

FEBRUARY 2026

# Swiss Review

The magazine  
for the Swiss Abroad



## What now for the nation's metaphorical campfire? Decision day looms for public broadcaster

Defence spending and the question of neutrality –  
how the Ukraine war has left its mark on Switzerland

The odd one out – newly elected National Councillor  
Rudi Berli is the only Swiss Abroad in parliament

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**4 Focus**

The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation feels the squeeze

**9 Report**

Visiting the Swiss municipality with the youngest population

**12 Society**

The war in Ukraine has also had an impact in Switzerland

More and more schools are banning smartphones

**16 Images**

A climate exhibition minus the finger-wagging



Photo: Danielle Liniger

**News from your region****19 Switzerland in figures**

Swiss birth rate hits an all-time low

**20 Politics**

The popular initiative demanding significantly more money for climate action

Inheritance tax for the super-rich emphatically rejected at the ballot box

**25 Literature**

Author Dorothee Elmiger scoops three literary awards at once

**26 Profile**

Rudi Berli is the only Swiss Abroad in the National Council

**28 Notes from the Federal Palace**

Olympic timekeeping – another symbol of Swiss reliability

Cover photo: by Max Spring, the “Swiss Review” cartoonist. [www.maxspring.ch](http://www.maxspring.ch)

# Stories around the campfire



When the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) broadcast, the whole of Switzerland used to watch or listen. From our favourite Saturday afternoon radio programme, to live coverage of the skiing – SRG SSR was the metaphorical campfire around which we all sat. Nowadays, the flame flickers behind a wall of interactive features. We consume media on the go, on the side, and in completely separate spaces.

An emotive debate is raging over the future of SRG SSR. The “CHF 200 is enough” initiative aims to slash the annual radio and television licence fee for private households, but would effectively halve the SRG SSR budget in one fell swoop (more on page 4). SRG SSR is already going through the biggest upheaval in its history, with 900 jobs expected to be cut as the organisation becomes more streamlined and adapts its content. This also has implications for the “Fifth Switzerland”.

All of us stand at the heart of this debate – a society looking for our own “campfire” while algorithms distract our attention and AI hallucinations are presented as fact. Today’s teenagers move effortlessly through digital spaces, but rarely with any guidance. How do we help them to develop media literacy, and how can we find high-quality content amid the overload?

If the fire still burns, it does so in the form of podcasts in our pocket, live streams on the train, or our soundtrack in the kitchen. But one thing still matters: the desire for reliable information and stories that connect us. This is precisely the content that I hope to present to you in future in my role as editor-in-chief.

I would not be who I am today were it not for this magazine, which used to be the only link I had to my father’s home country while growing up as a Swiss Abroad. All the more reason for me to thank my predecessor Marc Lettau for his outstanding work. Roman Häfliger will keep a low profile but play a valuable role as our new graphic designer. It is a new chapter for both of us.

WALTER SCHMID, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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

**Swiss  
Community**

# Media shift and spending caps: Swiss broadcasting is under pressure

Changes in media usage, rounds of cost-cutting and job cuts: the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), Switzerland's publicly financed media company, is facing some major challenges. On 8 March 2026, the public will vote on an initiative that could halve SRG SSR's budget. What would the ramifications be for our quadrilingual nation and the "Fifth Switzerland"?

SUSANNE WENGER

The science programme on the radio? Cancelled. The society programme on the TV? Discontinued. When Swiss German television and radio cut programmes last year to save money, it was met with uproar. Researchers filed a petition, and creative artists expressed their concern. The angriest backlash, however, was triggered when SRG SSR stopped broadcasting in ultra-short wave (USW) in late 2024 and switched entirely to digital. Half a million listeners left and switched

to private radio stations and foreign broadcasters. In a subsequent U-turn, the parliament decided to maintain USW broadcasting for longer than originally scheduled, at which point SRG SSR announced it was returning to the analogue radio waves.

With its 17 radio and seven television channels SRG SSR still reaches a daily audience of several million people. However, 95 years after it was founded, it is no longer the "nation's campfire", the way it once was. Previously, in the time before the internet

and streaming services, SRG SSR created shared, primetime experiences. Plays in dialect and news broadcasts on the radio used to empty the streets. Saturday evening shows and Swiss series saw families gather round the TV set. Today, media usage is fragmented and individual. "The focus is switching to online, mobile and non-linear consumption," says Ulla Autenrieth, media scientist at Graubünden University of Applied Sciences.

### Initiative designed to lower taxes

SRG SSR nonetheless remains an institution that stirs emotions. In 2018, a popular initiative aimed at abolishing the mandatory media tax, which Switzerland uses to fund its media service publicly, failed at the ballot box, with over 70 per cent of voters against. The right-wing conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP), sections of the Free Democratic Party of Switzerland (FDP) and the Swiss Trade Association are now taking a new approach in their efforts to rein in SRG SSR. Their "200 Swiss francs is enough" initiative is aiming to reduce the current tax of 335 francs to 200 francs per household. SRG SSR, whose operating revenue was 1.56 billion francs in 2024, finances 80 per

How much sport SRG SSR can and should continue to broadcast live is also a matter of intense debate ahead of the vote. Pictured here: the 2025 men's downhill at Wengen.  
Photo: Keystone





A family from Berne watch television together in 1957. Nowadays, we consume a varied range of media content on many different platforms around the clock.  
Photo: Keystone

cent of its budget through this tax. If the initiative is approved, it is forecasting a drop in revenue of 800 million francs, not least because a reduced range of programmes would also bring in less advertising revenue. Revenue would halve. Opponents of the initiative describe it as a “halving initiative”, whereas the people behind it say that SRG SSR’s calculations are too pessimistic. Private local radio and TV stations, which also receive money from the tax, would be spared under the initiative.

### Federal Council itself imposes cutbacks

The Swiss government and parliament are against the initiative. It would noticeably reduce the offering and have negative consequences for the economy, culture, society and Switzerland’s already beleaguered media

landscape, argues the Federal Council. However, the Federal Council has resolved in its own right to lower the tax from 2027: households will pay 300 francs, and 80 per cent of companies will no longer pay. Media Minister Albert Rösti (SVP), once a co-author of the initiative, sees this as a compromise. He feels the initiative goes too far and the cut would be “drastic”. Rösti has, however, “pushed through a counter-project that will require considerable savings from SRG SSR”. SRG SSR must change without driving away private investors.

### Restructuring under new management

Susanne Wille has been at the head of SRG SSR since November 2024. Shortly after taking office, she announced the largest restructuring in the history of the company. More de-

tails have subsequently emerged. A total of 270 million francs in savings is to be achieved by 2029. Some 900 of the 5,500 jobs are being cut, and administrative structures are to be centralised. Alongside lower taxes, falling advertising revenue is also plaguing SRG SSR. Just like private media groups, it is feeling the bite of advertising money moving to US tech giants like Google.

The impact the savings package will have on programming remains unclear. For Wille it is a balancing act: she must make savings without alienating the supporters of public broadcasting, who want content over and beyond the pressure of ratings. She wants to digitise SRG SSR but cannot compete too fiercely with private media houses online. In any event, SRG SSR and publisher associations agreed on one thing last year: SRG SSR is to limit its online text contributions and focus on audio-

visual content. SRG SSR and private stakeholders want to work together more closely, for instance in their use of technology.

