



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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Federal Chancellery FCh

# The Swiss Confederation a brief guide

2025



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## “Democracy is more than a system – it’s a mindset!”

Viktor Rossi, Federal Chancellor

Dear Reader

You do not need to be a fortune teller to know that major challenges lie ahead in 2025. The global situation is marked by political tensions and environmental crises. This underlines the vital importance of stable and effective democracy. In the face of global uncertainty, Switzerland is demonstrating that living in a democracy is not just a privilege but also a responsibility – and a source of hope.

Young people have a key part to play. They are already a driving force in shaping tomorrow’s world. They question the existing order, contribute fresh ideas and set new priorities. Their active involvement in politics and civil society strengthens our direct democracy. A democracy can only remain vibrant if it is approached with courage and conviction.

In uncertain times such as these, it is crucial that all of us – whether young or old – understand how our political system works and the active role we can play in it. After all, it is only possible to exercise your democratic rights if you know what they are.

Democracy is more than a system – it’s a mindset! It requires dialogue, respect for the opinions of others, and a will to seek common solutions.

The ‘Swiss Confederation – a brief guide’ is intended to help you deepen your understanding of how our democracy works and illustrate the values of political participation. It should inspire people to take responsibility, especially now, and to look beyond their own interests to the common good.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, fluid script that is characteristic of Viktor Rossi.

Viktor Rossi  
Federal Chancellor



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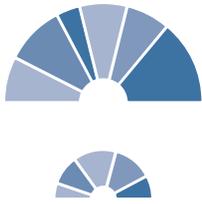
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**This publication reflects the status at the editorial  
deadline (20.01.2025). Latest figures and information  
can be found on the websites mentioned.**



**Complementary resources to accompany the brochure:**

- CH info app for smartphones and tablets
- Website [www.ch-info.swiss](http://www.ch-info.swiss)
- Teaching material
- Barrier-free PDF for the visually impaired



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**Switzerland**

813,000 Swiss nationals live abroad, 171,000 of whom are under 18. Holiday camps are organised in Switzerland for these young 'Swiss Abroad'. During these camps, they

can go on short hikes and visit cities in different cantons, allowing them to learn a lot about their 'second home'.

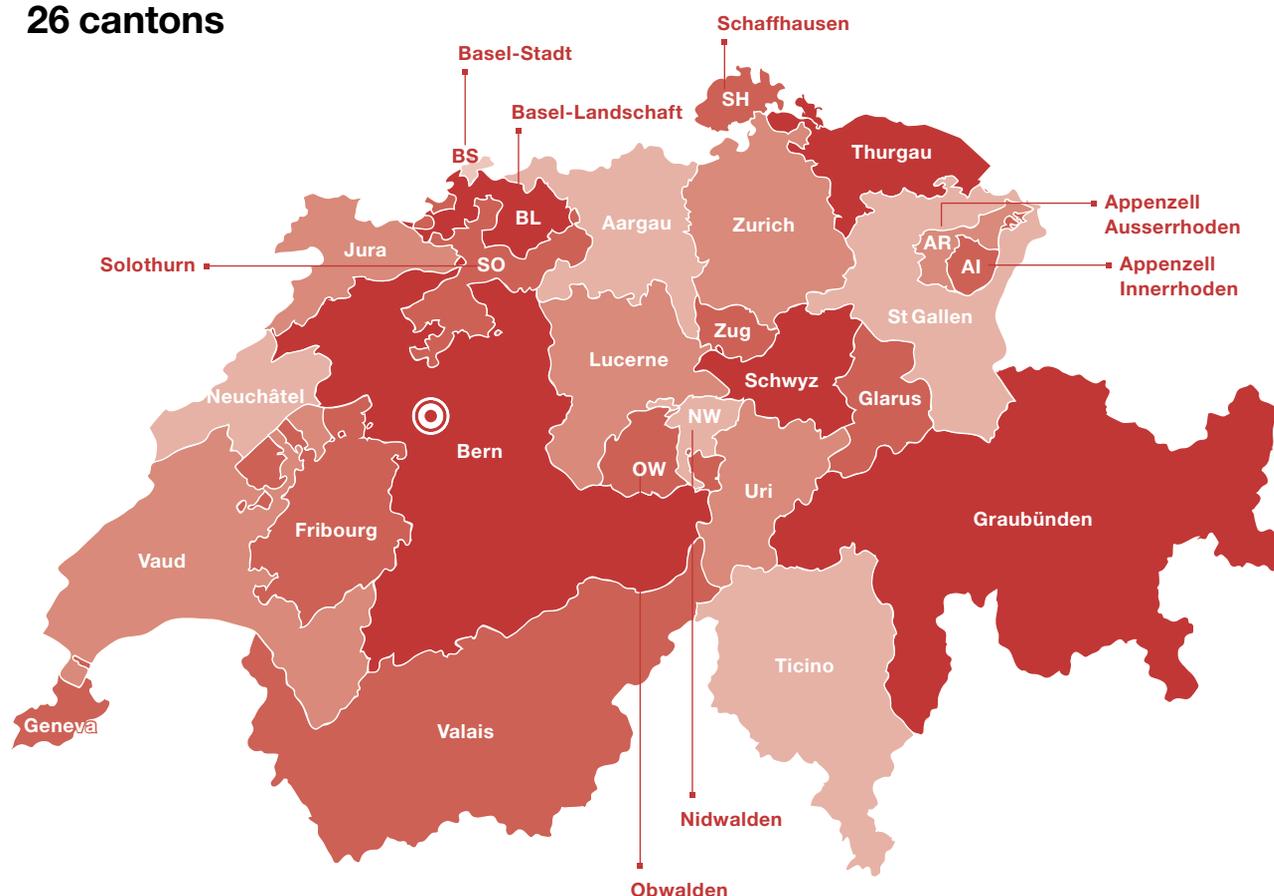




# Switzerland

Switzerland is a small country with a population of around 9 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



Statistics about Switzerland

## 9 million people

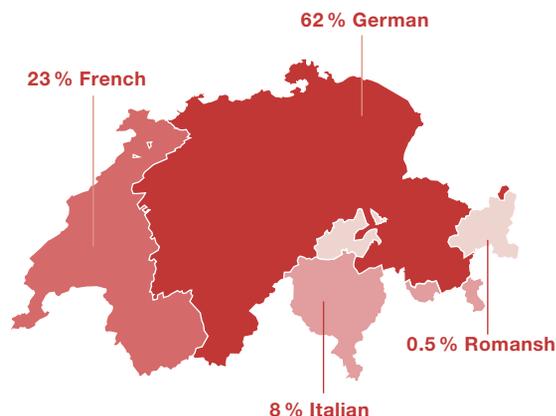
There are around 9 million people living in Switzerland, 27 per cent of them without a Swiss passport (permanent resident population, Q3 2024). More than half of these foreign nationals were either born in Switzerland or have been living here for at least ten years. The majority of the foreign population comes from an EU country. The largest foreign national groups are from Italy, Germany and Portugal.



■ Swiss citizens 6 565 776  
■ Non-Swiss citizens 2 462 083

## 4 national languages

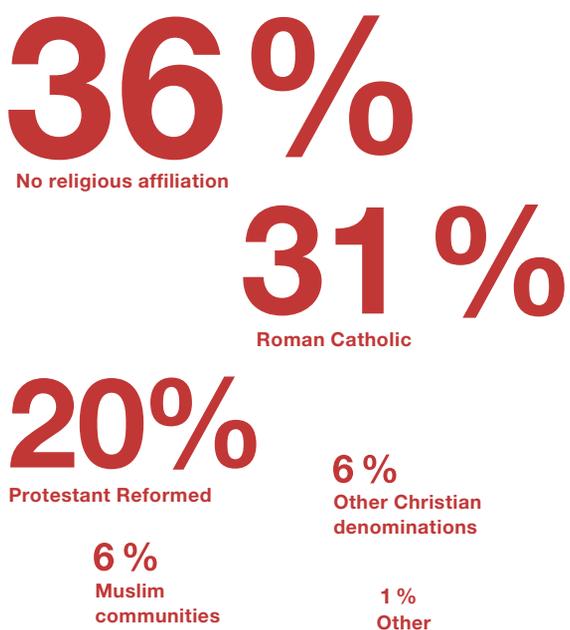
Switzerland is a multilingual country. The four national languages are German, French, Italian and Romansh. 62 per cent of the population primarily speak (Swiss-) German, 23 per cent French, 8 per cent Italian and 0.5 per cent Romansh. For 23 per cent of the population, their mother tongue is not one of Switzerland's national languages. Many people state that they have two main languages, i.e. they are bilingual.



Switzerland

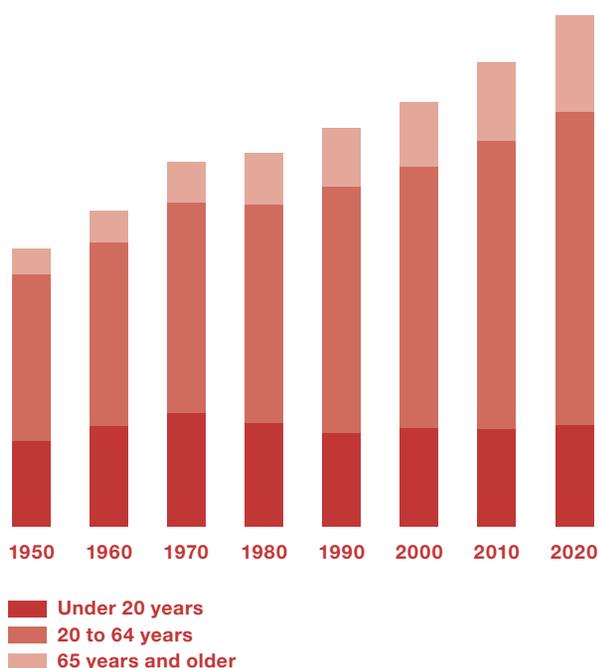
## Christian majority

Switzerland is a Christian country. 57 per cent of its population are either Catholic or Protestant (Reformed Evangelical). Freedom of religion in Switzerland also allows other religious communities to practise 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

Shifting alliances between cities and outlying areas served to maintain internal political order and external independence. In 1291 the original forest cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden entered into the first documented alliance. In the following centuries, the Confederation continued to grow through alliances and territorial conquests.



## 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.



**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.



**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

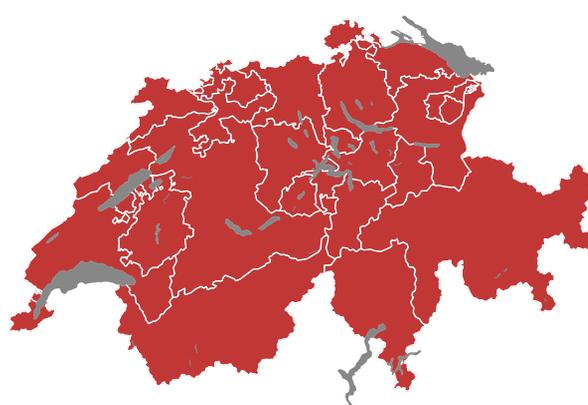
The Federal Constitution defines the Confederation's tasks and responsibilities. These include Switzerland's relations with the outside world, defence, the national road network, and nuclear energy. Switzerland's Parliament, the Federal Assembly, is made up of the National Council and the Council of 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: 813 000 '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.

