique Gruhl-Bégin
www.innosuisse.admin.ch/en

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
12.85bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
2,268



www.wbf.admin.ch/en

Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC

DETEC is shaping the Switzerland of tomorrow: it works to ensure safe transport routes, a reliable energy supply and the preservation of our natural resources – forests, water, animals, plants and landscapes. In doing so, it always seeks to strike a balance between protection and utility, for example when generating green energy or taking environmental considerations into account when planning infrastructure projects.



Rail and road transport, as well as tram and bus services in urban areas, are to be better coordinated in future. Pictured: traffic flow in Bern's Wankdorf district.



“Solid transport networks connect Switzerland and strengthen the cohesion of our country.”

Albert Rösti, head of DETEC.
Member of the Federal Council since 2023.

Switzerland needs reliable roads and railways to keep the country on the move. DETEC ensures that our transport infrastructure is well maintained and expanded where necessary. However, this involves demanding tasks: There are financial challenges associated with the railway expansion plans, which will lead to considerable additional costs, and plans to expand six sections of motorway were rejected by voters in 2024. A holistic approach is therefore needed.

ETH Zurich was commissioned to produce an expert report for the Federal Council to identify from a technical perspective where the need is greatest and which projects should be prioritised by 2045. On this expert basis – also known as Transport '45 – and the expertise of its specialist agencies, DETEC submitted a proposal to the Federal Council regarding which projects should be included in the planning process. The Federal Council has already determined that consideration should be given to providing additional funding for railway expansion projects.

Taking a uniform view, rail and road transport as well as tram and bus services in urban areas need to be better coordinated than before. The expansion will progress step by step and ongoing construction work will continue as planned. This will ensure that all parts of Switzerland remain well connected in the future. A well-functioning transport network with modern infrastructure not only connects people, regions and jobs, but also strengthens the cohesion of the country as a whole.

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
14.76bn

Staff (FTEs) 2024
2,551



www.uvek.admin.ch/en

General Secretariat GS-DETEC

Secretary General: Yves Bichsel
www.uvek.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Transport FOT

Director: Christa Hostettler
www.bav.admin.ch/en

Federal Office of Civil Aviation FOCA

Director: Francine Zimmermann
www.bazl.admin.ch/en

Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE

Director: Benoît Revaz
www.bfe.admin.ch

Federal Roads Office FEDRO

Director: Jürg Röthlisberger
www.astra.admin.ch

Federal Office of Communications OFCOM

Director: Gianna Luzio
www.bakom.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for the Environment FOEN

Director: Katrin Schneeberger
www.bafu.admin.ch/en

Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE

Direktor: Roman Mayer
www.are.admin.ch/en

Autonomous organisations

Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate ENSI

Director: Marc Kenzelmann
www.ensi.ch/en

Federal Inspectorate for Heavy Current Installations ESTI

Director: Daniel Otti
www.esti.admin.ch

Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board STSB

President: Gery Balmer
www.sust.admin.ch

Federal Electricity Commission ElCom

President: Werner Luginbühl
www.elcom.admin.ch/en

Federal Communications Commission ComCom

President: Martin Bürki
www.comcom.admin.ch/en

Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television ICA

President: Mascha Santschi Kallay
www.ubi.admin.ch

Federal Postal Services Commission PostCom

President: Anne Seydoux-Christe
www.postcom.admin.ch

Rail Transport Commission RailCom

President: Barbara Furrer
www.railcom.admin.ch

The Judiciary **The Courts**

In 2025, the Federal Supreme Court celebrated 150 years as Switzerland's permanent highest

court. So it opened its doors to the public in Lucerne and at its main site in Lausanne.