### Necessary or dangerous?

The vote on the 200-franc initiative is piling more pressure on SRG SSR. Proponents say that the licence fees are the highest in Europe. Zurich SVP National Councillor Thomas Matter, speaking in parliament, called it a “forced SRG SSR tax” that hit young people particularly hard, since the latter hardly watch or listen to TV and radio at all anymore. He also described the tax as an “absurd burden” on companies, saying that SRG SSR should confine itself to a “core mandate”. What this mandate would look like if SRG SSR were 800 million francs short is still a matter of debate. The wording of the initiative mentions only “radio and television programmes that provide an essential service for the general public”. Currently, SRG SSR’s constitutional mandate encompasses cultural, educational and entertainment content in addition to news.

Opponents of the initiative – a broad coalition of politicians from The Centre, FDP, the Green Liberals, the SP and the Greens alongside representatives of culture, sport and civil society – warn of far-reaching consequences. They claim that undermining an independent source of news at a time of growing disinformation from foreign platforms would threaten Switzerland’s security. Culture and sport would be losing a platform. And, above all, halving SRG SSR’s budget would mean it would be unable to maintain its federal structure and its four-language character, said coalition member and Centre National Councillor Martin Candinas of Grisons in parliament.

Switzerland’s multilingual nature makes it misleading to compare the media tax with its international counterparts, opponents stress.

### Redistribution to linguistic minorities

SRG SSR produces content for Switzerland’s four language regions, via SRF (German), RTS (French), RSI (Italian) and RTR (Romansh), and also produces content for the foreign market through swissinfo (SWI). An internal financial redistribution process ensures that linguistic minorities continue to be catered for: of the 930 million francs that the Swiss German business sector received from the media tax in 2024, 235 million went to Ticino, 115 million to the French-speaking part of Switzerland and 20 million to the Romansh-speaking part.

If SRG SSR’s budget were halved, it would have to close most of its regional studios, the media department reports. It currently operates seven main and 17 regional studios. Reporting would more often take place from these centres: “There would be significantly less regional journalism.” Is

Federal Councillor Paul Chaudet (1955–66) answers questions from a Swiss Radio International journalist.

Archive photo: swissinfo/ provided



## Voices from the debate

“Let’s finally trim down SRG SSR, with its unhealthily bloated headcount, finances and amount of power, to a sensible size.”

Thomas Matter, Zurich, SVP National Councillor

“The initiative would deprive SRG SSR of 800 million francs. That’s not a cutback; that’s razing to the ground. It would hit our rural regions.”

Josef Dittli, Uri, FDP member of the Council of States

“It’s hard to believe that, in spite of all the advances in technology, 850 million francs is not enough for a public-service broadcaster in a country of nine million inhabitants.”

Lorenzo Quadri, Ticino, Lega National Councillor

“Local reporting for even the smallest villages in Switzerland has not made financial sense for a long time now. Many editorial departments have vanished from rural and mountainous regions.

We need SRG SSR as a regionally anchored, four-language media house.”

Christine Badertscher, Berne, Green National Councillor

“It is true that SRG SSR is important in the language regions that don’t have many options in terms of private media. But why should it finance such a lavish entertainment offering in German-speaking Switzerland?”

Christian Wasserfallen, Berne, FDP National Councillor

“Households contribute less than one Swiss franc a day in order to be able to enjoy radio and television. That is the minimum for high-quality content.”

Valérie Piller Carrard, Fribourg, SP National Councillor

## Uncertain future for swissinfo's international offering

the news for Ticino about to be produced in Zurich? The initiative's sponsors see these warnings as exaggerated. The basic media offer for minorities is not in jeopardy, as the initiative would leave the financial redistribution intact, according to the "yes" committee. Programmes of "the same high value" will still be possible.

### "Shared media space"

Media scientist Ulla Autenrieth sees the "structural reality", however: in Switzerland, public service content is created not for a homogeneous national market but for multiple audiences differentiated by their language, culture and region: "Something that benefits from an economy of scale in other countries needs to be produced multiple times for us." With so much less money, SRG SSR would be forced to reduce its offer. "But the idea of a shared media space depends on diversity," she says.

Notwithstanding fragmented use of media, the need for shared points of reference remains, according to Autenrieth. Younger people want reliable content, as do parents for their children, research has shown. Public broadcasting could play to its key strengths here by going where the interest is: "Many young people consume SRG SSR content via play platforms, social media or podcasts." Any contemporary public service must be digital and flexible. Shared media experiences today no longer arise from one single "campfire", but in many forms, from live events like the Women's European Championships in football last year to collaborative formats. If SRG SSR takes this reasoning seriously, it could continue to act to bring people together.

This article reflects the situation at the time of our editorial deadline on 18 December. Additional archive photos relating to SRG SSR are available in our online edition: [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch)

When political decisions deprive SRG SSR of money, this also affects its international offers: swissinfo, tvsvizzera.it and partnerships with broadcasters like TV5MONDE for the French-speaking world or 3sat for German-speaking areas. swissinfo reports news about Switzerland in ten languages internationally and in 2001 became the successor of the legendary Swiss Radio International. Just like the "Swiss Review" published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), the platform targets the over 826,000 Swiss people living abroad. swissinfo furthermore sees itself as the "voice of Switzerland in the world".

However, the Swiss government is planning to scrap the annual federal contribution of just under 19 million Swiss francs to the foreign programming mandate as part of a savings package. Until now, SRG SSR and the Confederation have shared the cost of this, but the Confederation plans to bow out from 2027. This means that swissinfo in its current form is in jeopardy. Various organisations, including OSA, have submitted a petition asking parliament to safeguard federal funding arguing that swissinfo is a balanced, multilingual information source for the Swiss Abroad that strengthens their political rights.

The Council of States, the small parliamentary chamber, defied the government during the 2025 winter session and came out in favour of maintaining the federal contribution. A narrow majority felt that Switzerland could not afford to give up this window to the world. Proponents of abolishing the contribution argued that information about Switzerland is now also available from other sources. If SRG SSR wants to maintain its current foreign offer, it must "reallocate" resources, according to Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter. The National Council, the large chamber, will vote

swissinfo is currently available in ten different languages, including Spanish. Whether it remains that way depends heavily on what the politicians decide.