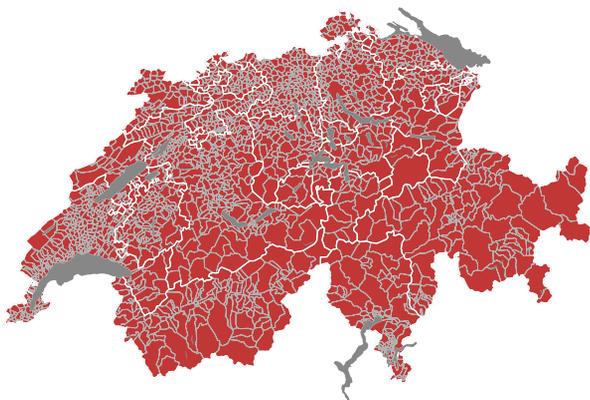
Four cantons are officially multilingual: Bern, Fribourg and Valais have two official languages, Graubünden even has three.

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

**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.**

# 2121

The 26 cantons are divided into 2121 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 most populous commune is the city of Zurich, where around 434,000 people live. The least populous is Kammerrohr in the canton of Solothurn (31 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 eight of the cantons are net contributors: ZH, SZ, OW, NW, ZG, BS, SH, GE. The remaining 18 cantons receive equalisation payments (net beneficiaries).



- Net contributors (8)
- Net beneficiaries (18)

In 2025, CHF 6.2bn flow into the fiscal equalisation system: 4.2bn from the federal government, 2bn from the cantons.



## The examples of Valais and Zug

The Canton of Valais, which is financially weaker, receives CHF 878m in fiscal equalisation, or CHF 2469 per inhabitant. The Canton of Zug, which is financially stronger, contributes CHF 431m, or CHF 3321 per inhabitant towards fiscal equalisation.

Fiscal equalisation



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:

**The first series of bilateral agreements** was accepted by 67% of 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 series of bilateral agreements** 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, which was approved by 55 % of voters in 2005. Schengen facilitates transnational mobility and cooperation on justice and police. Dublin facilitates coordination on asylum proceedings.

The Federal Council wants to stabilise and further develop the bilateral approach. It is doing so by pursuing a package approach. Negotiations with the EU on this took place from March to December 2024. The package includes several thematic elements, including three new agreements (electricity, health, food safety) and the updating of five existing agreements to continue to ensure unhindered access to the EU single market for the Swiss economy. On 20 December 2024, the Federal Council took note of the substantive conclusion of negotiations between Switzerland and the EU.

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

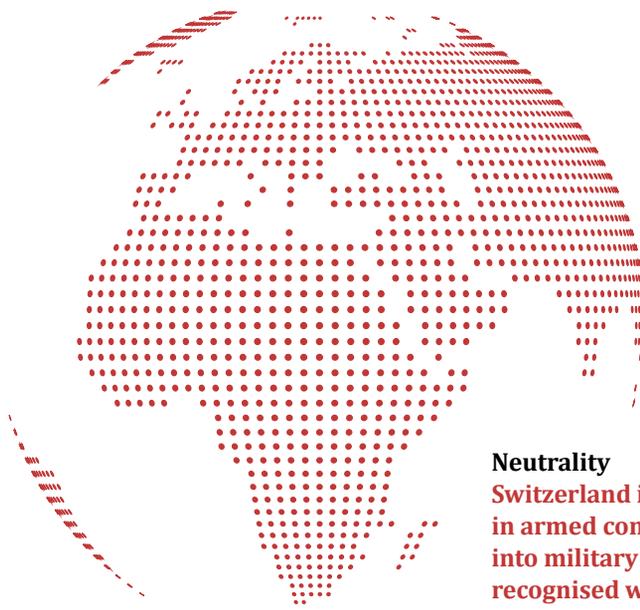
#### Council of Europe

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

### UN

193 states of the world belong to the United Nations. It is committed to promoting peace and international security, worldwide cooperation in solving international problems and respect for human rights. Switzerland has been a member of the UN since 2002: In a referendum, accession was accepted by 55 % of Swiss voters.

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.

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

### Neutrality

**Switzerland is a neutral state: it may not take part in armed conflicts between two states or enter into military alliances. Switzerland's neutrality is recognised worldwide.**

### 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

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

Every year, the Lycée-Collège de la Planta simulates a UN General Assembly: students take on the role of delegates from 77 states. They prepare for this day for a year. Now it is up to them to advocate

for the concerns of 'their' country and be open to the opinions of others. A vote is held at the end.





# 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.**

## Turnout for votes and elections

Usually around 47 % of those eligible to vote cast their ballots in federal votes (average of the last 5 years). 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 mail box 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)

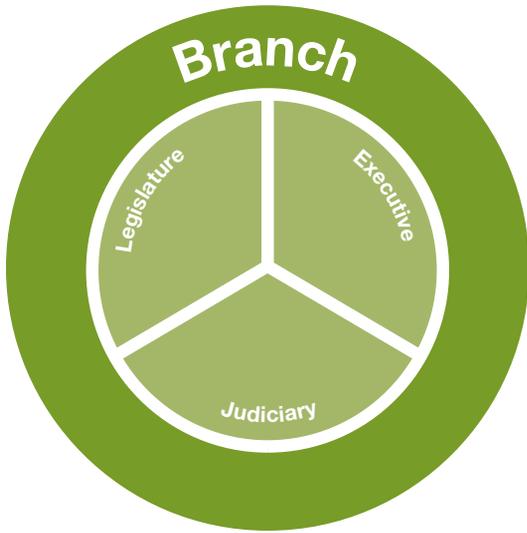
In the cantons of Glarus and Appenzell Innerrhoden, several thousand voters gather outdoors once a year to vote in a people's assembly (Landsgemeinde). They vote to elect their representatives and to decide on proposals that affect their canton. The people's assembly is an ancient form of Swiss democracy.



Political system

## Separation of powers

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 stand as a candidate for political 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.



# 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.





## 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.



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 appoints the judges (the judiciary):

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



## 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.)

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](http://www.attorneygeneral.ch)

# 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**).

### 2025 voting dates

Votes are scheduled to take place on the following Sundays in 2025:

9 February  
28 September  
30 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. 234 have been voted on since then. 26 have been accepted.

As of 31 December 2024, 13 initiatives were at the signature-gathering stage, 18 were pending before the Federal Council or Parliament and 1 was 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’).

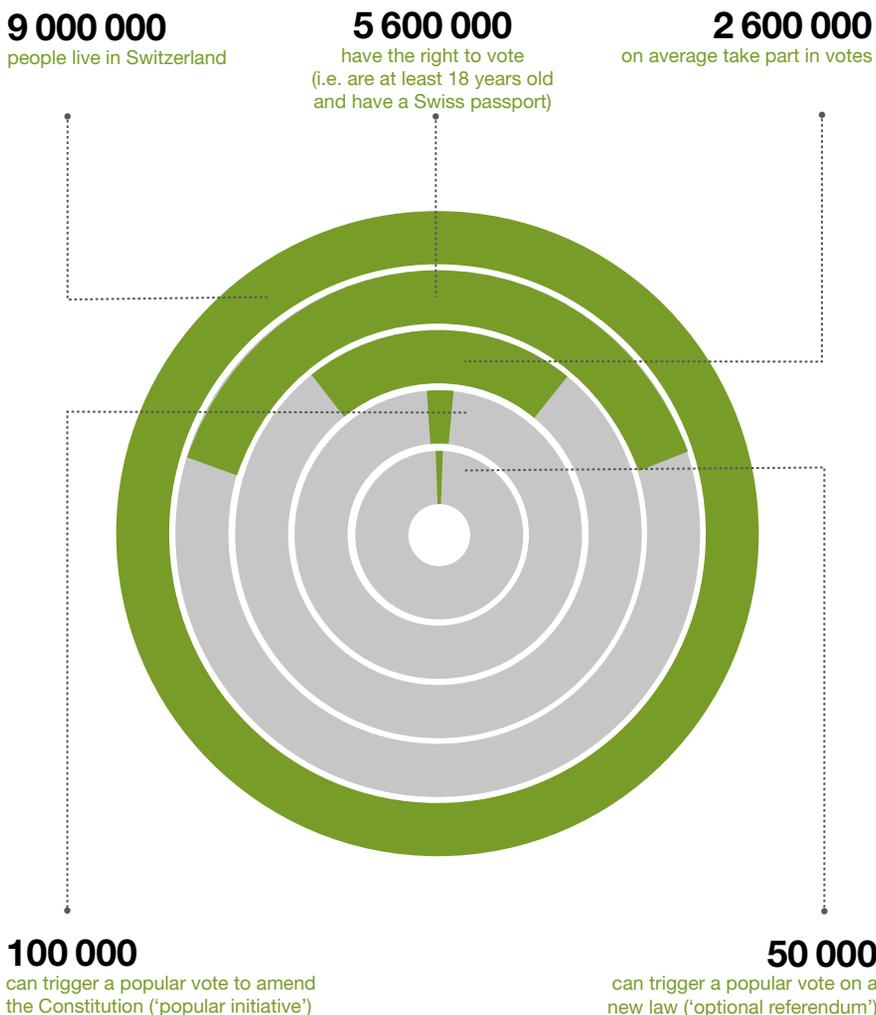
The optional referendum was introduced in 1874. 216 have been held since then; 91 of the proposals were rejected by voters.

As of 31 December 2024, the referendum period was running for 18 federal acts and decrees.



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

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



**Votes held in 2024**

**3 March**  
Initiative for a 13th OASI pension payment  
**Yes 58.3%**

Pensions Initiative  
**No 74.8%**

**9 June**  
Premium Relief Initiative  
**No 55.5%**

Debt Brake Initiative  
**No 62.8%**

Federal Popular initiative  
'For freedom and physical integrity'  
**No 73.7%**

Federal Act on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources  
**Yes 68.7%**

**22 September**  
Biodiversity Initiative  
**No 63%**

Occupational Pension Reform  
**No 67.1%**

**24 November**  
Federal Decree on the 2023 Expansion Phase of the National Highways  
**No 52.7%**

Amendment to the Code of Obligations (Tenancy law: Subletting)  
**No 51.6%**

Amendment to the Code of Obligations (Tenancy law: Termination for personal use)  
**No 53.8%**

Amendment to the Federal Act on Health Insurance (Uniform financing of benefits)  
**Yes 53.3%**

Votes  
Democracy

**Effects of initiatives and referendums**

Even if most initiatives fail and only very few laws are stopped by a referendum, these two instruments can still have a major impact:

- They lead to public discussions on the topics they involve.
- They can influence legislation: groups that are likely to launch a referendum are taken into consideration in the drafting of new laws (→ p. 42/43).
- The Federal Council and Parliament will sometimes make counter-proposals to initiatives, to address the initiative's concerns in a different way.

# 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 infor-  
mation 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 (e.g. same-sex partnerships). Depending on the issue, centre parties (The Centre) will cooperate with either left or right-wing parties.