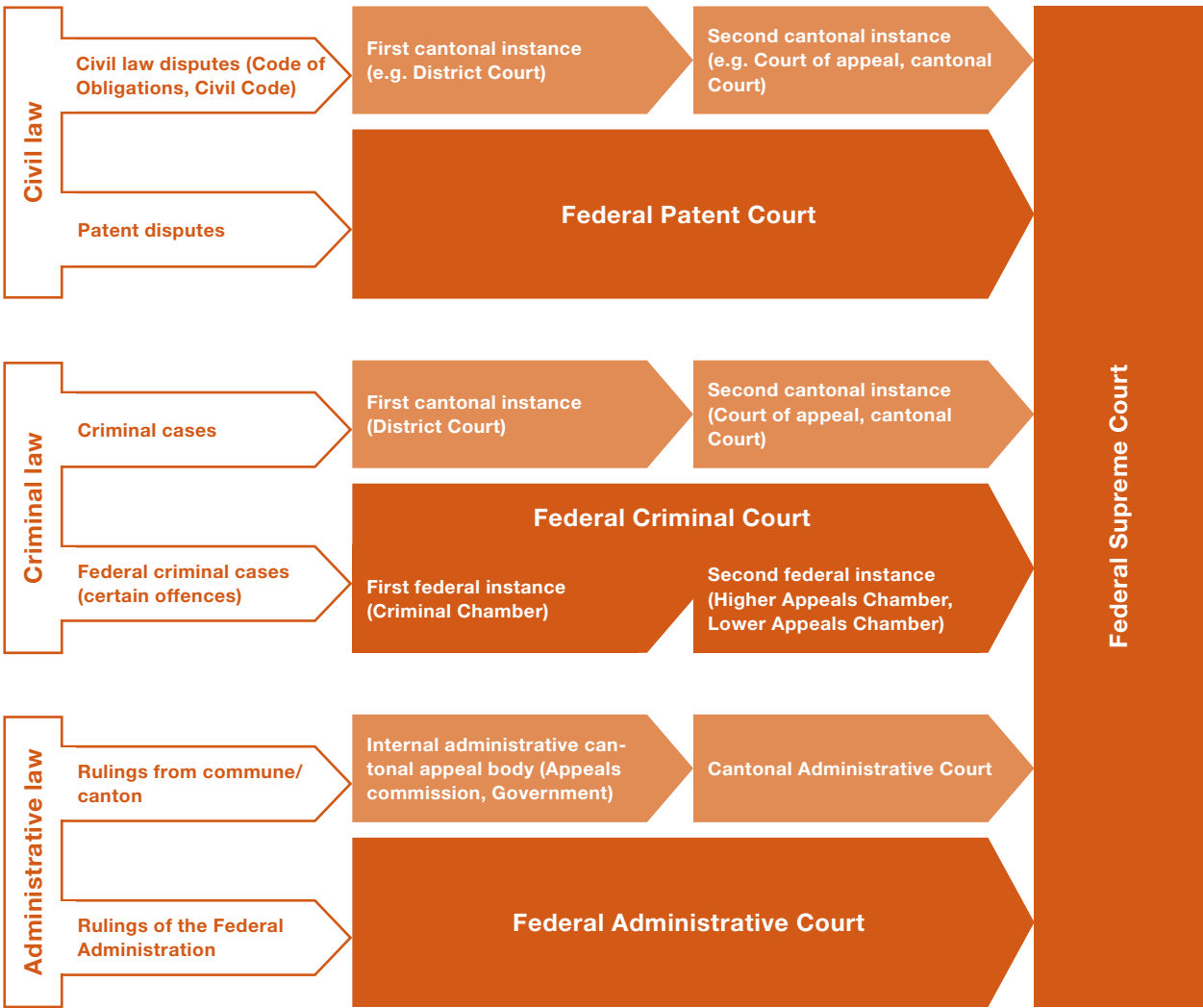
The Judiciary

The Courts

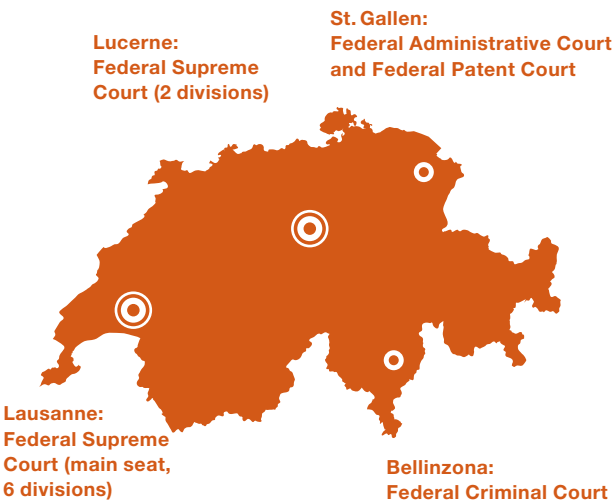
There are four federal courts. The highest court is the Federal Supreme Court, which rules in the final instance on cases from almost all areas of law. The other federal courts have different tasks. The Federal Criminal Court is responsible for criminal matters of particular importance to the Swiss Confederation as well as for appeals concerning international mutual assistance in criminal matters. The Federal Administrative Court rules on appeals against rulings of the federal administrative authorities and the Federal Patent Court on disputes over invention patents.

www.eidgenoessischegerichte.ch

Procedures in the Swiss legal system



The federal courts are located at four sites



In 2024 approximately 15 100 cases were concluded



Multilevel procedure

Cantonal courts or the Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court rule in the first and second instance. If the parties concerned do not agree with a decision, they can take their case to the Federal Supreme Court. The Federal Supreme Court Act regulates the conditions under which an appeal is possible.

Election of judges

The judges of the federal courts are elected by the United Federal Assembly for a term of office of 6 years. Re-election is possible without restriction. At the latest, judges leave office at the end of their 68th year of age.

The United Federal Assembly also elects the presidents and vice-presidents of the courts. The presidential term of office is 2 years (with the exception of the Federal Patent Court: 6 years). A one-time re-election is possible.

The Federal Supreme Court

The Federal Supreme Court is the highest instance for legal disputes between citizens, between citizens and the state, between cantons and between the federal government and the cantons. These disputes may concern matters of civil, criminal, administrative and social law.

www.bger.ch

Functions

In general, it definitively examines decisions of lower courts