Photo: Roman Häfliger



on the issue on 2-20 March 2026. On 8 March, the Swiss will also be voting on the SVP's SRG SSR initiative aiming to lower significantly the media tax – the second source of financing for swissinfo. SVP National Councillor for Valais Jean-Luc Addor, member of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group, sits on the initiative committee. In his view, the foreign mandate forms part of SRG SSR's "fundamental mission". A year ago, he told "Swiss Review": "Hands off swissinfo." A spokeswoman confirmed in response to an enquiry that this was the committee's position: "The offer is part of SRG SSR's public service mandate. It should stay that way." Opponents warn, however, that the initiative would leave only an "amputated" public service behind. The OSA also fears negative consequences for news for the "Fifth Switzerland".

swissinfo director Larissa Bieler believes that the foreign mandate "has been a quintessential bridge between the Swiss Abroad and their homeland since 1935". Without this offer, Switzerland would lose visibility and understanding internationally. The announcement in November that Bieler would be leaving the SRG SSR management at the end of March 2026 made people sit up and take notice. SRG SSR justified this measure by saying that the management board was being streamlined as part of the austerity measures. (SWE)

# Peter Lyner



Working in a bakery is very fast-paced, says Peter Lyner, 60, who runs a family bakery in Winterthur. “Just leaving our loaves in the oven a little longer is not an option.” Each tray must be done at the right moment, so that you work to capacity as much as possible, he says. But bakers are used to time pressure. “This is when we come into our own.” Lyner’s eponymous bakery and confectionery is a fourth-generation business. The head baker never considered doing anything else for a living. “Bread is a staple food, and I love producing it.” Lyner also enjoys working with people and likes running a business. “You need to think on your feet – and think ahead.” Since the pandemic and in the wake of high energy costs, not to mention wheat shortages, bakers have had to contend with a race to the bottom by discount supermarket chains. At the moment, you can buy a standard loaf – or “Pfünderli” – for 99 cents at Aldi. “You barely cover your overheads at that price,” he laments, adding that it is simply a way for supermarkets to attract footfall. Lyner, meanwhile, is continually adapting the business to changes in the market. He now has three additional outlets and has also been running a café since 2020. Lyner currently has 53 employees and 13 trainees. But he and his staff still bake everything by hand. Unlike the big retail chains that churn out cut-price loaves en masse, Lyner is thinking more long-term. He focuses on quality – and quality does not come free. His speciality “Eschenbergbrot” sells for 4.90, while a Lyner croissant costs 1.60. “You need to know your prices and stick to them.” Only bakeries with clear strategies can survive, he argues.

EVELINE RUTZ

## Guy Parmelin chairs the Federal Council in 2026

Economy Minister Guy Parmelin (SVP) is chairing the Federal Council in 2026. This is after earning praise in November for negotiating a reduction in the punitive tariffs imposed by the US on Swiss imports. Parmelin was elected by the joint chambers of the Federal Assembly on 10 December, receiving 203 out of 210 valid votes – an excellent result that illustrates how much respect the right-wing conservative politician from Vaud also enjoys among the left-wing parties. This will be Parmelin’s second time chairing the Federal Council as President of the Swiss Confederation, having previously held the role back in 2021.

(MUL)

## US tariffs – 39 becomes 15

A new deal could not have come soon enough for Swiss exporters after the Trump administration’s decision to slap a 39 per cent tariff on Swiss goods. After hard negotiation, Berne managed to get the tariff cut to 15 per cent in November. Hailed as a positive breakthrough, this lower rate is still less than ideal for both the Swiss economy and US consumers. Plus, there is the elephant in the room: a group of Swiss executives met Donald Trump in the Oval Office earlier in the month, bearing gifts that included a gold bar worth over 100,000 Swiss francs. Their audience with the US president has been decried at home as unseemly, undignified and verging on bribery.

(MUL)

## Switzerland relaxes arms exports

Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland has stuck to the letter of the law regarding its strict rules on arms exports, even stopping war materiel exported to Germany years previously from being delivered to Kyiv. But parliament now wants to relax these restrictions, voting in its December 2025 session to allow Swiss arms manufacturers to deliver weapons to certain Western countries even in times of armed conflict. The decision is mainly a boost for Switzerland’s arms industry, although the direct export of weapons to Ukraine remains prohibited. Voters are likely to have the last word, after a broad alliance of left-wing parties announced a referendum on the matter.

(MUL)

## Fury over funding to protect women from gender-based violence

Violent crime against women is high in Switzerland, even compared to other countries. The federal government has spoken of an “alarming number of femicides”. However, the National Council voted in December against increasing the amount of money set aside to tackle violence against women. This sparked public fury, with over 250,000 people signing an online petition within 24 hours as a flood of angry emails virtually paralysed the IT system in the Federal Palace. The Council of States subsequently endorsed the additional funding, prompting the National Council to vote in favour at the second time of asking.

(MUL)



The Vortex student residence, home to 1,000 people, is one of the reasons for such a low average age in Chavannes.  
Photo: Keystone

## Switzerland's youngest municipality is a satellite of Lausanne

With an average age of 34.4, Chavannes-près-Renens (Vaud) is the youngest municipality in Switzerland. This hub to the west of Lausanne is attracting migrants from all corners and is seeking to preserve its quality of life.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Renens, a small town to the west of Lausanne with a major railway junction, is well-known in Switzerland. But does anybody know Chavannes-près-Renens? This municipality, which is the youngest in Switzerland, is just down the road from Renens station. The first building of note is the railway chapel, which is soon to house a bookshop and a literary gathering café, according to mayor Loubna Laabar. To the right is the Citadelle, a residential building dating from the 1960s. One of the entries to the building is in the municipality of Ecublens, which is home to the Swiss Federal Technology Institute of Lausanne (EPFL). Some of its apartments are on the other side of the municipal border. The Rue Centrale, with its small houses and allot-

ments set up by the SBB, bears witness to the town's railway past.

### Sustained growth

Chavannes is a welcoming place. Its population in 2000 was 6,000. It officially became a town in 2025, when it reached 10,000 inhabitants. Immigration here is largely European, with a mixture of blue and white-collar workers. The municipality houses over 110 nationalities; 56 percent of residents are foreign nationals and 40 percent are aged between 20 and 39. The number of schoolchildren in the area more than doubled between 1990 and 2024. The growth is due to two factors, the first of which is student accommodation. The Vortex, a circular building a stone's throw from the EPFL (in Ecublens), houses over



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In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records  
**Today: the Swiss municipality with the lowest average age**

1,000 students, out of an estimated total of 2,000. The other factor is immigration. "Between 2015 and 2035, the number of West Lausanne region inhabitants will have risen by 50 percent, with 40,000 people settling here, which is enormous for Switzerland," remarks Benoît Biéler, director of SDOL (Stratégie et développement de l'Ouest lausannois [West Lausanne Strategy and Development]). Furthermore, these new arrivals are settling at the right time to start a family. The foreign population is therefore boosting the birth rate. "They still think having kids is worth it," the mayor says with a smile.

### A town without a centre

You can walk around Chavannes all day and never find an actual town

## Chavannes-près-Renens is the Swiss municipality with the lowest average age, at 34.4.

It also holds the record for the youngest district in West Lausanne, which has an average age of 38.5, and in the canton of Vaud, where the figure is 40.6.

centre. You will discover an area criss-crossed by major roads, a metro line and a motorway. You will also see forests and a massive sports complex owned by Lausanne City Council. “The hamlet of Chavannes (to the south) was undermined by Renens train station, which was built at some distance from it,” says Biéler. The entire history of this plot of land is summed up by the way it is divided between a rail and industrial zone to the north and marshy plains to the south. “In the past, the yokels from the south used to brawl with the louts from the north,” Christian Vernez, a local teacher, quips in his book about Chavannes, cited by town councillor Eduardo Camacho-Hübner. The latter, a Franco-Bolivian engineer who moved here as a student at EPFL in 1993, has since put down roots. His former apartment looked out over an emblematic location of the municipality’s industrial past: the Perrier plant, opened by the manufacturer in 1925, which used to produce “têtes de nègre”, the chocolate and marshmallow confectionary whose racist name was banned in 1992. Living nearby led him to devote a book to the subject. Contrary to other industrial sites in West Lausanne, which were de-

stroyed to make room for activities or housing, the Perrier factory was transformed into a cultural and crafts hub.