### 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.**

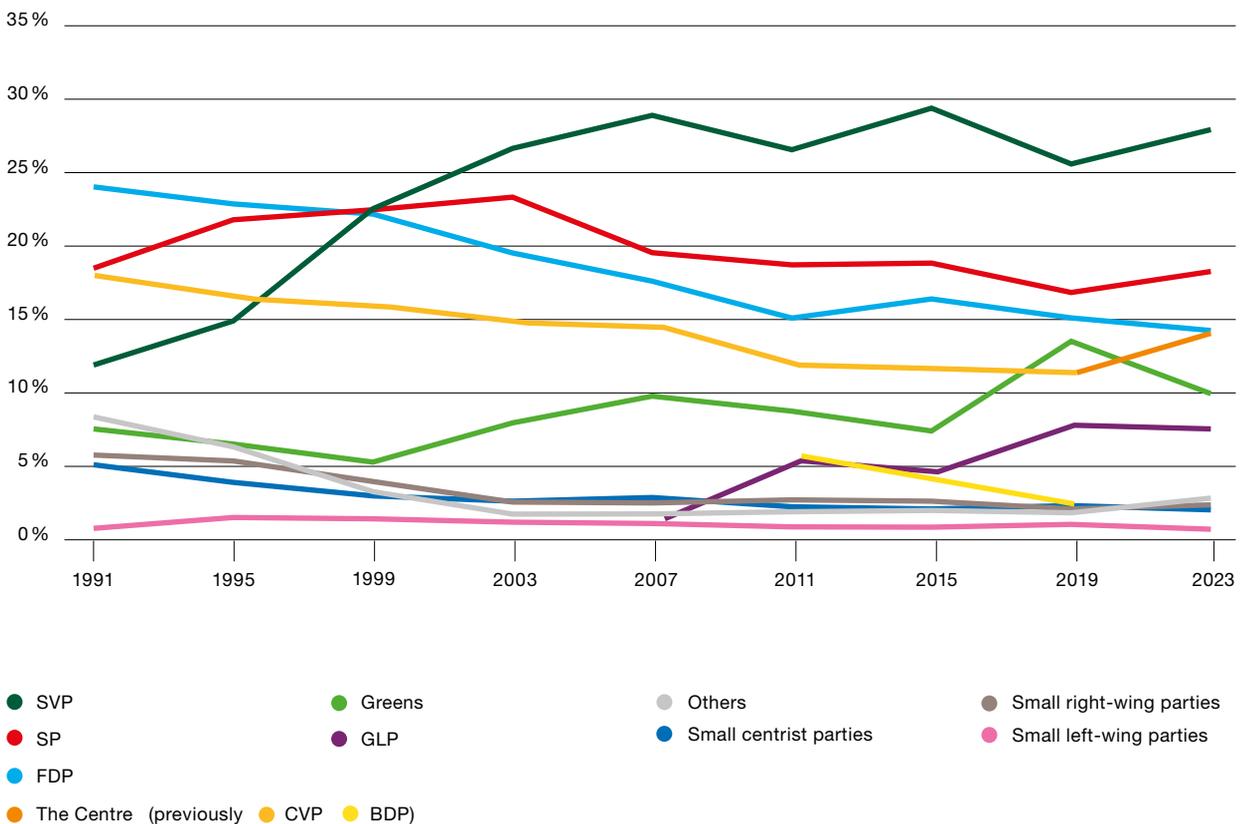
#### What does 'left-wing' mean?

- 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

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.

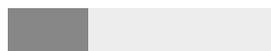


## SVP – Swiss People's Party



Party President  
**Marcel Dettling**

Share of the vote\* **27.9%**



Federal Council	<b>2</b>
National Council	<b>62</b>
Council of States	<b>6</b>

[www.svp.ch](http://www.svp.ch)

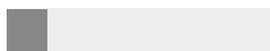


## SP – Swiss Social Democratic Party



Co-Presidents  
**Mattea Meyer**  
**Cédric Wermuth**

Share of the vote\* **18.3%**



Federal Council	<b>2</b>
National Council	<b>41</b>
Council of States	<b>9</b>

[www.sp-ps.ch](http://www.sp-ps.ch)

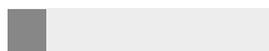


## FDP – FDP.The Liberals



Party President  
**Thierry Burkart**

Share of the vote\* **14.3%**



Federal Council	<b>2</b>
National Council	<b>28</b>
Council of States	<b>11</b>

[www.fdp.ch](http://www.fdp.ch)

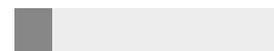


## The Centre\*\*



Party President  
**Gerhard Pfister**  
(until end of June 2025)

Share of the vote\* **14.1%**



Federal Council	<b>1</b>
National Council	<b>29</b>
Council of States	<b>15</b>

[www.die-mitte.ch](http://www.die-mitte.ch)

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



## The GREENS Switzerland



Party President  
**Lisa Mazzone**

Share of the vote\* **9.8%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>23</b>
Council of States	<b>3</b>

[www.gruene.ch](http://www.gruene.ch)



## glp – Swiss Green Liberal Party



Party President  
**Jürg Grossen**

Share of the vote\* **7.6%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>10</b>
Council of States	<b>1</b>

[www.gruenliberale.ch](http://www.gruenliberale.ch)



## EVP – Swiss Evangelical People's Party



Party President  
**Lilian Studer**

Share of the vote\* **2%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>2</b>
Council of States	<b>0</b>

[www.evpev.ch](http://www.evpev.ch)



## EDU – Federal Democratic Union



Party President  
**Daniel Frischknecht**

Share of the vote\* **1.2%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>2</b>
Council of States	<b>0</b>

[www.edu-schweiz.ch](http://www.edu-schweiz.ch)

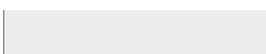


## LdT – Lega dei Ticinesi



Coordinator  
**Norman Gobbi**

Share of the vote\* **0.6%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>1</b>
Council of States	<b>0</b>

[www.lega-dei-ticinesi.ch](http://www.lega-dei-ticinesi.ch)

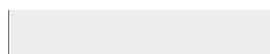


## MCG – Mouvement Citoyens Genevois



Party President  
**François Baertschi**

Share of the vote\* **0.5%**



Federal Council	<b>0</b>
National Council	<b>2</b>
Council of States	<b>1</b>

[www.mcge.ch](http://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

The Legislature **Parliament**

**The Parliamentary Investigation Commission (PlnC)** is the strongest instrument at Parliament's disposal to scrutinise the work of the Federal Council and the Federal Administration

and is only deployed in the case of events of major significance. Interest was correspondingly high when the PlnC appeared before the media on 20 December 2024 to present the results of its investigations into the emergency merger of Credit Suisse.





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# The Legislature

# Parliament

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**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.parliament.ch](http://www.parliament.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.

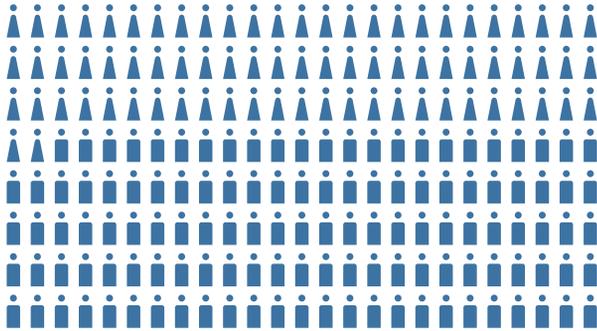
The architect had the aim of creating a national monument. 95% of the materials used were sourced within Switzerland; contracts were awarded to 173 Swiss firms, while 38 Swiss artists were able to leave their mark in the Parliament Building for posterity. Naturally, Auer was careful to ensure that all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

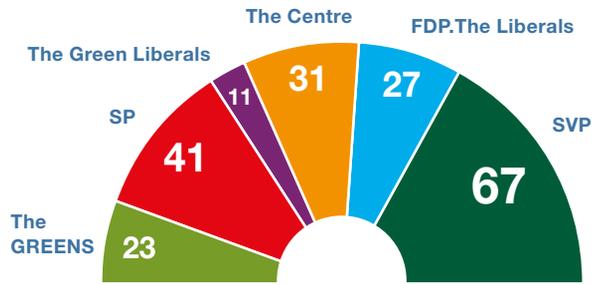


200 members of the National Council



46 members of the Council of States

## Strength of parliamentary groups

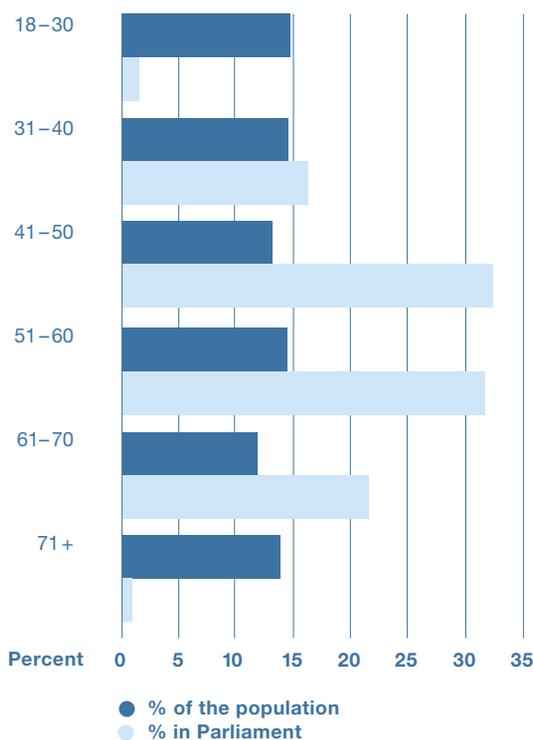


National Council

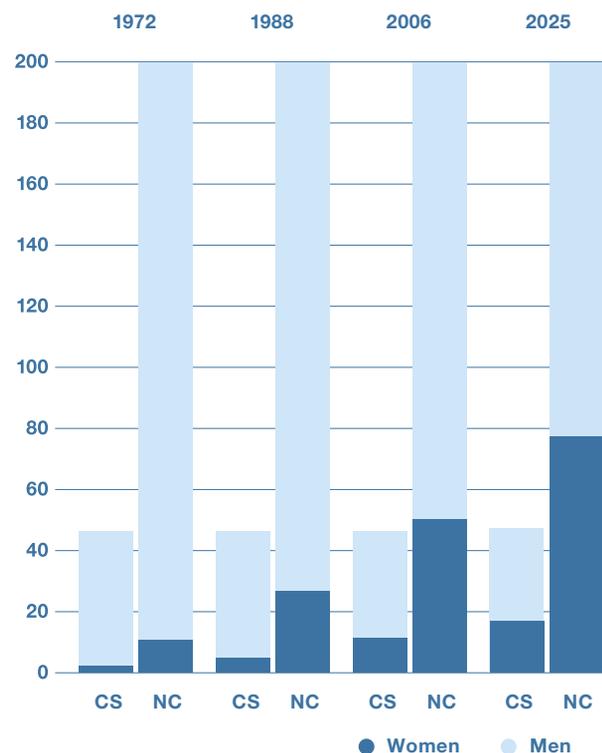


Council of States

## 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

**Ordinances** complement the acts. The Federal Council and the departments enact most of the ordinances, which are issued without the participation of Parliament. In the case of an important ordinance, the relevant parliamentary committee may request that a draft text be submitted for consultation. Ordinances are not subject to referendums.

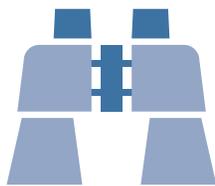
## Election of federal authorities

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

The technical term for the Swiss parliament is 'Federal Assembly'. Article 148 of the Federal Constitution reads, for example: "Subject to the rights of the People and Cantons, the Federal Assembly is the supreme authority of the Confederation."