As the highest judicial authority, the Federal Supreme Court rules on appeals against decisions of the highest cantonal courts, the Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court. It examines whether they have applied the law correctly. In the case of human rights issues, an appeal can be lodged at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). If the ECHR finds that Switzerland has violated human rights, the judgment is not directly repealed. However, under certain circumstances, the persons concerned can request a new decision (revision).

It ensures uniform application of the law

Through its decisions, the Federal Supreme Court ensures that federal law is observed and applied uniformly. It protects the constitutional rights of citizens. The other courts and the administrative authorities align themselves with its decisions.

It contributes to the development of law

If the Federal Supreme Court has to rule on a legal question that is not or not clearly regulated by the law, it contributes to the development of the law through its case law. Sometimes it transpires that a legal provision is missing for a specific legal problem, but that such a provision would be necessary. In this case, the Federal Supreme Court draws the legislator's attention to this gap. This can lead to Parliament amending or reformulating a law.

Organisation

Divisions

The Federal Supreme Court is divided according to legal areas. It comprises eight divisions:

- two public law divisions in Lausanne (e.g. political rights, law on foreign nationals)
- two public law divisions in Lucerne (e.g. taxes, accident and invalidity insurance)
- two civil law divisions in Lausanne (e.g. contract law, family law)
- two criminal law divisions in Lausanne

40 ordinary and 19 substitute judges work for the Federal Supreme Court. Of the full members of the court, 14 are women and 26 are men. Three have Italian, 14 have French and 23 have German as their mother tongue.

The members of the court are prohibited from engaging in any gainful activity in addition to their work as federal judges.