### A welcoming place

Buildings are being constructed left, right and centre. One particularly audacious project is a 36-storey tower with a planted roof in the Les Cèdres district, in the south of the municipality, on the other side of the motorway. This district should house 1,700 inhabitants. To the south-east, a medical campus is planned, hosting 4,000 students in 500 residences. On either side two new districts are being planned that will house around 2,500 people. With its excellent transport links, closeness to Lausanne and Lake Geneva and its affordable housing, Chavannes is an appealing location.

This growth meets the urban planning objectives of the Federal Act on Spatial Planning, which seeks to tie in urban development with transport routes. “We are under pressure from the canton to achieve a high land use coefficient,” says Laabar, whose planned future in Chavannes is also



Maintaining quality of life amid a burgeoning population is one of mayor Loubna Laabar’s biggest concerns.

Photo: Stéphane Herzog

linked to the EPFL, where her husband studied. This development involves ongoing effort to create infrastructure: water collection tanks, roads, schools and public facilities. Quite the challenge for a small municipality. Chavannes is home to plenty of students, but few wealthy taxpayers and only a handful of companies and has hardly any properties for sale. Intermunicipal equalisation is also heightening the financial imbalance. The mayor accepts the challenge, but the Chavannes administration is keen to preserve the region’s quality of life.

### A motorway with a 60 km/h limit

For example, the municipality intends to set limits of 30 km/h on six of its major roads. Four already have this limit. It also recently decided to withdraw from a convention signed with the Federal Roads Office and the can-



Chavannes is a popular place to live for students (who often live in studio apartments such as this one in the “Vortex”). Yet affordable accommodation is also helping to attract new residents. Photo: Keystone



ton of Vaud for the creation of a bypass road in Chavannes. It emerged that traffic on this road was lighter than anticipated. The municipality's proposal was to abandon this bypass, divide the number of the motorway's lanes by two (since it is a dead end) and reduce speed to 60 km/h. "This junction was the last straw: Chavannes is not a major source of traffic and has the lowest number of cars in the canton of Vaud," the mayor explains. Not to mention the noise pollution affecting a large number of neighbourhoods.

What is it like to live in the area? Lisa Bonard is the owner of the Café de Chavannes, located in the heart of the former village. She dreams of festive events, new bars, a cinema and a town square. "We build all these big apartment blocks but the population live their lives elsewhere," she says. In fact, her restaurant acts like a kind of town square. Several populations rub shoulders there: students, teachers and factory workers. The Lausanne native is very active, organising artists' markets and natural wine-tasting events and serving inventive cuisine in her

In Chavannes, urban density meets the vast sweep of Lake Geneva – a blue expanse framed by the Alps. Photo: Keystone

restaurant, such as a homemade chicken cordon bleu with a light cheese mousse and pickles. This draws in clients from far and wide.

### The need for a town square

The municipality is aware of these needs. On the one hand, it does organise activities for its residents. For example, it runs a one-week summer camp – for 100 Swiss francs – attended by around a hundred children each time. On the other hand, it is also looking for urban planning



Eduardo Camacho-Hübner moved to Chavannes to study, then decided to stay. He is now a member of the town council. Photo: Stéphane Herzog



Chavannes-près-Renens, a municipality covering a relatively small space, is situated in the greater Lausanne region, an area of strong economic growth. Map: Swisstopo

solutions. Chavannes has invested ten million francs in building a bicycle and pedestrian walkway over the motorway, connecting Place de la Gare with the Les Cèdres neighbourhood. "This ties the north and the south parts of the territory together," Loubna Laabar explains. The municipality also intends to create a large public square at the foot of its future tower. To do this, it will rely on a system of shared ownership that will allow it to create public squares or play areas whose management ultimately falls to the council. "Chavannes is a unique place where life is good," concludes the socialist politician, who is originally from Morocco and came to the region in 2008.

## Switzerland and the war in Ukraine

Four years on, and the war in Ukraine continues to have an impact in Switzerland. Amid fierce debate over increased defence spending and the question of neutrality, the armed forces are enjoying renewed public support, while the flow of refugees from the war zone has stiffened Switzerland's asylum stance.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

The Federal Council lifted the last Covid restrictions in mid-February 2022 – only to face a new problem one week later. Nonetheless the government found it hard to flick the crisis switch back on immediately. In front of the media, the President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis called Russia's invasion of Ukraine a "sad day" and made vague reference to sanctions. The government appeared before the cameras one day later, now as a group of three, but once more it was still unclear where the Federal Council stood. Everyone had seen the shocking footage from Ukraine by then. Protests against the invasion drew crowds around the country.

People in Europe had got used to peace after the Cold War and, again, after the Balkan wars of the 1990s. There has been fighting in eastern Ukraine since 2014. But it was not until the full-scale invasion and the battle for Kyiv that the conflict properly hit home in Switzerland. The tangible consequences came in the form of a wave of refugees

from Ukraine. Cars with "UA" registration plates soon became a common sight around Switzerland. Meanwhile, demand for Ukrainian flags surged. People stood with Ukraine. Defence spending increased. And parliament debated whether soldiers should again be allowed to keep ammunition at home – this, too, a consequence of Europe's security landscape being reshaped by the war.

### The great neutrality debate

By adopting European Union sanctions against Russia, the Federal Council sparked a fierce debate around Swiss neutrality that rumbles on to this day. Former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher (SVP) wasted little time in announcing a popular initiative. He described economic sanctions as a "weapon of war". Playing into the hands of an aggressor is not being neutral, Cassis countered. Blocher's initiative advocates a strict interpretation of neutrality. Switzerland should no longer be able to im-



Ukrainian refugees have largely melted into everyday Swiss life – but continue to take to the streets to denounce the Russian invasion.

Archive photo: Keystone; Zurich, February 2025

pose sanctions on warring countries – United Nations sanctions constituting the sole exception, says Blocher.

So how has the war in Ukraine changed Swiss attitudes to neutrality and the armed forces? According to an annual study by ETH Zurich that evaluates public opinion on foreign, security and defence policy issues, overwhelming public support for neutrality remains intact – with some 90 percent of respondents still in favour. Yet 28 percent say that Switzerland should also make its position clear in relation to military conflicts, despite its status as a neutral country. This view is much more popular since the war began, compared to the years that preceded hostilities. Seventy per cent also think it right that Switzerland adopt sanctions against Russia.