## 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

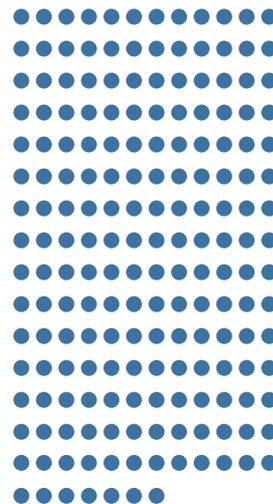


Video about the roles of the Federal Assembly (in German)

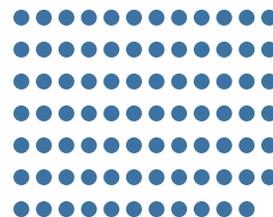
Legislative provisions are enacted in the form of federal acts and ordinances. The other form of enactment is the federal decree. Referendums are required only for a small number of federal acts. Simple federal decrees and ordinances cannot be stopped by a referendum.

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

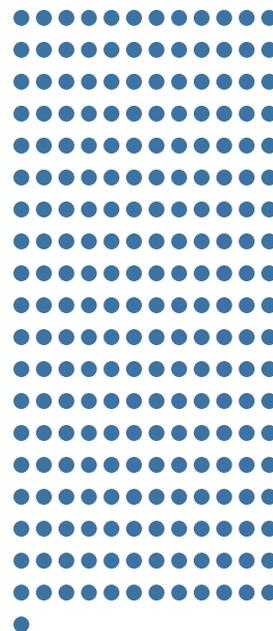
187 federal acts



83 federal decrees



229 simple federal decrees



16 ordinances



# 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 2025

Every year, a different member acts as president of the National Council. Maja Riniker (FDP.The Liberals) will preside over the National Council in 2025. 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 2025

Every year a different member acts as president of the Council of States. Andrea Caroni (FDP.The Liberals) will preside over the Council of States in 2025. 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 2025

Spring session:

**3–21 March**

Summer session:

**2–20 June**

Autumn session:

**8–26 September**

Winter session:

**1–19 December**

Special session (if required):

**5–9 May**

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

**1 December**

Election of the President of the Swiss Confederation and of the Vice President of the Federal Council: **10 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.parliament.ch](http://www.parliament.ch)



**President of the National Council and President of the Council of States for 2025**

Maja Riniker, Aargau  
FDP.The Liberals

Andrea Caroni,  
Appenzell Ausserrhoden  
FDP.The Liberals

### 3 questions for Maja Riniker

#### What inspired you to enter politics?

Ever since I stood at the lectern in the National Council chamber at the youth session as a 17-year-old, I have been committed to Switzerland. I am deeply convinced that everyone in our country should work for the benefit of the community where they are able to do so.

#### What do you do to unwind from political life?

To clear my head, I like to play cards or talk to family and friends, not about politics, but I am interested in their lives and what drives them. To keep fit, I go jogging or skiing in winter.

#### How do you see Switzerland in 20 years?

Our safe country continues to consist of its various regions, and continues to actively foster its four national languages. It is among the world's leading countries in terms of its educational institutions, and has carefully expanded its infrastructure while respecting its natural environment.

### 3 questions for Andrea Caroni

#### What priorities have you set for your year as president?

On the 25th anniversary of our new Federal Constitution, I would like to emphasise the values that guide our institutions: liberal democracy, the rule of law, federalism and concordance. It is thanks to these that we are able to live together in peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, half the world's population lives in autocracies, and these seem to be spreading at an alarming pace. I would also like to celebrate Switzerland's wide range of music (and play a little myself).

#### What inspired you to enter politics?

When I was 19 and about to graduate from high school, I joined the local branch of the FDP in Grub AR out of curiosity. A few months later, while I was studying English abroad, the party put my name forward for the communal control committee, and shortly before my twentieth birthday, I was indeed elected. So that was that.

#### What do you do to unwind from political life?

My sources of relaxation are my family and friends, and my hobbies such as travelling, music – I'm currently learning to play the piano again after many years playing the drums – tennis, gaming and watching movies and TV series.

# 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.



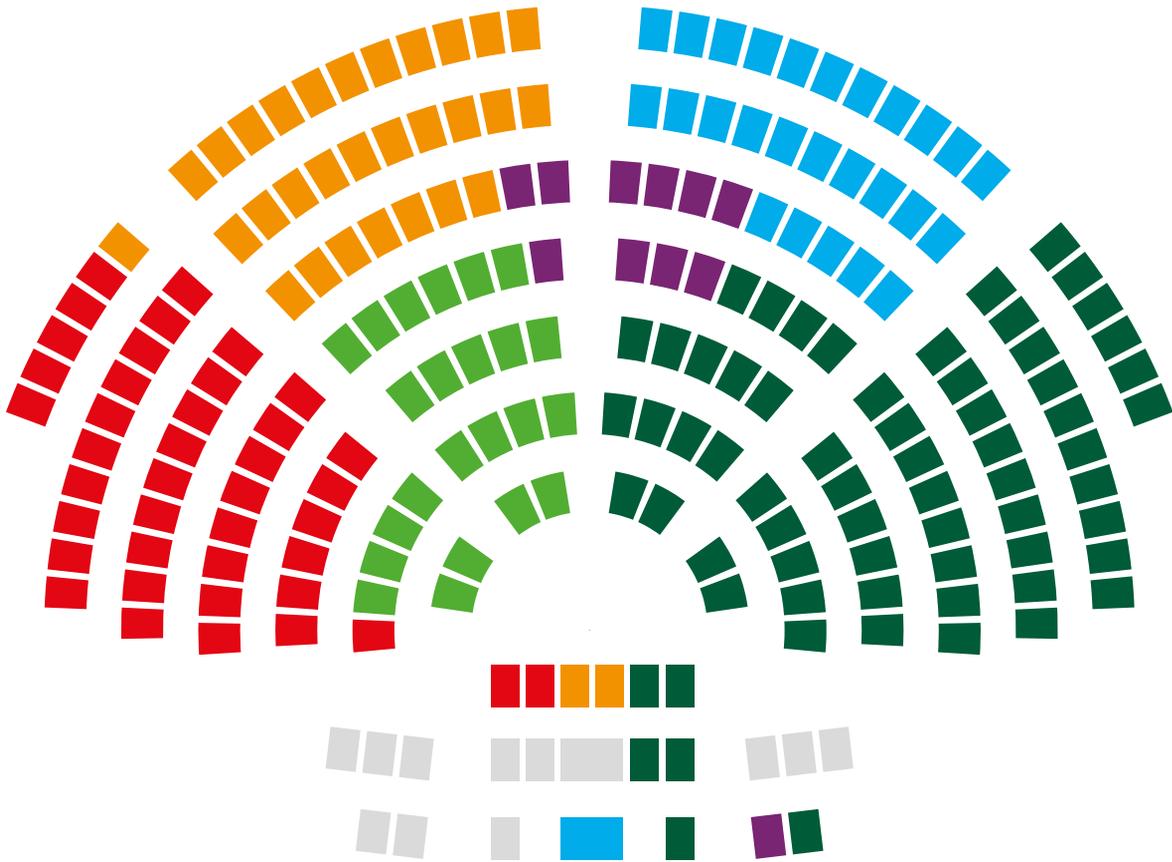
National Council chamber



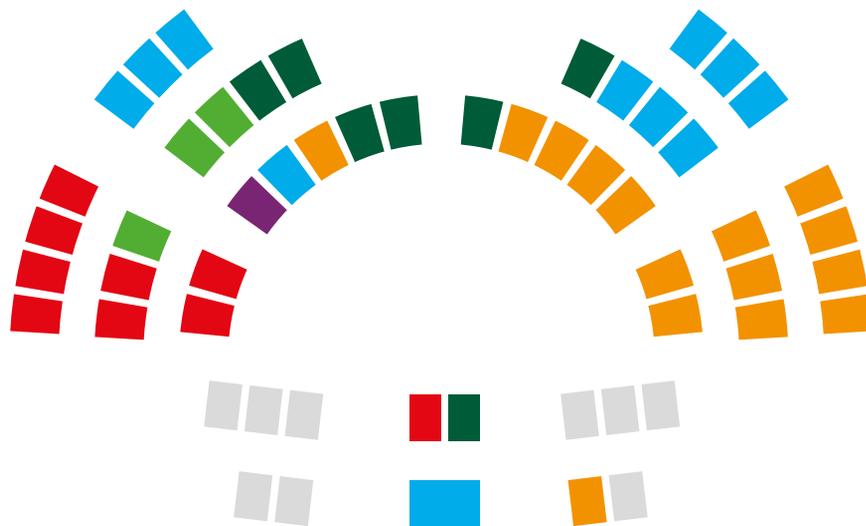
Council of States chamber

Parliamentary group	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	50 SP	50	41	9
● Centre group (The Centre-EVP)	Philipp Matthias Bregy	44 The Centre, 2 EVP	46	31	15
● FDP.The Liberals Group	Damien Cottier	38 FDP.The Liberals	38	27	11
● 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



Allocation of seats in the Council of States



- SVP
- SP
- The Centre
- FDP.The Liberals
- The GREENS
- GLP

Current seating plans:  
Who sits where?  
(in German)



6

parliamentary groups

10

political parties

9

specialist committees  
per Council

2

supervisory committees  
per Council

## 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.

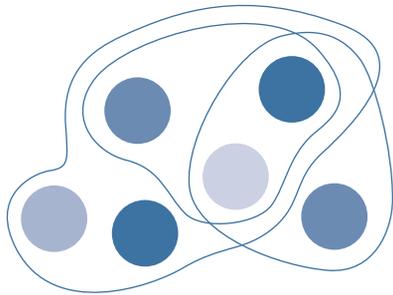
- Members of the Federal Assembly, parliamentary groups and committees can table a **parliamentary initiative** to propose draft legislation. If both Councils agree, a committee will draw up the draft legislation.
- A **motion** is used to instruct the Federal Council to draft legislation (an act or 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.



# 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.



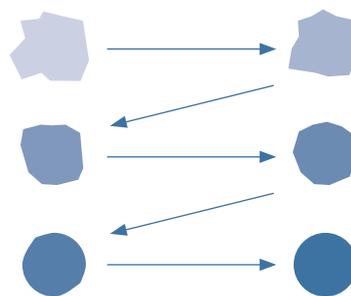
## Two councils with equal powers

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.



## 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.



## 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!

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## 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.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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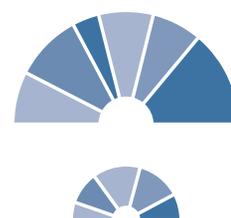
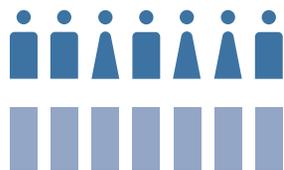
## The People have the last word

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)

# 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.



## Parliament

## 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).

## 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



**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.

# 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.

## 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 2025**  
**21 March (Museum Night)**  
**17 May (childrens' programme)**  
**1 August**  
**25 October**



**Visiting the Parliament Building**

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
**113m**

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
**235**



[www.parliament.ch](http://www.parliament.ch)



Parliamentary Services,  
Secretary General:  
Philippe Schwab

# A parliament for all

**People with disabilities have full access to Parliament and its resources.**



At present, three members of parliament are wheelchair users: Christian Lohr, Islam Alijaj and Philipp Kutter (from left to right).