The Federal Supreme Court is represented externally by its presidency. The court as a whole, with all 40 federal judges, decides on the most important issues.

President: François Chaix

The court members are supported by 380 employees, including around 180 court clerks. These clerks assist in reaching a verdict. In many cases, they are tasked with preparing a draft judgment. However, the verdict is always reached by the judges involved.

General Secretariat

The General Secretariat prepares the meetings of the governing bodies, supports the implementation of their decisions and is available to assist the presidency and all federal judges. It organises meetings with delegations from other courts and international organisations and is responsible for maintaining national and international relations.

As a service centre for the court, the General Secretariat supports the individual divisions in their daily work. All the necessary legal information is provided to the members of the court and the court clerks. In addition, the General Secretariat ensures that the decisions of the Federal Supreme Court are accessible to the public. The IT department develops customised applications to meet the specific requirements of the court.

The highest governing body of the court administration is the Administrative Commission, which consists of the president, the vice-president and a further member of the court. The administrative departments are headed by the Secretary General. He also heads the secretariat of the full court, of the Conference of Presidents and of the Administrative Commission. He participates in an advisory capacity in the meetings of the Administrative Commission and the Conference of Presidents.

Open doors to the public

At the Federal Supreme Court's headquarters in Lausanne and at the Lucerne premises, individuals and groups can regularly take part in guided tours.



Public hearings

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
107m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
349



Video
The Federal Supreme Court



Federal Supreme Court,
Secretary General:
Nicolas Lüscher

Particularities

Usually in writing

The proceedings before the Federal Supreme Court are generally in writing. It begins with the lodging of an appeal; the opposing party is then invited to respond. In principle, the Federal Supreme Court no longer holds court hearings at which parties and witnesses are heard or lawyers present their arguments. Instead, the decision is reached in the following way: the judge in charge of the case studies the documents and submits a written draft judgment to the other judges involved in the case. If all the judges agree, the decision is issued. If they do not all agree, a public hearing is scheduled.

Transparent

During a public hearing, the judges discuss the case, often in the presence of the parties to the dispute, media representatives or visitors. At the end, the judges vote by show of hands. Film recordings are provided of public hearings that are of particular interest to the public. All judgments of the Federal Supreme Court are published online. Each year, the Federal Supreme Court issues around 40 to 60 press releases on particularly important rulings.

No independent examination of the facts of the case

The Federal Supreme Court examines legal issues. In principle, it bases its findings on the facts as they were established by the lower courts.

Multilingual – three or five judges

The judges of the Federal Supreme Court come from all linguistic regions of Switzerland. During public hearings, they speak in their mother tongues. The decisions are written either in German, French or Italian and are not translated. As a rule, three judges decide on a case and five when the case raises legal questions of fundamental importance or if one of the judges so requests.



“A real separation of powers only exists when everyone is aware of its importance.”

François Chaix
President of the Federal Supreme Court 2025/2026

Three questions to the president of the Federal Supreme Court

You are the president of the Federal Supreme Court. What does this role involve?

As president, I am the face of the institution and represent it externally. Together with the vice-president and another member of the court, we form the administrative commission. We are entrusted with the responsibility of managing the Court. In addition to the role of president, I remain active as an ordinary judge and participate in the decision-making process of the division to which I belong. This is important because it is the profession we have chosen.

Does the separation of powers work in Switzerland?