Hubert Annen has been lecturing in military psychology at the ETH Zurich Military Academy for about 30 years. His professional activities had for a long time engendered responses in his private circle ranging from scepticism to outright disapproval, he says. He often found himself having to explain – or even justify – his work. This changed after Putin's invasion. "Most people now agree that Switzerland needs an army, not to mention experts looking after the mental health of our soldiers."

ETH Zurich has also assessed the impact of war on public sentiment. Wars and conflicts are now seen as the biggest threat. Never in the past 35 years have so many voters felt that Switzerland is underspending on defence, while 82 per cent of those surveyed believe that the army is necessary – a marked increase. And something else has changed: as in previous conflicts, more people now want Switzerland to move closer to NATO, with the ETH Zurich study indicating a narrow majority in favour of Swiss-NATO rapprochement.

The armed forces are now a little more popular than they were. Yet the public have less of an appetite to pick up the tab, says Annen. The vast majority of respondents say that they are unwilling to fund defence spending through higher taxes or any other additional commitment.

## Criticism from abroad

Foreign pressure on Switzerland and the Federal Council mainly comes from European nations that wish to re-export their Swiss-made munitions to Ukraine but are prevented from doing so by the Federal Council. The countries in question criticise the strict interpretation of neutrality in this case and have threatened to stop buying from Swiss arms manufacturers. Berne has now responded, with the Swiss parliament voting in December to relax restrictions on arms exports that were introduced shortly before the invasion of Ukraine.

Peace activist and former Green National Councillor Jo Lang calls the decision a smokescreen. Delivering munitions via third-party countries, he says, is legally unfeasible and militarily of little significance. "Switzerland should

instead think about how its commodity traders have filled Putin's war chest and how Swiss manufacturing has contributed to Russia's war machine." Given that a lot of Swiss money and key materials are fuelling Russian aggression, Switzerland has a particular obligation to help Ukraine financially, he adds. However, relative to its economic strength, Switzerland has been one of the least generous European countries until now.

Conservative politicians, for their part, called for higher defence spending in the wake of the Russian invasion. And their wishes have since been granted, with parliament increasing the defence budget and cutting foreign aid. The left-wing parties have accused the conservatives of military tub-thumping.

The defence ministry now wants to increase VAT in order to cover the billions of francs in additional spending, according to reports in the media. The armed forces are set to receive a lot more money in the long term – again as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.

## Successful integration

Beyond politics, the Swiss public has shown solidarity and support towards Ukrainian refugees, helping them with German tuition, administrative procedures, and the search for accommodation. In the first three months after the invasion, 80 per cent of Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland stayed with private hosts. Looking back, Miriam Behrens, the director of the non-governmental Swiss Refugee Council, says that Switzerland coped well with the influx, which saw the number of asylum seekers skyrocket from 20,000 to 100,000. The asylum system is stable but has reached its limit, she adds. As an example, Behrens notes that public officials have voiced criticisms that have then been picked up by politicians and dominated public debate. "This has paved the way for a lot of new restrictions, not only affecting protection status S but also the asylum system per se." Refugees seem to be an easy target, she complains.

Yet Behrens believes Switzerland can be proud that 45 per cent of people who arrived in 2022 are currently in work. Our country should take a great deal of credit for this, she says. Although the war in Ukraine has left its mark on Switzerland, Ukrainians themselves have largely melted into everyday life.

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Read our lead article on Ukraine, published in July 2022: [www.revue.link/ukr2022](http://www.revue.link/ukr2022)

## Should smartphones be banned at school?

There have been calls in Switzerland for a blanket ban on smartphones at school. Others want clearer rules. At the same time there is the question of whether children should be banned from using social media altogether.

DENISE LACHAT

Smartphones were never designed with children in mind – but they have reshaped childhood almost overnight. This is the view of Smartphone Free Childhood, an international grassroots movement of parents committed to delaying children's access to smartphones for as long as possible. Smartphone Free Childhood believes that children are being pulled into a digital world designed to keep them hooked. Various studies have outlined the huge impact they have on children's development, mental health and relationships. In particular, US academics Jonathan Haidt and Jean Marie Twenge have presented evidence that there has been a surge in teenage depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts since the adoption of smartphones, and that smartphones have severely undermined children's ability to concentrate and learn.

### Smartphone bans

Various countries have responded by banning the use of smartphones at school. Italy and France did so a while back, while the Netherlands followed suit at the beginning of 2024. Denmark is Europe's most digitally advanced country, where schools provide pupils with access to computer tablets from an early age. But it, too, moved to ban mobile phones in all schools (up to age 16/17) in autumn 2025. In these and other cases, the argument put forward for banning mobiles is that, while school-provided computers and tablets can and should offer engaging access to learning content, privately owned smartphones prevent children from concentrating and are detrimental to the classroom (and playground) dynamic. Educational jurisdiction in Switzer-



land is a matter for the cantons, not the federal government. Hence, the approach to smartphones in the classroom varies from canton to canton. Nevertheless, there is a general trend towards banning devices at school. Vaud and Ticino have already had bans in place for quite some time, while the classrooms of Nidwalden, Valais, Aargau and Neuchâtel have been smartphone-free since the beginning of this school year. There are similar moves afoot in Zug and Thurgau. Other cantons have rejected a ban, albeit noting in some cases that responsibility lies with individual municipalities. Without explicitly ban-

Mobile phones in the classroom are already a thing of the past in Valais, where school pupils place their devices into smartphone pouches at the start of the day.

Photo: Keystone

ning smartphones, many schools apply their own rules – such as requiring children to hand in their phones for safe storage at the start of the day, where the devices then remain until home time. Voices across the political spectrum have called for smartphone bans. And a clear majority of the Swiss population agrees. According to a study by the Swiss-based Sotomo research institute, 80 percent of people in Switzerland want children to be barred from using their phones at school.

Although Switzerland is still a long way from implementing a national ban, the Federal Council has been

## Smartphones are a distraction in the classroom but also an important part of children's everyday lives, containing essential things like bus tickets.

forced to address the matter after the federal parliament approved two almost identical upper-house motions from the Green Party. The government must now produce a report outlining its position and setting out how the state can protect children and teenagers from excessive and damaging consumption of social media. The parliamentary motions in question applied arguments based on the studies mentioned above.

### Promoting a healthy relationship with smartphones

But what do Switzerland's teachers, school heads and youth experts think of banning phones at school? In short, not a lot. In 2024, the umbrella organisation of teachers in Switzerland, the LCH, noted that the aforementioned studies had shown quite a mixed picture. The success of smartphone bans in schools is heavily dependent on how well such bans are implemented and communicated, it says, adding that careful consideration needs to go into balancing the need to curtail smartphone exposure with promoting smart use of phones and other digital devices. Smartphones can be a source of distraction. They can also lead to addiction, cyberbullying and other risks. But they do offer an important medium for learning, the LCH argues. Banning them outright would be counterproductive, in its view.