Over the course of a number of years structural improvements have been made to the Parliament Building to make this historic building more accessible. One of the main measures has been the installation of ramps and lifts to enable people with limited mobility to access all areas of the Parliament Building. This is a key requirement for both visitors and members of parliament who use wheelchairs. The lectern in the National Council chamber and the seats of the presidents in both chambers are now wheelchair accessible, for example.

The Parliamentary Services and the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics have also taken measures to meet the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments. The signage in the building has been adapted and the elevators have been equipped with voice announcement systems. For the blind and partially sighted a brochure about Parliament is also available in Braille. Information about Parliament and its history can also be accessed via an audio app.

All these measures are part of a comprehensive renovation plan and are being developed in close consultation with various disability organisations. The aim is to make Parliament as barrier-free as possible for everyone. The infrastructure of the Parliament Building is being upgraded to meet the latest accessibility standards, while taking into account the building's heritage.

The Executive **The Government**

On 1 January each year, the Federal Chancellery publishes the official photo of the Federal Council. The president for that year gets to decide the design and select the photographer. The concept

for the current photo was commissioned by Karin Keller-Sutter, who is president of the Swiss Confederation in 2025, and carried out by Arthur Gamsa.





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# The Executive

# The Government

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**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](http://www.admin.ch)

### **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**

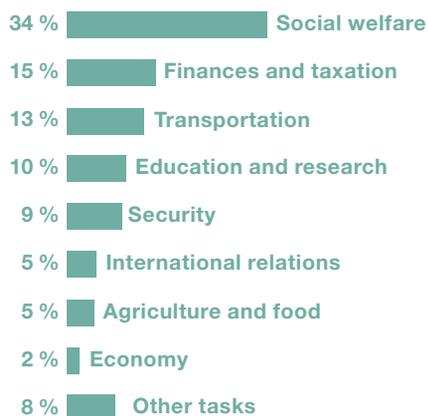
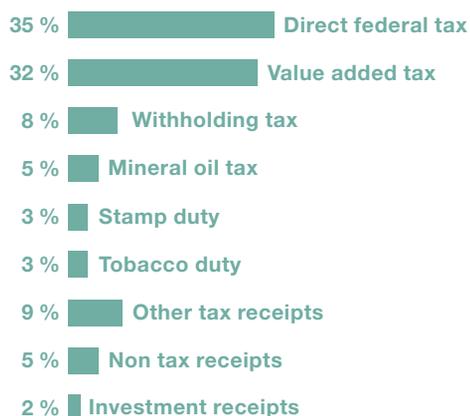
The Confederation is required to balance its expenditure and receipts over the longer term. It is required to run a surplus when the economy is thriving and may spend more than it collects in receipts when the economy is weak. The debt brake does allow for an exception to be made in extraordinary situations 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.



Videos  
The Federal Council – a brief guide

# Federal receipts and expenditure 2023



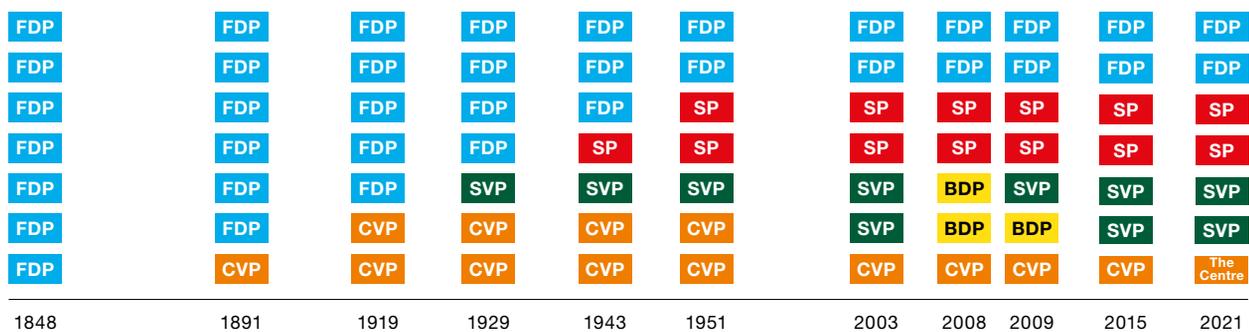
## Receipts of 80 billion

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 CHF 81 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).

# 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: **10 December 2025**  
Election of the Federal Council: **mid-December 2027** (following the parliamentary elections in October 2027)



Video  
Presidency  
(in German)



**Karin Keller-Sutter**  
President of the  
Swiss Confederation

Head of the Federal Department of Finance

Member of the Federal Council since 2019

Party affiliation

FDP



**Guy Parmelin**  
Vice President

Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research

Member of the Federal Council since 2016

Party affiliation

SVP



**Ignazio Cassis**

Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Member of the Federal Council since 2017

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

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

# 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 CVP ('The Centre' from 2021).

## 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.



**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.

# 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.



## Implementing the decisions of Parliament

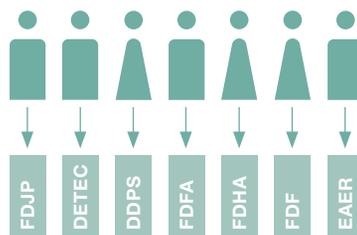
As soon as Parliament has decided on a new law, the Federal Council issues the required ordinances. They set out the specifics on how the new law should be implemented. If Parliament requests particular measures, the Federal Council ensures that these are taken.



## 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 (Twitter):** @SwissGov, @BR\_Sprecher  
**YouTube:** Swiss Federal Council  
**Web:** www.admin.ch, www.ch.ch  
**Apps:** Votelnfo, CH info

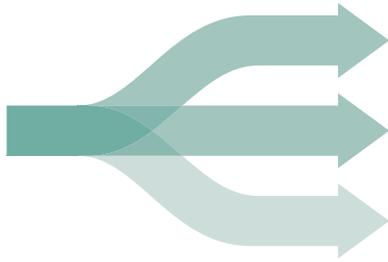


## Heading the Federal Administration

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).



President of the Swiss Confederation 2025  
Karin Keller-Sutter



## 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.

### We are living in a period of crises, populist ideas are on the rise and the party landscape is becoming increasingly polarised. Madam President, what helps in times like these?

Not losing courage and being able to rely on our political institutions. Switzerland's direct democracy gives it an advantage over other political systems. Politicians are forced to find majority solutions that are also backed by the people. This creates stability. It is therefore crucial that we look after our political institutions and the rule of law. They protect our country, our prosperity and the rights of all our citizens.

### How important are the federal finances in times like these? Shouldn't we be investing as much as possible now?

Simply spending as much money as possible does not solve any problems – on the contrary. Every franc must be spent wisely – after all, it's the taxpayers' money. We have the debt brake to thank for the fact that we were able to spend billions to support the economy and population during the COVID-19 pandemic. A balanced federal budget is therefore extremely important, especially when it comes to preparing for crises.

### What is particularly important to you personally for the coming year as Federal President?

I believe that good political solutions can only succeed if everyone involved takes a step back. You have to listen to others, recognise good arguments and take them into account. That requires a certain degree of humility and is how we find the compromises that help us move forward.

## 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 Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights

National Commission for the Prevention of Torture

42,982 (38,596 full-time equivalents) staff work in the Federal Administration. 1,084 of those are apprentices, 626 are graduate interns.

**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 councillor, 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 Education, 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 Rösli**  
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



Over 260 different professions can be learnt in Switzerland – 50 of those in the Federal Administration.

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# Federal Chancellery

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**The Federal Chancellery is the staff office of the Federal Council: it ensures that the Federal Council is able to take sound decisions and communicate them in a coordinated manner. As the custodian of people's rights, it organises federal elections and votes and verifies the legality of initiatives and referendums.**



From the engine room of direct democracy: the signature lists, sorted by canton, are carefully counted and checked.



Viktor Rossi,  
Federal Chancellor since 2024

### Preparing Federal Council decisions

The Federal Council normally holds a meeting once a week to deal with numerous items of business. Prior to the meeting, the federal departments and offices can give their input on the items on the agenda. The Federal Council coordinates this joint reporting procedure. The Federal Chancellor and the two vice chancellors are always present at Federal Council meetings.

- **Vice Chancellor:** Rachel Salzmann
- **Vice Chancellor and Federal Council Spokesperson:** Andrea Aricidacono (until end of March 2025).

### Communicating Federal Council decisions

After every Federal Council meeting, the Federal Council Spokesperson goes before the press to announce the Federal Council's decisions. Federal Council decisions and reports are published in the Federal Gazette, while new or amended 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, on the basis of these, establishes the need for political action. It is responsible for Federal Council planning and controlling: for the four-year legislature planning, the annual objectives and reporting.

### Supporting the president

In 2025 Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter will assume additional tasks at home and abroad in her capacity as president. The Federal Chancellery provides support and ensures continuity from one presidential year to the next.

### Coordinating the work of the Federal Administration

The Federal Chancellor chairs the monthly meetings of the Conference of Secretaries General, at which the secretaries general coordinate the work of their departments. The Digital Transformation and ICT Steering (DTI) division coordinates activities in the field of digitalisation.

### Overseeing democratic rights

The Federal Chancellery ensures that all federal elections and popular votes are conducted correctly. It provides information on the proper procedures and specific requirements to anyone interested in launching a popular initiative or referendum (→ p. 22ff.). The Federal Chancellery is working with the cantons to make it possible to vote in elections and referendums electronically (e-voting).

### Promoting multilingualism

Switzerland's official languages are German, French and Italian, and all legal and official federal texts must be available in these languages. In certain cases they must also be produced in Romansh. Texts of international relevance are also produced in English. The Federal Chancellery is responsible for the quality of the translations.

### Publishing information through a range of channels

Before a federal vote is held, the Federal Chancellery sends explanatory material to all voters and updates the information on the VoteInfo app. Before federal elections, it sends out voting instructions. Up-to-date and detailed information is provided on two websites, in explanatory videos and in this brochure 'The Swiss Confederation – a brief guide'. The Federal Chancellery is also active on social media.

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

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
79m

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
297

**Autonomous organisation**

**Office of the Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner FDPIC:**  
Adrian Lobsiger  
[www.edoeb.admin.ch](http://www.edoeb.admin.ch)



[www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch)

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# Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

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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.





# “Making peace demands courage.”

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

War in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, civil war in Sudan: in many places around the world, people are suffering from the consequences of violence. Peace, security and stability will therefore be a priority for Swiss foreign policy in 2025. As part of that, Switzerland will work with other countries to establish framework conditions that can ensure peace, security and stability. Switzerland will also capitalise on the experience it gained over the previous two years as a member of the UN Security Council. In spring 2025, under a mandate from the UN General Assembly, it will host a conference on the situation in the Middle East as the depositary state of the Geneva Conventions.

As a country that owes much of its prosperity to exports, Switzerland is dependent on functioning, regulated global structures. In particular, relations with the EU, Switzerland’s most important trading partner, are to be stabilised and further developed. The relevant negotiations with the EU were formally concluded at the end of 2024. The ordinary political process will continue in 2025 with the Federal Council’s decision on the signing of the negotiation package and the consultation.

181 states, 43 international organisations, around 750 NGOs: International Geneva offers a wealth of expertise in one location – and is also a hub for Swiss foreign policy, in areas ranging from peace and disarmament to human rights, humanitarian affairs, labour, health, science and sustainable development.