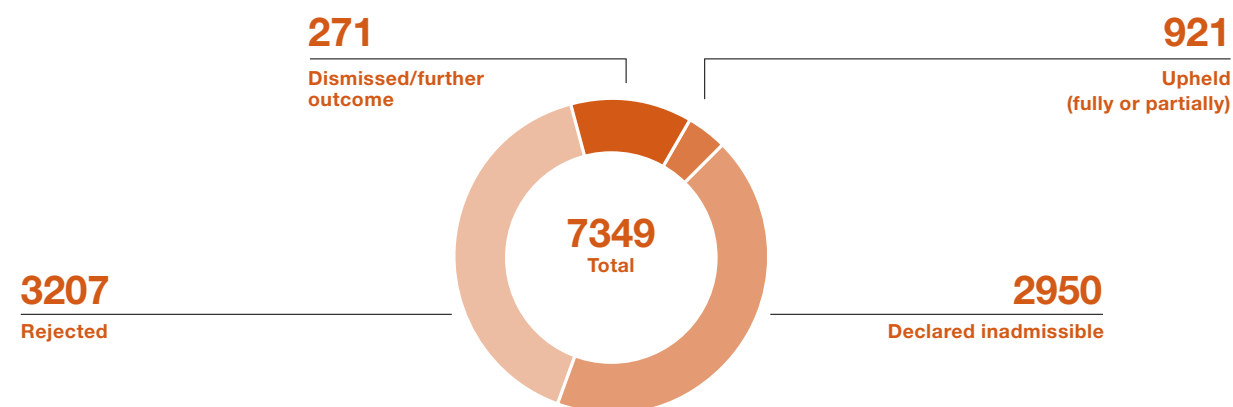
We are privileged to live in a country where Parliament, the Federal Council and the Federal Supreme Court respect each other. Each branch of government is aware that it has its own powers and that it must also take into account those of the other branches. The separation of powers exists first and foremost on paper in the Constitution and only becomes a reality through people's willingness to respect it. For the future of Switzerland and our institution, I hope that the Federal Supreme Court will remain a point of reference and a factor for social peace. This is particularly important at a time when authority is increasingly being called into question.

Will artificial intelligence (AI) help draft judgements in future?

In my view, AI is not suitable for making legal decisions. It is based on probability calculations using existing information, i.e. the past. At the Federal Supreme Court, however, we are constantly confronted with new social issues and thus new legal problems. AI is not suitable for such a task. At the Federal Supreme Court, AI supports, for example, the anonymisation of our judgements, which are all published on the Internet. But it is always our employees who put the finishing touches to them. We are also currently developing an application for translating and summarising texts. In my opinion, AI must remain a tool to support decision-making: the decision itself must always be made by judges, i.e. by women and men who are aware of the human reality of the cases.

The president of the Federal Supreme Court is elected by Parliament for a term of two years. He represents the Federal Supreme Court vis-à-vis the outside world.

Outcome and number of cases 2024



The Federal Criminal Court

The Federal Criminal Court is the court of first instance and of appeal for criminal cases of particular interest to the Swiss Confederation. It also decides on objections against the Office of the Attorney General or other prosecution and legal assistance authorities, as well as on conflicts of jurisdiction between cantons or the Confederation and the cantons.

www.bstger.ch

Functions

Most criminal offences are judged by cantonal courts. The Federal Criminal Court rules on criminal cases of particular interest to the Confederation, including criminal offences committed by or against federal employees, offences involving explosives, counterfeiting, cross-border economic crime, organised crime, corruption and money laundering as well as aviation offences.

The Federal Criminal Court reviews orders issued by federal prosecution authorities and authorities providing international mutual assistance in criminal matters. It also rules on conflicts of jurisdiction between prosecution authorities.

Organisation

The Federal Criminal Court consists of a Criminal Chamber and a Lower and Higher Appeals Chamber. Criminal Chamber judgments can be subject to appeal before the Higher Appeals Chamber. The latter was established in 2019. Most of the Lower and Higher Appeals Chamber judgments can be referred to the Federal Supreme Court.

The Court has 22 tenured and 14 part-time judges. Some 72 employees support them. The Federal Criminal Court's management bodies are the Administrative Commission and the Plenary Assembly (consisting of all tenured judges).

President: Roy Garré

Particularities

Large procedures

Proceedings before the Federal Criminal Court may involve several individuals and be multilingual, making translations necessary. At times special security measures have to be taken for the hearings. The written judgment in major proceedings involving several parties is often well over 100 pages long.