Pro Juventute, the Swiss foundation promoting child and youth welfare, also prefers a more reasoned approach that allows schools to retain the prerogative. But above all, it wants young people to be consulted. If they are excluded from the decision-making process, schoolchildren will more than likely try to circumvent any bans, it points out. "School-

children will take a second device into school with them or use their phones secretly." The needs of children and teenagers also have to be taken seriously, says Pro Juventute. Many of them use their phone on the way to school or before and after classes, because they need it to access their bus ticket or communicate with their parents for example. Pro Juventute believes that a blanket ban on smartphones is ill-advised and would make young people's everyday lives more difficult. Schoolchildren should instead be equipped with the digital skills and literacy that they need to keep them safe online, it states.

### Social media ban?

The association of school principals in German-speaking Switzerland shares this view. However, its chair Thomas Minder also wants politicians to do their bit. Minors should be banned from using social media in the same way that they are barred from voting and managing their own financial affairs until they reach the age of 18, he told Tamedia in a recent interview, saying that he struggled to understand why young people should be allowed on apps that were as addictive as cigarettes and alcohol. No more Instagram and TikTok? In December 2025, Australia became the first country in the world to enact a social media ban for children under the age of 16. Meta, the company that

owns Facebook and Instagram, must now take steps to deactivate accounts used by under-16s. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also supports a social media age limit, and several EU states are currently considering whether to implement bans. This could also become an issue for Switzerland's lawmakers, given that the initiators of both parliamentary motions in Berne not only want to know what the Federal Council thinks of banning smart-

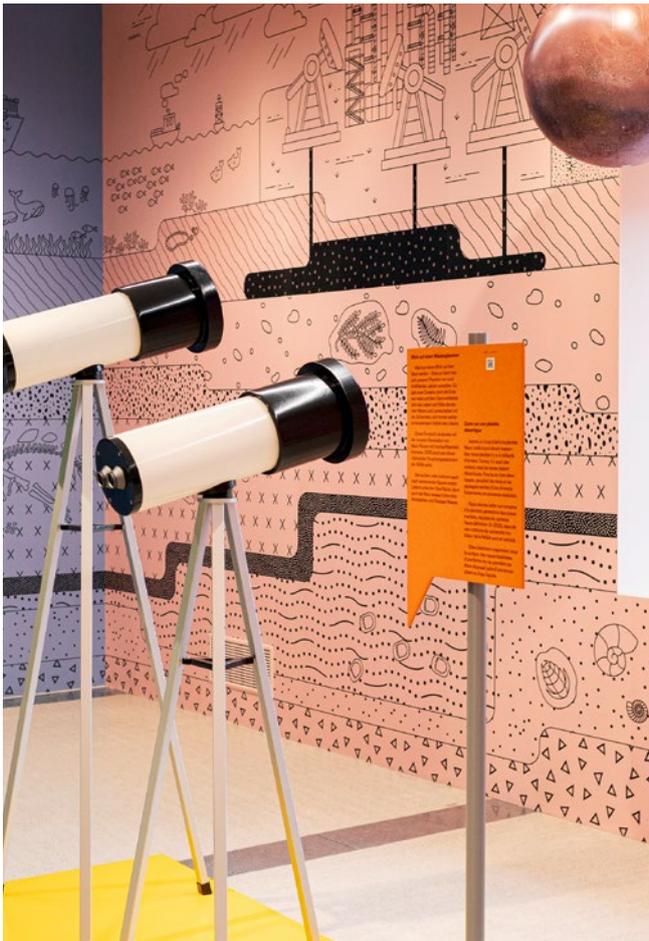
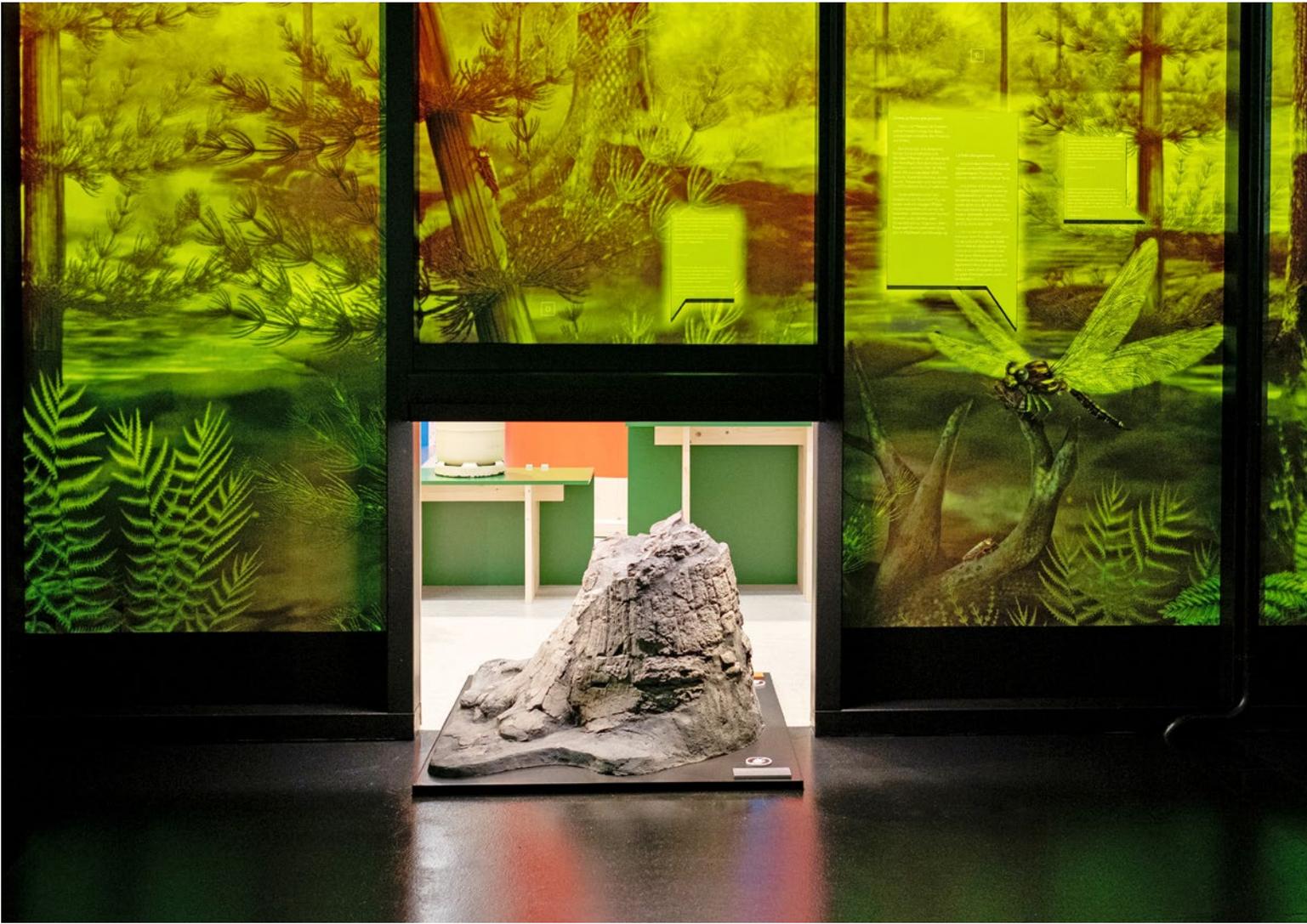


Minors should be banned from using social media, says Thomas Minder, chair of the association of school principals in German-speaking Switzerland.