## General Secretariat GS-FDFA

Secretary General: Markus Seiler  
[www.fdfa.admin.ch](http://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](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/sdc)

## Directorate for Resources DR

Director: David Grichting

## Expenses 2023 (CHF)

3.53bn

## Staff (FTEs) 2023

5,461



[www.fdfa.admin.ch](http://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.



The National Action Days on Disability Rights were co-organised by the Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities (FBED). Sessions were held for the first time in Ticino and in other cantons.



“Equality, solidarity and diversity are essential values that the FDHA defends and promotes on a daily basis.”

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

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.

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
20.52bn

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
2,759



[www.edi.admin.ch](http://www.edi.admin.ch)

### General Secretariat GS-FDHA

Co-secretaries general: Stefan Hostettler and Jean-Christophe Kübler

[www.edi.admin.ch](http://www.edi.admin.ch)

### Federal Office for Gender Equality FOGE

Co-Directors:  
Stéphanie Lachat and Gian Beeli

[www.ebg.admin.ch](http://www.ebg.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Culture FOC

Director: Carine Bachmann

[www.bak.admin.ch](http://www.bak.admin.ch)

### Swiss Federal Archives SFA

Director: Philippe Künzler

[www.bar.admin.ch](http://www.bar.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology

#### MeteoSwiss

Director:  
Christoph Appenzeller

[www.meteoschweiz.admin.ch](http://www.meteoschweiz.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Public Health FOPH

Director: Anne Lévy

[www.bag.admin.ch](http://www.bag.admin.ch)

### Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO

Director: Hans Wyss

[www.blv.admin.ch](http://www.blv.admin.ch)

### Federal Statistical Office FSO

Director:

Georges-Simon Ulrich

[www.bfs.admin.ch](http://www.bfs.admin.ch)

### Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO

Director: Stéphane Rossini

[www.bsv.admin.ch](http://www.bsv.admin.ch)

### Autonomous organisations

#### Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products Swissmedic

Director: Raimund T. Bruhin

[www.swissmedic.ch](http://www.swissmedic.ch)

#### Swiss National Museum SNM

Director: Denise Tonella

[www.nationalmuseum.ch](http://www.nationalmuseum.ch)

#### Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

Director: Philippe Bischof  
(Michael Kinzer from July 2025)

[www.prohelvetia.ch](http://www.prohelvetia.ch)

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# Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP

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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.

Employers that take on refugees and temporarily admitted persons are entitled to financial support under certain conditions.





# “Better together.”

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

One of the FDJP’s main priorities is migration policy. Particular emphasis is placed on integrating foreign nationals with the right of residence in Switzerland. After all, everyone benefits: businesses are able to fill job vacancies, and foreign nationals living in Switzerland are offered new career prospects, can earn their own living and so gain greater independence. The FDJP therefore encourages contact between employers, job seekers and integration offices as this helps to identify and overcome potential obstacles.

Another of the FDJP’s priorities is protecting the public. In the fight against human trafficking, the FDJP ensures that all partners work together to provide victims with the best possible protection and to punish the perpetrators. The FDJP is also working on a bill that expands the range of services available to victims of domestic and sexual violence. The revision of the Victim Support Act, for example, is intended to give victims access to specialised treatment around the clock.

Finally, the FDJP is pressing ahead with digitalisation. At the end of 2024, Parliament adopted the legal basis for a state digital identity (e-ID). This will enable users to identify themselves digitally in a secure, fast and uncomplicated manner in the future, while retaining the greatest possible control over their data. The e-ID is set to be introduced in 2026.

## General Secretariat GS-FDJP

Co-secretaries general: Nora Bertschi  
and Sebastian Kölliker  
[www.ejpd.admin.ch](http://www.ejpd.admin.ch)

### State Secretariat for Migration SEM

State Secretary:  
Vincenzo Mascioli  
[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Justice FOJ

Director: Michael Schöll  
[www.bj.admin.ch](http://www.bj.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Police fedpol

Director:  
Eva Wildi-Cortés  
[www.fedpol.admin.ch](http://www.fedpol.admin.ch)

### Post and Telecommunications Surveillance Service PTSS

Director: Daniela Schär  
[www.li.admin.ch](http://www.li.admin.ch)

## Autonomous organisations

### Federal Institute of Intellectual Property IIP

Director:  
Catherine Chammartin  
[www.ige.ch](http://www.ige.ch)

### Federal Institute of Metrology METAS

Director: Philippe Richard  
[www.metas.ch](http://www.metas.ch)

### Swiss Institute of Comparative Law SICL

Director: Nadjma Yassari  
[www.isdc.ch](http://www.isdc.ch)

### Federal Audit Oversight Authority FAOA

Director: Reto Sanwald  
[www.rab-asr.ch](http://www.rab-asr.ch)

### Federal Gaming Board FGB

Responsible: Thomas Fritschi  
[www.esbk.admin.ch](http://www.esbk.admin.ch)

### Federal Commission on Migration FCM

President: Manuele Bertoli  
[www.ekm.admin.ch](http://www.ekm.admin.ch)

### Federal Arbitration Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights

President:  
Helen Kneubühler Dienst  
[www.eschk.admin.ch](http://www.eschk.admin.ch)

### National Commission for the Prevention of Torture NCPT

President: Martina Caroni  
[www.nkvf.admin.ch](http://www.nkvf.admin.ch)

## Expenses 2023 (CHF)

4.33bn

## Staff (FTEs) 2023

3,026



[www.ejpd.admin.ch](http://www.ejpd.admin.ch)

# 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.



Women should be encouraged to enter traditionally male-dominated sectors.



“Each apprentice has a unique set of qualities. That makes it easier for us to overcome challenges.”

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

A good education is the key to a successful future. That's why the DDPS is committed to offering a wide range of apprenticeships. Whether traditional or modern, manual or technical, at the DDPS the choice is yours.

Six-hundred apprentices are trained at the DDPS each year. That is half of all apprenticeships in the Federal Administration. The 40 occupations on offer at locations across the country range from mechanical engineer to carpenter, from cook to laboratory technician to information technologist.

One of the major advantages of apprenticeships at the DDPS is the personalised support on offer. Apprentices receive regular feedback from qualified and motivated practical instructors. The courses offered are recognised for their quality and seriousness, ensuring that those on board acquire a solid set of skills that are relevant to the job market. The learning environment is modern and stimulating, with practical activities that encourage autonomy and a sense of responsibility.

The DDPS offers career development opportunities to anyone who wants to work in a dynamic and innovative environment. It operates throughout Switzerland and offers 12,500 jobs in more than 200 occupations. It is committed to promoting an exemplary working environment based on clear values and an inclusive culture.

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
6.79bn

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
12,252



[www.vbs.admin.ch/en](http://www.vbs.admin.ch/en)

### General Secretariat GS-DDPS

Secretary General: Daniel Büchel  
[www.vbs.admin.ch/en](http://www.vbs.admin.ch/en)

### State Secretariat for Security Policy SEPOS

State Secretary:  
Markus Mäder  
[www.sepos.admin.ch/en](http://www.sepos.admin.ch/en)

### National Cyber Security Centre NCSC

Director: Florian Schütz  
[www.ncsc.admin.ch](http://www.ncsc.admin.ch)

### Federal Office for Civil Protection FOCP

Director: Michaela Schärer  
[www.babs.admin.ch/en](http://www.babs.admin.ch/en)

### Federal Office for Defence Procurement armasuisse

Chief of Defence Procurement:  
Urs Loher  
[www.ar.admin.ch/en](http://www.ar.admin.ch/en)

### Federal Office of Topography swisstopo

Director: Sandra Felix  
[www.swisstopo.admin.ch/en](http://www.swisstopo.admin.ch/en)

### Federal Office of Sport FOSPO

Director: Matthias Remund  
[www.baspo.admin.ch](http://www.baspo.admin.ch)

### Defence sector

Chief of the Armed Forces:  
Lieutenant General  
Thomas Süssli  
[www.vtg.admin.ch/en](http://www.vtg.admin.ch/en)

### Federal Intelligence Service FIS

Director: Christian Dussey  
[www.fis.admin.ch](http://www.fis.admin.ch)

### Office of the Armed Forces Attorney General

Armed Forces Attorney  
General: Stefan Flachsmann  
[www.aa.admin.ch/en](http://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.**

Production of the 5-centime piece at the Federal Mint (Swissmint): discs (blanks) prior to being struck in the coining press.





# “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.

President of the Swiss Confederation in 2025.

Sound finances and rigorous budget policy give the state the necessary room for manoeuvre to act in the service of its fellow citizens. This also bolsters the confidence of investors and citizens, which is essential for sustainable economic growth.

The Federal Council conducts a fiscal policy based on the requirements of the debt brake. This financial management instrument requires that the ceiling for total expenditure approved in the budget be based on expected income, adjusted for the economic situation.

The federal finances will face a number of challenges in the next few years. The aging population will cause an increase in social security expenditure, in particular in the health and AHV segments.

Moreover, global geopolitical instability has resulted in a rise in security expenditure, especially in the Armed Forces' budget. Savings measures are now necessary to ensure a balanced budget. In 2024, the Federal Council commissioned a group of experts to review the Confederation's tasks and subsidies, and to submit proposals on restructuring the public finances.

The proposed measures will be subject to a broad consultation. The final decision lies with Parliament, which approves the budget each year.

## General Secretariat GS-FDF

Secretary General: Barbara Hübscher Schmuki  
[www.efd.admin.ch](http://www.efd.admin.ch)

## State Secretariat for International Finance SIF

State Secretary:  
Daniela Stoffel  
[www.sif.admin.ch](http://www.sif.admin.ch)

## Federal Office for Customs and Border Security FOCBS

Director: Pascal Lüthi  
[www.bazg.admin.ch](http://www.bazg.admin.ch)

## Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunications FOITT

Director: Dirk Lindemann  
[www.bit.admin.ch](http://www.bit.admin.ch)

## Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics FOBL

Director: Pierre Broye  
[www.bbl.admin.ch](http://www.bbl.admin.ch)

## Federal Finance Administration FFA

Director:  
Sabine D'Amelio-Favez  
[www.efv.admin.ch](http://www.efv.admin.ch)

## Federal Office of Personnel FOPER

Director: Rahel von Kaenel  
[www.epa.admin.ch](http://www.epa.admin.ch)

## Federal Tax Administration FTA

Director: Tamara Pfammatter  
[www.estv.admin.ch](http://www.estv.admin.ch)

## Autonomous organisations

### Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority FINMA

Director: Stefan Walter  
[www.finma.ch](http://www.finma.ch)

### Swiss Federal Audit Office SFAO

Director: Pascal Stirnimann  
[www.efk.admin.ch](http://www.efk.admin.ch)

### Federal Pension Fund PUBLICA

Director: Doris Bianchi  
[www.publica.ch](http://www.publica.ch)

## Expenses 2023 (CHF)

18.27bn

## Staff (FTEs) 2023

8,729



[www.efd.admin.ch](http://www.efd.admin.ch)

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# Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER

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The EAER defines framework conditions for the economy and the labour market. It sets the rules that apply in the private sector and in agriculture, and represents the interests of the Swiss economy and the scientific community abroad. It is responsible for organising vocational and professional education and training and promotes research. The EAER also has the task of making sure that the country is supplied with essential goods.



This farm in Epagny in the canton of Fribourg could also benefit from reduced red tape in future.



“Many can benefit from less red tape, whether in terms of trade, the broader economy or in agriculture.”