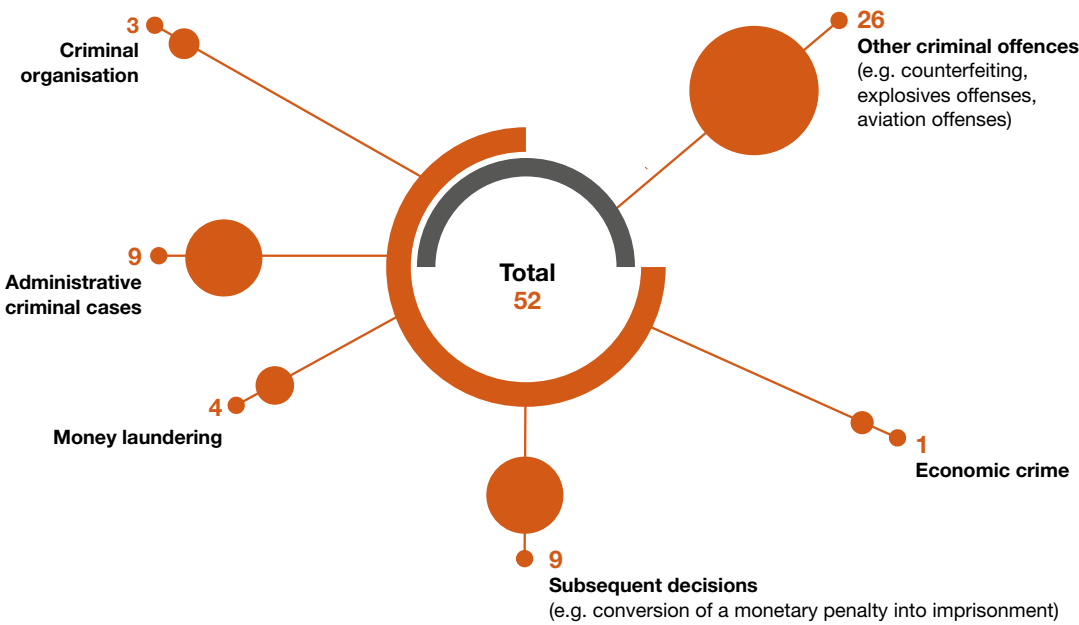
International context

Criminal cases often have an international dimension, especially those concerning economic crime and terrorism. The Lower Appeals Chamber can be required to decide whether Switzerland should extradite a person to another country, or if evidence (mostly bank records) should be handed over to another country.



The Federal Criminal Court is based in Bellinzona.

Criminal Chamber: cases by subject matter in 2024



Expenses 2024 (CHF)
19m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
80



Video
Federal Criminal Court

The Federal Administrative Court

The Federal Administrative Court handles appeals against rulings made by federal administrative authorities. **In certain areas, it also reviews decisions made by cantonal authorities.**

www.bvger.ch/en



The Federal Administrative Court was founded in Bern in 2007 and has had its headquarters in St. Gallen since 2012.

Functions

The Federal Administrative Court decides on appeals concerning the legality of rulings made by the federal administrative authorities. It therefore deals with a broad spectrum of legal issues ranging from A for asylum to Z for zoning law. The court also examines appeals against certain decisions made by cantonal governments, such as those concerning hospital lists. Lastly, it rules in the first instance on legal actions instituted in specific areas, e.g. in cases involving public law contracts.

Organisation

The Federal Administrative Court, which is based in St. Gallen, comprises six divisions and the General Secretariat. Division I focuses on infrastructure, taxes, federal employment and data protection; Division II on economic affairs, competition and education; Division III on social insurance and public health; Divisions IV and V on asylum law; and Division VI on the law on foreign nationals and citizenship.

The judges are elected by the United Federal Assembly. They perform their duties independently and are bound only by the law.