Photo provided

phones in schools, but whether the government would also consider barring young people from social media. Fierce debate is likely to continue until any Federal Council report is forthcoming, not least because two school pupils in Australia launched a high court challenge to the under-16s social media ban shortly before the new law came into force down under.

Sotomo study (in German only):  
[www.revue.link/handy](http://www.revue.link/handy)  
 Smartphone Free Childhood website:  
[www.revue.link/phonefree](http://www.revue.link/phonefree)



Our planet has seen countless climate disasters. Telescopes take visitors billions of years back in time to an age when Earth was a desert.

Earth's history, condensed into a one-minute video. Humans only appear on screen seconds before the end.



## A climate exhibition without the lecturing

How are we doing in the fight against climate change? Berne's Natural History Museum will attempt to keep tabs on this over the next ten to 20 years in a fascinating exhibition that also has a message of hope.



Three hundred million years ago, Switzerland was a marshland where the fossil fuels we burn today were formed.

Photos: Danielle Liniger

JÜRIG STEINER

Slobbering, croaking and splashing all around. You find yourself in a dripping swamp as a monstrous dragonfly hurtles through the air. Beside a rotting tree stump, a white, eyeless thing – possibly a worm or a caterpillar – drags itself forward, its feelers outstretched. You automatically look down to make sure that your feet are not sinking into the quagmire.

This is a rainforest scene from a new exhibition at Berne's Natural History Museum called "Earth, folks! – The changing climate". The tropical swamp sits within a wooden cube that shows the world as it looked 300 million years ago. Long before humans.

Twenty years ago, during the excavation of the Lötschberg Base Tunnel, evidence came to light that the region now forming the mountainous canton of Berne was once a hot, swampy environment. Workers not only found granite but also came across a layer of rock containing the carbonised remnants of prehistoric plants. What has this got to do with climate change? The answer is that the remnants are a fossilised reminder of the vast quantities of carbon that intact wetlands were able to capture over centuries. By burning fossil fuels, modern civilisation has released this trapped carbon as CO<sub>2</sub> within a matter of decades and driven climate change.

### Fanning the flames

This is how the Natural History Museum uses visual language to powerful effect, underscoring that climate change and natural disasters have been constant factors throughout the Earth's history. But humans, relative newcomers on this planet, are now setting immense forces in motion. Still, unlike meteorite strikes or volcanic eruptions, we can (or could) still do quite a lot to avert catastrophe.

Dora Strahm, the exhibition curator, explains this accessible approach to the subject matter: "We want to return to the underlying facts that often fade into the background but are far less complicated than people make out." Strahm condenses Earth's underlying problem into one succinct sentence: "We are still burning fossil

fuels." The burning of coal, oil and gas still accounts for 70 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. "Climate change is not politics, but physics."

The exhibition takes visitors far back in time but always keeps the connection to the present. Strahm: "We also want the exhibition to appeal to people who have zero scientific knowledge."

### Walking with dinosaurs

Nevertheless, anyone with existing knowledge will also learn plenty. For example, there is another cube structure, this time devoted to an event dating back 66 million years: the 14-km-diameter asteroid that slammed into what is today south-east Mexico. The impact spewed sulphur into the atmosphere, turning the Earth into an inhospitable place within seconds and sending the dinosaurs into extinction. But not all life was wiped out. Some birds that lived on the ground instead of in trees survived the catastrophe – probably because they relied less on habitats (trees) that were destroyed, say scientists. These birds are the dinosaurs that are still among us today.

The new exhibition will run for an unusual length of time: it is scheduled to remain in situ for the next ten to 20 years. Some elements – including 12 short videos of people from different walks of life saying how they currently view climate change – will be continually updated during this period. The same 12 people will each record a new video every year.

### What we can or could still do

The exhibition will also keep tabs on whether humanity is making progress or otherwise in the fight against climate change. A big diagram hangs on one display wall, with numerous columns depicting greenhouse gas emissions and the extent of global warming until 2050 – the year by which most countries aim to have delivered on their net-zero goal of no longer producing more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than they can offset.

Every year, the next column will be updated. The data for the 2025 entry will soon be available. It is already safe to say that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions



in 2025 will have been higher than what is compatible with net zero by 2050. However, the exhibition – in its own words – “stands for hope rather than powerlessness, and for celebrating the flourishing life on planet Earth rather than lamenting its loss”. For instance, visitors will learn that China cut its greenhouse gas emissions in the first quarter of 2025 despite the continued operation of countless coal-fired power plants. This is because China is rapidly installing more solar capacity.

Strahm cites one key difference between present-day climate change and cataclysmic events like an asteroid impact: “We can still do something to protect the Earth as we know it.” Visitors to the exhibition can help to decide how the Natural History Museum can do its own bit. By submitting their votes, they will determine

**The exhibition underscores that climate change and natural disasters have been constant factors throughout the Earth’s history.**

over a number of stages which sustainability projects the exhibition should showcase and support in future with a small donation. “Every little helps,” says Strahm.

**No moralising**

If “Earth, folks” has a message, it is that we must act – even though museum-goers may be forgiven for thinking that it is all too little too late, based on what they see in the exhibition. Yet the tone is anything but preachy. Before you walk in through the entrance, you are taken on a one-minute whistle-stop video journey through 4.5 billion years of the planet’s history. Humans only appear on screen at the very last moment. Later, there is a display cabinet containing the model of a human brain. Just a human brain and nothing else – the crucial tool for bringing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero.



Palaeontologist Ursula Menkveld (pictured here) created “Earth, folks!” – an exhibition that refuses to moralise – in collaboration with curator Dora Strahm.

Photos: Danielle Liniger



Igniting the flames – fossil fuels continue to be the main cause of anthropogenic climate change.

The human brain – the crucial tool for fighting global warming.



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## Children or pets, poverty or wealth?

# 1.29

Many around the country are wondering how long it will be before Switzerland’s population surpasses ten million. Well, it may take a while yet, given that Switzerland’s birth rate has fallen to a record low of 1.29 children per female.

SOURCE: FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE, 2024 SURVEY

# 7,024

Fewer kids. Abandoned pets. This cannot only be down to a lack of money. The average full-time monthly gross wage in the country has increased to 7,024 francs, which should be more than enough to cover the cost of raising 1.29 children – with enough change left over to feed two or three guinea pigs.

SOURCE: FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE, 2025

# 9%

But maybe the average wage is misleading, suggesting that everyone in Switzerland is doing fine. In an extensive report, the federal government has revealed that nine per cent of the Swiss population live below the poverty line, i.e. earn less than the minimum needed to get by. This percentage has never fallen in ten years, despite the government pledging to reduce poverty.

SOURCE: FEDERAL SOCIAL INSURANCE OFFICE, 2025

# 32,000

One of the reasons is that more and more people in Switzerland prefer not to have children. Almost one fifth of those in their 20s say they don’t want kids. But many still like the idea of taking on responsibility. Hence, the market for pets is booming. On the flip side: thousands of dogs, cats, rabbits, fish, birds and other creatures are abandoned or turned over to animal shelters every year. Swiss Animal Protection, Switzerland’s leading animal welfare organisation, takes in 32,000 unwanted pets a year alone.