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

Switzerland is highly integrated into the global economy. Free trade agreements are of key importance to Switzerland in securing access to foreign markets and boosting competitiveness. Trade is already simplified thanks to an existing free trade network with 43 partners. The agreement with China, which has been in place since 2014, is currently being optimised and broadened. And the agreement with India, concluded in March 2024 after 16 years of negotiations, marks a significant milestone in Switzerland's trade policy.

But the aim is not only to make it easier to trade, but also to simplify life for farmers, for example, by reducing the administrative burden. The Federal Council's goal is to ensure that the agriculture sector is productive and that the country has a stable food supply in line with the principles of sustainability. To this end, the EAER is making sure the conditions are in place to strengthen value creation across the entire agricultural and food industry.

Every four years, the Federal Council formulates its policy to promote education, research and innovation. The 2025-28 dispatch is aimed at consolidation following several periods of above-average growth in expenditure. Within the scope of their responsibilities, the federal government and the cantons work together to ensure the best possible quality and permeability of the Swiss education system.

**General Secretariat GS-EAER**

Secretary General: Nathalie Goumaz  
[www.wbf.admin.ch](http://www.wbf.admin.ch)

**State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO**

State Secretary:  
Helene Budliger Artieda  
[www.seco.admin.ch](http://www.seco.admin.ch)

**State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI**

State Secretary:  
Martina Hirayama  
[www.seri.admin.ch](http://www.seri.admin.ch)

**Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG**

Director: Christian Hofer  
[www.foag.admin.ch](http://www.foag.admin.ch)

**Federal Office for National Economic Supply FONES**

Director a.i.:  
Christoph Hartmann  
[www.fones.admin.ch](http://www.fones.admin.ch)

**Federal Office for Housing FOH**

Director: Martin Tschirren  
[www.bwo.admin.ch](http://www.bwo.admin.ch)

**Federal Office for Civilian Service CIVI**

Director: Christoph Hartmann  
[www.zivi.admin.ch](http://www.zivi.admin.ch)

**Autonomous organisations**

**Office of the Price Supervisor**

Price Supervisor:  
Stefan Meierhans  
[www.preisueberwacher.admin.ch](http://www.preisueberwacher.admin.ch)

**Competition Commission COMCO**

Director: Patrik Ducrey  
[www.weko.admin.ch](http://www.weko.admin.ch)

**Board of the Federal Institutes of Technology ETH**

President:  
Michael O. Hengartner  
[www.ethrat.ch](http://www.ethrat.ch)

**Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training SFUVET**

Director: Barbara Fontanellaz  
[www.sfvvet.swiss](http://www.sfvvet.swiss)

**Swiss Innovation Agency Innosuisse**

Director:  
Dominique Gruhl-Bégin  
[www.innosuisse.ch](http://www.innosuisse.ch)

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
12.66bn

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
2,255



[www.wbf.admin.ch](http://www.wbf.admin.ch)

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

Roads, rail, power and the media: DETEC assures Switzerland's basic public services. But it also takes care of our natural environment: woodlands, landscape, water, air, plants and animals. DETEC pursues a climate policy that is also beneficial for the economy.



This clamshell bucket, suspended from a crane, is used to collect sediment samples from 55 sites in Lake Constance, which are then rinsed, sieved and examined for quagga mussels.



# “Striking a balance between protecting and using our natural environment. That is what DETEC is striving to achieve.”

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

Our lakes fulfil important functions: they provide drinking water, are a source of recreation, tourism and fishing. At the same time, they serve as habitats for many animals and plants. However, our lakes are under strain and changing. To gain a better understanding of these developments, an international team of researchers on Lake Constance are taking a closer look supported by DETEC.

As part of the SeeWandel research project, they are studying the influence of nutrients, invasive plant and animal species, and climate change on the lake's ecosystem.

This work shows that Lake Constance has recovered after decades of pollution. Thanks to good wastewater treatment plants and reduced fertiliser use in agriculture, it is once again home to almost the same aquatic plants as before. However, new invasive species are disrupting the balance. The quagga mussel, for example, has spread throughout the lake, impacting on the ecosystem and water abstraction infrastructure (drinking water, thermal use).

The data from the SeeWandel project, in which Austria and Germany are also involved, can help to predict changing conditions – also for other lakes. This allows steps to be taken in good time to protect nature and how it is used.

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
**14.46bn**

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
**2,526**



[www.uvek.admin.ch](http://www.uvek.admin.ch)

## General Secretariat GS-DETEC

Secretary General: Yves Bichsel  
[www.uvek.admin.ch](http://www.uvek.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Transport FOT

Director: Christa Hostettler  
[www.bav.admin.ch](http://www.bav.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Civil Aviation FOCA

Director: Christian Hegner  
[www.bazl.admin.ch](http://www.bazl.admin.ch)

### Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE

Director: Benoît Revaz  
[www.bfe.admin.ch](http://www.bfe.admin.ch)

### Federal Roads Office FEDRO

Director: Jürg Röthlisberger  
[www.astra.admin.ch](http://www.astra.admin.ch)

### Federal Office of Communications OFCOM

Director: Bernard Maissen  
[www.bakom.admin.ch](http://www.bakom.admin.ch)

### Federal Office for the Environment FOEN

Director: Katrin Schneeberger  
[www.bafu.admin.ch](http://www.bafu.admin.ch)

### Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE

Director: Maria Lezzi  
[www.are.admin.ch](http://www.are.admin.ch)

## Autonomous organisations

### Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate ENSI

Director: Marc Kenzelmann  
[www.ensi.ch](http://www.ensi.ch)

### Federal Inspectorate for Heavy Current Installations ESTI

Director: Daniel Otti  
[www.esti.admin.ch](http://www.esti.admin.ch)

### Swiss Transportation Safety Investigation Board STSB

President: Pieter Zeilstra  
[www.sust.admin.ch](http://www.sust.admin.ch)

### Federal Electricity Commission EICOM

President: Werner Luginbühl  
[www.elcom.admin.ch](http://www.elcom.admin.ch)

### Federal Communications Commission ComCom

President: Christian Martin  
[www.comcom.admin.ch](http://www.comcom.admin.ch)

### Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television ICA

President: Mascha Santschi Kallay  
[www.ubi.admin.ch](http://www.ubi.admin.ch)

### Federal Postal Services Commission PostCom

President: Anne Seydoux-Christe  
[www.postcom.admin.ch](http://www.postcom.admin.ch)

### Rail Transport Commission RailCom

President: Barbara Furrer  
[www.railcom.admin.ch](http://www.railcom.admin.ch)

The Judiciary **The Courts**

In 2025, there is an anniversary to celebrate: 150 years of the Federal Supreme Court as Switzerland's permanent highest court. So it will be opening its doors to the public in Lucerne on

6 September and at its main site in Lausanne on 13 and 14 September. Photo: An open day at the Federal Supreme Court to mark the 175th anniversary of the Federal Constitution in 2023.





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# The Judiciary

# The Courts

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**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](http://www.eidgenoessischegerichte.ch)

### **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**

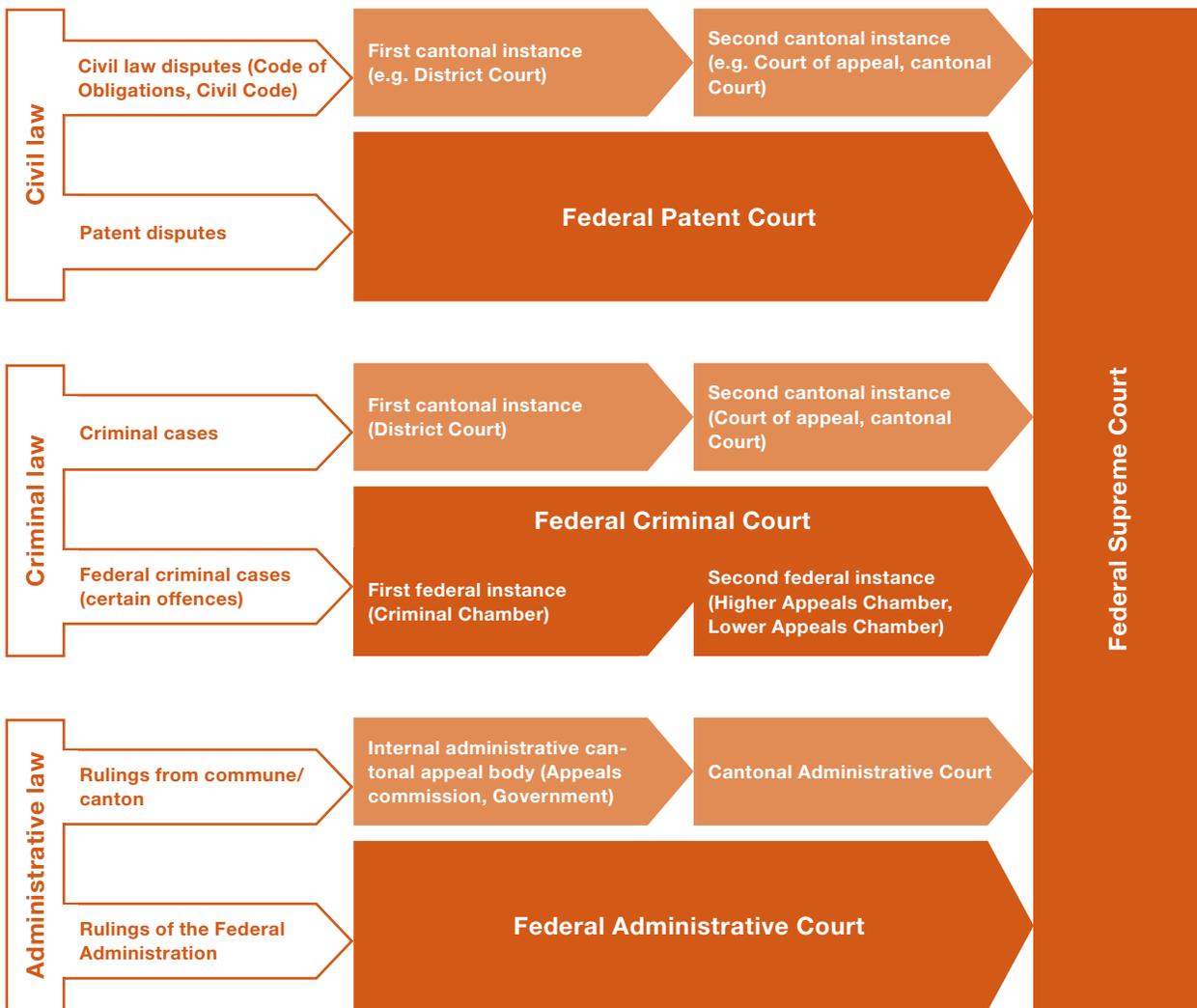
The judges of the federal courts are elected by the United Federal Assembly for a term of office of 6 years. Re-election is possible without restriction. At the latest, judges leave office at the end of their 68th year of age.

The United Federal Assembly also elects the presidents and vicepresidents 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.