President: Claudia Cotting-Schalch



Video
Federal Administrative Court

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
86m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
385

7144 cases concluded in 2024

5544 not appealable to the Federal Supreme Court	1600 appealable to the Federal Supreme Court	222 of which appealed to the Federal Supreme Court
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Particularities

Own inquiries
In hearing legal disputes, the Federal Administrative Court does not rely solely on the facts established in the lower instance and on the parties' submissions, it establishes the material facts. For this purpose, it calls on experts to deliver opinions and in certain cases makes preparatory inquiries or visual inspections.

Largely final
Each year, the court issues an average of 7,000 decisions – mostly in writing – in German, French and Italian. Most of its judgments are final.

The Federal Patent Court

The Federal Patent Court decides on disputes relating to patents. The smallest of the federal courts, it regularly deals with international parties. If the parties agree, pleadings and briefs can be in English.

www.bundespattentgericht.ch/en

Functions

Developing a technical idea usually costs a lot of money. With a patent, the 'intellectual property' of an invention is legally protected. In the event of a dispute, the Federal Patent Court decides whether a new technical development meets the requirements for patent protection; it also assesses whether existing patent rights are being infringed. It must also decide who is the legal holder of a patent or how a patent may be used in the context of licensing.

Until 2012, the cantonal courts had jurisdiction in matters relating to patent disputes. Since then, these cases have been a matter for the Federal Patent Court. Its judgments may be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court.

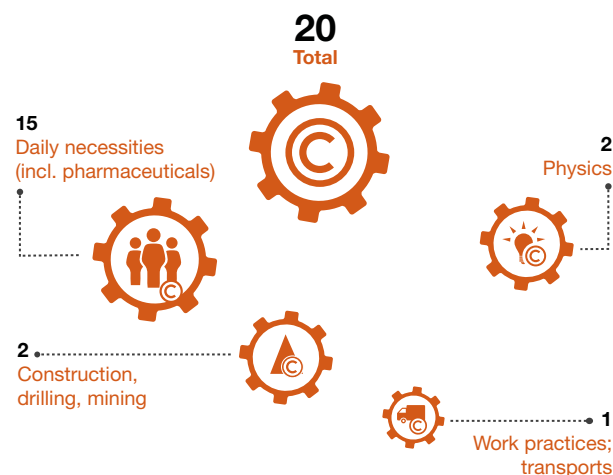
Organisation

The Federal Patent Court is the smallest federal court. It is not split into different divisions. 41 non-permanent judges work for the court, but they do not have their own offices in the court. The president of the Federal Patent Court, another judge, two court clerks and two office staff members work for the Federal Patent Court on a permanent basis.

The seat of the Federal Patent Court is in St. Gallen. It does not have its own courtroom. If court hearings take place, they are held in the building of the nearby Federal Administrative Court. The Federal Patent Court can also hear cases in the cantons, e.g. in Neuchâtel, if the parties come from French-speaking Switzerland.

President: Mark Schweizer

Cases received in 2024, by technical field



Particularities

English is also permitted as a language

International parties frequently appear before the Federal Patent Court; English is also often used in the field of technology. The parties to the dispute may therefore also conduct proceedings in English if everyone agrees.

Judges with technical expertise

The Federal Patent Court regularly deals with complex technical issues in its proceedings. Judges with appropriate technical expertise are therefore involved, enabling fast and cost-effective proceedings, as time-consuming and costly opinions from external experts can usually be avoided.

Expenses 2024 (CHF)
1m

Staff (FTEs) 2024
6

Judgments delivered by the federal courts

Invalidity insurance benefits for obesity

According to previous case law, obesity (severe overweight) did not generally entitle the person concerned to an invalidity pension. The Federal Supreme Court has now changed its practice. Today, the fact that obesity is generally treatable no longer automatically excludes entitlement to a pension. Instead, each individual case must be examined to determine the extent to which the condition actually limits the person's ability to work. As with other illnesses, there is also an obligation to reduce damages in cases of obesity. This means that an affected person is only entitled to a invalidity pension if they undertake reasonable measures (such as dietary or drug treatments, behavioural programmes).
BGE 151 V 66

Yoko Ono is the owner of John Lennon's watch

Yoko Ono gave John Lennon a watch for his 40th birthday in 1980. After his murder, the watch was kept in Yoko Ono's flat. From there it came into possession of a former private chauffeur of Yoko Ono. A collector later acquired the watch in Germany and submitted it to an auction house in Geneva in 2014 to have its value estimated. Yoko Ono found out about this. The Federal Supreme Court dismissed an appeal by the collector and confirmed that Yoko Ono is the owner of the watch. Ownership was initially transferred to her by inheritance. It can be assumed that the watch was stolen by the chauffeur. The collector could not acquire ownership of the stolen item through acquisitive prescription.
BGE 151 III 122

Conviction for war crimes and crimes against humanity for acts committed during the first civil war in Liberia

Ruling on appeals against the conviction handed down at first instance by the Criminal Chamber of the Federal Criminal Court, the Higher Appeals Chamber of the Federal Criminal Court found a Liberian national guilty of violating the laws of war for acts committed between 1993 and 1995 in Liberia during the first civil war, while he was commander of an armed group. The Court found that he had, mainly, killed and had civilians executed, raped a civilian woman, violated the dignity of a deceased civilian, ordered lootings, ordered and directed forced transports carried out in inhumane conditions, and used a child soldier. The Higher Appeals Chamber also considered that the offences were part of a widespread attack against civilians and that they should be classified as crimes against humanity, as they were not time-barred when this standard was introduced into Swiss law in 2011. The Court handed down a 20-year prison sentence and ordered the defendant to be expelled from Switzerland for a period of 10 years. This decision has been appealed to the Federal Supreme Court.
Judgment CA.2022.8

AI is not an inventor

A US national filed an application with the Federal Institute of Intellectual Property to register a patent for a food container. He requested that his AI system be listed as the inventor since it had allegedly made the invention autonomously. The Federal Administrative Court upheld the dismissal of the appeal. Patent applications must name a natural person as the inventor. However, a natural person who participates in the

artificial intelligence (AI) process and recognises the existence of the invention can qualify as the inventor.
Judgment B-2532/2024

Unlawful write-off of AT1 bonds

As part of the take-over of Credit Suisse by UBS, the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority ordered Credit Suisse in March 2023 to write off all AT1 bonds for a nominal value of approximately CHF 16.5 billion. About 3,000 complainants lodged appeals with the Federal Administrative Court against this decree in approximately 360 cases. In a partial decision, the Court revoked the decree for lack of a legal basis. The request for reversal of the write-off is still pending.
Partial decision of 1 October 2025 in case B-2334/2023

Ortovox patent for avalanche transceiver partially invalid

The Federal Patent Court has partially upheld an action for annulment of a patent held by Ortovox by Swiss outdoor sports equipment manufacturer Mammüt. In the court's view, it is obvious and therefore not patentable to suppress the audio signal of an avalanche transceiver or to output it at a reduced volume while the transceiver is emitting a voice message. On the other hand, it is inventive to provide the user of an avalanche transceiver with additional instructions in the form of voice messages that are triggered by events related to the search.
Judgment O2023_012



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Federal Chancellery (p. 3, 6, 16, 28, 36, 45, 50, 51, 53, 56, 57, 59–63, 65–71)
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Federal Administrative Court (p. 82)

Historic photos on pages 10/11 (chronological)
Old Confederation: State Archive Schwyz
Helvetic Republic: Swiss National Museum (SNM)
Mediation: SNM
Federal Treaty: Swiss Federal Archives/Wikimedia Commons
Sonderbund War: SNM
Federal Constitution: SNM
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