Website (in German)  
The federal courts

# Procedures in the Swiss legal system



The federal courts are located at four sites



In 2023 approximately 14 800 cases were concluded



# 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](http://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, 15 are women and 25 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

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**

100m

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**

345



Video

The Federal Supreme Court



Federal Supreme Court,  
Secretary General:  
Nicolas Lüscher

The court members are supported by 375 employees, including around 175 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, the Conference of Presidents and 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. During the anniversary year 2025, open days will be held (see 'Three questions for the president of the Federal Supreme Court'):

#### Open Day schedule 2025

**6 September in Lucerne**

**13/14 September at the main site in Lausanne**



**Visits to the  
Federal Supreme Court  
in Lausanne**



**Visits to the  
Federal Supreme Court  
in Lucerne**



**Public hearings**

## 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 50 to 60 press releases on particularly important rulings.

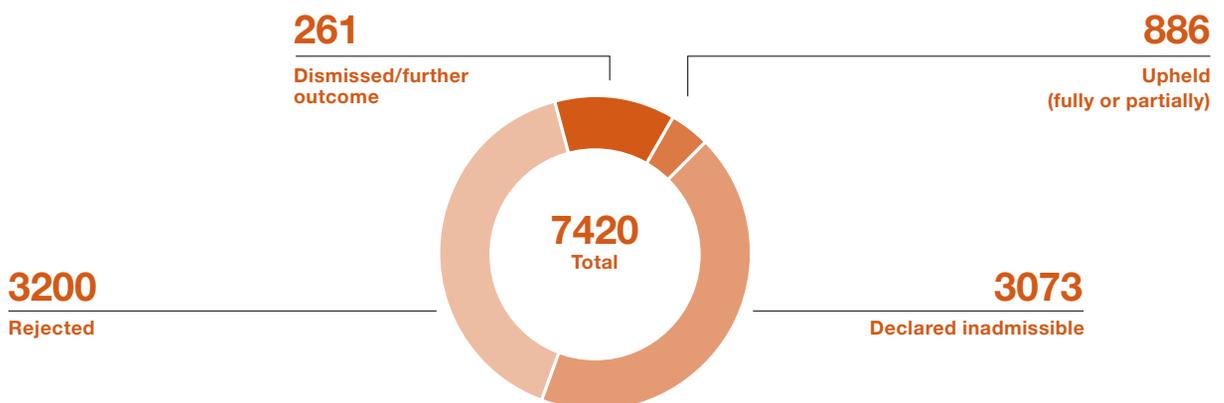
### No independent examination of the facts of the case

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.

### Outcome and number of cases 2023





**“In a State governed by the rule of law, the judiciary provides the counterweight necessary for the proper functioning of the institutions.”**

**François Chaix**  
President of the Federal Supreme Court 2025/2026

## **Three questions to the president of the Federal Supreme Court**

### **What will the Federal Supreme Court be celebrating in 2025?**

The Federal Supreme Court has existed since 1848. However, its powers were still very limited and it met as and when required at different locations in Switzerland. The 1874 Federal Constitution significantly expanded its powers; but above all, it was given its permanent seat in Lausanne in 1875. So in 2025, the Federal Supreme Court will celebrate its 150th anniversary as a permanent court.

### **And how is it celebrating this anniversary?**

With a variety of events. The official ceremony with representatives from the worlds of politics, the judiciary and the legal profession in particular will take place in May. In addition, the Federal Supreme Court will organise a symposium in May, which will be attended by the cantonal supreme courts, the supreme courts of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe, and other representatives of the Swiss judiciary and legal world. There will be a festive event for the court's employees in June. And we are particularly looking forward to introducing our institution to the public at the open days on 6 September 2025 (in Lucerne) and 13 and 14 September 2025 (at the main site in Lausanne)!

### **What other historical stages can the Federal Supreme Court look back on?**

I would like to start by mentioning the creation of the Federal Insurance Court (FIC) in 1917 in Lucerne, which was fully incorporated into the Federal Supreme Court in 2007. Another milestone was the election of Ms Margrith Bigler-Eggenberger as the first female member of the court in 1974. Finally, I would like to mention 1 January 2007: since that date, the Federal Supreme Court has had the jurisdiction to rule on disputes relating to federal elections. This power strengthens the position of the Federal Supreme Court as the guardian of democracy.

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.

# 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/en/home/index](http://www.bstger.ch/en/home/index)

## 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 77 employees support them. The Federal Criminal Court's management bodies are the Administrative Commission and the Plenary Assembly (consisting of all tenured judges).

**President:** Alberto Fabbri

## 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.

**Expenses 2023 (CHF)**  
18m

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
81

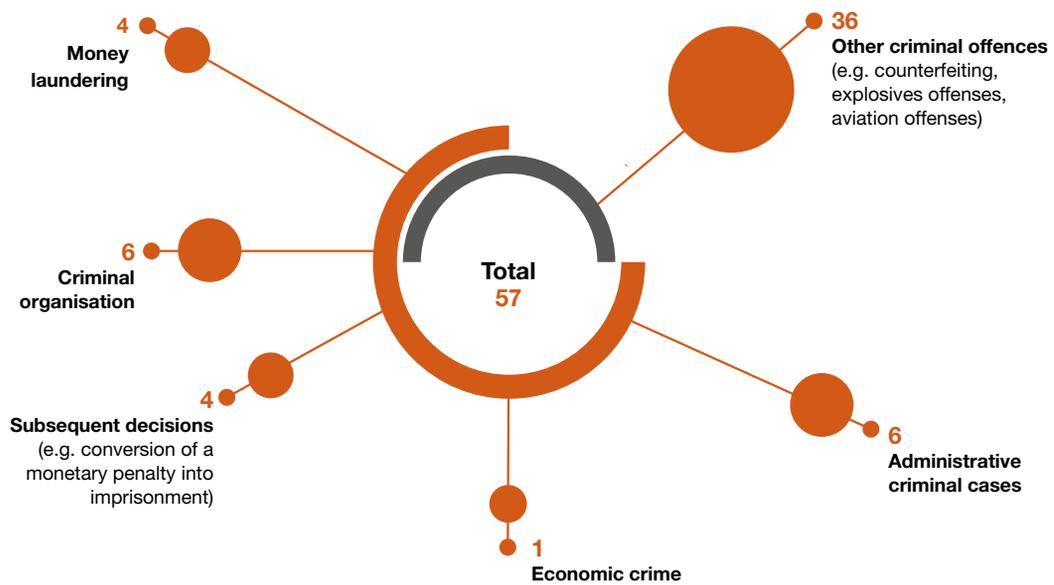


Video  
The Courts of the  
Swiss Confederation



The Federal Criminal Court is based in Bellinzona.

**Criminal Chamber: cases by subject matter in 2023**



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# The Federal Administrative Court

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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](http://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 2023 (CHF)  
84m

Staff (FTEs) 2023  
369

6655 cases concluded in 2023

5047

not appealable  
to the Federal  
Supreme Court

1608

appealable to  
the Federal  
Supreme Court

240

of which appealed  
to the Federal  
Supreme Court



## 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 6,500 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.bundespatentgericht.ch/en](http://www.bundespatentgericht.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.

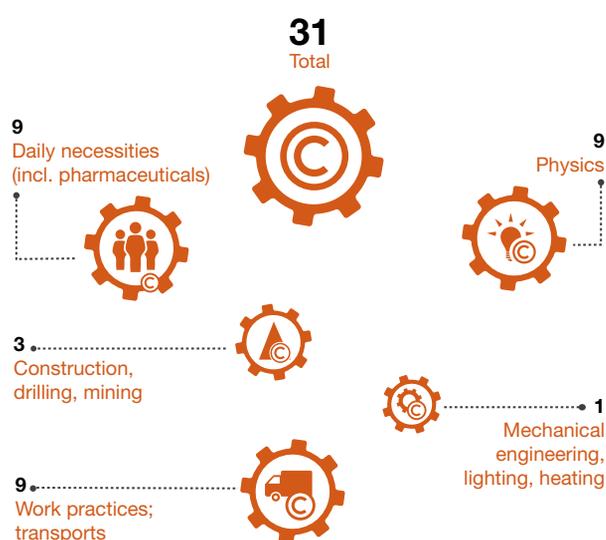
## Organisation

The Federal Patent Court is the smallest federal court. It is not split into different divisions. 42 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 2023, 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 2023 (CHF)**  
1m

**Staff (FTEs) 2023**  
6

## Judgments delivered by the federal courts

### **Incitement to hatred on grounds of sexual orientation**

For the first time, the Federal Supreme Court has upheld a conviction for discrimination and incitement to hatred on grounds of sexual orientation. In 2021, the convicted man had made derogatory comments about a journalist and the gay and lesbian community in a film interview on the Internet. With the language used and various pejorative expressions, he invited the readers of his post to despise the journalist, in particular because of her sexual orientation. His message was designed to incite and stir up feelings of hatred based on sexual orientation.

*Verdict 6B\_1323/2023; BGE 150 IV 292*

### **Federal Council address before votes**

The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG) did not violate the principle of diversity with its broadcasting of the Federal Council address on the "Frontex proposal" on Radio SRF before the vote of 15 May 2022. Due to the special nature of the addresses, the requirements for this are less strict than for other vote-related broadcasts. The audience can readily recognise and classify the speeches as part of the Federal Council's information activities. Those eligible to vote are accustomed to forming their own opinions despite the Federal Council's adoption of a position.

*Judgment 2C\_871/2022; BGE publication planned*

### **Former Gambian interior minister on trial for crimes against humanity**

The Criminal Chamber of the Federal Criminal Court has found the former Gambian Interior Minister guilty of multiple counts of intentional homicide, torture and false imprisonment as crimes against humanity committed in Gambia between 2000 and 2016 and has imposed a custodial sentence of 20 years and an expulsion order of 12 years. Switzerland's jurisdiction over purely foreign acts is based on the principle of universal jurisdiction for the prosecution of international crimes. Switzerland has no jurisdiction over charges of rape as a crime against humanity, as no systematic or widespread attack against the civilian population has been established. All parties to the proceedings have appealed the judgment.

*Judgment SK.2023.23*

### **Food deliveries are not postal packets**

PostCom, the regulatory authority for the postal market, qualified the conveyance of food deliveries by Uber and eat.ch as postal services. As a result, both companies would have had to guarantee their employees the same working conditions as in the postal sector and prepare a collective labour agreement. The Federal Administrative Court upheld the appeals of both companies. It established that the conveyance of goods and part-load freight, which includes food deliveries, falls outside the scope of the Postal Act.

*Judgments A-4721/2021 and A-4350/2022*

### **Comparis qualifies as an insurance intermediary**

On the comparis.ch website, users can compare insurance solutions and, by clicking onwards, request an insurance offer from the relevant insurer. Although the request for the offer is made through a sister company, the activities of the two companies are necessarily economically interdependent. For these reasons, the Federal Administrative Court upholds the ruling of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority that Comparis qualifies as an insurance intermediary.

*Judgment B-5886/2023*

### **Credible infringement of Stromer's patent rights**

The Federal Patent Court has approved an application by Swiss e-bike manufacturer Stromer for precautionary measures (restraining order, temporary seizure) to be ordered against a competitor. The Court holds that it was credibly demonstrated that the disputed patent is legally valid, and that the design of the competing product in the rear fork/rear axle/motor hub area infringes the patent rights of Stromer. Moreover, Stromer credibly demonstrated that it faced the risk of a decline in sales through the launching of the competing product.

*Judgment S2023\_004 and S2023\_005*



Publication of  
decisions of the Federal  
Supreme Court

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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  
Expanded democracy: Wikimedia Commons  
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Third Federal Constitution: Wikimedia Commons

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*The River Aare meanders its way through Bern.  
It is overlooked by the Federal Palace, the heart of Swiss political life.*

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