SOURCE: SWISS ANIMAL PROTECTION (SAP)



# 850,000,000,000

If the average wage has increased and the poverty rate remains high, then perhaps the wealthy have become even wealthier. Indeed they have. In 2025, the total wealth owned by the 300 richest Swiss climbed to a record high of 850 billion francs.

SOURCE: BILANZ BUSINESS MAGAZINE, ANNUAL SURVEY



## The left wants billions in climate investment

Should Switzerland invest more to deliver on its climate goals? Yes, according to the Climate Fund Initiative tabled by the SP and the Greens. Opponents say the proposal risks saddling future generations with debt.

EVELINE RUTZ

Recent climate forecasts are alarming enough. Now the SP and the Greens have doubled down, reiterating that temperatures in Switzerland are rising twice as fast as the global average. Without rigorous climate action, the country could face temperature increases of up to 4.9°C by the end of the century. “Heatwaves, drought and torrential rain are becoming more common and threaten both our health and our infrastructure,” says SP co-chair Mattea Meyer. To address the climate crisis – “one of the biggest challenges of our time” – effectively, the left want the state to do more. Essentially, they are proposing the creation of a fund that would be replenished with annual contributions of 0.5 to one per cent of GDP. Their popular initiative – “For a fair energy and climate policy: Investing for prosperity, jobs and the environment (Climate Fund Initiative)” – will be put to the electorate on 8 March 2026.

“We will make Switzerland carbon-neutral,” promise the authors of the initiative, which they say will free up 3.9 to 7.7 billion Swiss francs of federal money every year for insulating buildings, supporting the shift to electric



vehicles and driving the expansion of solar power among other things. The funds would help to promote biodiversity and cover the cost of retraining programmes designed to ensure that enough workers have the necessary skills for jobs in a low-carbon economy. Essentially, the initiative would play a part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 – an objec-

The glacial collapse and resultant landslide that obliterated Blatten. Events like this have upped the political ante. Climate change is an established reality in Switzerland, say supporters of the initiative. The consequences are now more dramatic than ever.

Photo: Keystone

ive approved by voters in 2023. And Switzerland would have more autonomy. “A climate fund will strengthen our energy security, because we will finally wean ourselves off foreign oil and gas,” says Lisa Mazzone, President of the Greens.

### Critics warn of financial risks

But the Federal Council and a majority in parliament see things differently. Their argument is that existing climate policies “combining targeted funding, legislation, and economic instruments” will deliver the desired reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>. Policies that are focused and establish effective incentives without the need for broad-based subsidies – or further funding. The Confederation and cantons currently spend around two billion francs a year on energy and climate measures, with 600 million francs set aside for promoting biodiversity.



The evacuated village of Brienzen/Brinzauls – crumbling mountains epitomise the increasing real-life threat posed by climate change.

Photo: Keystone

Opponents of the initiative warn against putting additional strain on the federal coffers when money is already tight. They complain that the proposed expenditure would not be subject to the mechanisms designed to curb government debt. “This would mean saddling future generations with a mountain of debt,” says National Councillor Andri Silberschmidt (FDP). It would be the opposite of sustainable. Silberschmidt warns of inefficiencies that would see subsidies often going to projects that would have been undertaken anyway. Take oil-fired heaters, for example – these now tend to be replaced by heat pumps. Rarely do state subsidies bring about fundamental changes in behaviour, he argues. National Councillor Nicolò Paganini (Centre): “The initiative replaces real impact with symbolism, fiscal discipline with autopilot, and democratic oversight with open-ended mandates.”

### The state “must step up”

Climate change is an established reality in Switzerland, say the authors of the initiative, citing the natural disasters in Gondo (Valais), Ticino, Brienz/Brinzauls (Grisons), and, most recently, Blatten (Valais). “We humans are the ones who will suffer,” proffers Katharina Prelicz-Huber of the Greens. Nature will get by somehow, but people will lose their livelihoods – and their lives.

SP National Councillor Gabriela Suter believes the state must step up and invest in protecting the interests of future generations: “Only through foresighted measures can we ensure a bright future for our descendants.” Marc Jost of the EVP agrees. Switzerland is not doing enough to become carbon-neutral and meet its international obligations, he says. “We can

no longer afford to maintain the status quo.” It is important for the state to avoid taking on additional debt, but it will be more expensive if we miss our climate goals, he says. If voters approve the initiative, the new climate fund will be available from 2029.



“We can no longer afford to maintain the status quo. It will be more expensive if we miss our climate goals.”

Marc Jost (EVP) on voting in favour of the initiative



“The initiative replaces real impact with symbolism, and democratic oversight with open-ended mandates.”

Nicolò Paganini (Centre) on voting against the initiative

## Overview of the federal votes on 8 March 2026

### Future-proofing the availability of cash

The “Cash is freedom” initiative requires the federal government to ensure that coins and banknotes are always available in sufficient quantities. Cash gives us freedom and safeguards our privacy, the authors of the initiative argue. The Federal Council and parliament reject the initiative and prefer a more moderate counterproposal (see “Swiss Review” 5/2025).

### Less money for the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation

The “CHF 200 is enough!” initiative submitted by the SVP and the Young Liberals aims to reduce the annual Swiss television and radio licence fee from 335 to 200 francs per household and exempt companies from the levy entirely. See our lead article (page 4).

### Investing more in climate action

The “Climate Fund Initiative” wants Switzerland to do more to fight climate change (see adjacent article), creating a fund that would be replenished with annual contributions of 0.5 to one per cent of GDP, and using this money to invest several billions of francs every year in a low-carbon future for transport, buildings and the economy.

### Abolishing the “marriage penalty”

Every person should be taxed individually regardless of their marital status, say the Federal Council and a majority in parliament, who want to abolish the so-called “marriage penalty” and have approved the new Federal Act on Individual Taxation for this purpose. Married couples are taxed jointly at present, which can lead to a higher tax burden compared to unmarried households when both incomes are added together. This was ruled unconstitutional by the Federal Supreme Court back in 1984. The FDP, SP, Greens and Green Liberals support the bill. But the Centre, EVP, SVP and EDU oppose it, warning of new tax inequities. The cantons fear a sharp fall in tax revenue.



## Two initiatives, two resounding defeats

The Swiss electorate gave short shrift to a proposal from the Young Socialists to introduce an inheritance tax for the super-rich. At the same time, a cross-party initiative to revamp Switzerland's conscription system foundered. The "Fifth Switzerland" also emphatically rejected both initiatives.

THEODORA PETER

Of the two proposals put to voters on 30 November, it was inheritance tax that proved particularly controversial: the Young Socialists (JUSO) wanted an additional tax on estates and endowments worth 50 million Swiss francs or more, saying that the resultant revenue should be used to fund climate action (see "Swiss Review" 4/2025). Their initiative ended in dismal fashion, with more than three quarters (78.3 per cent) of the electorate voting no. Not a single canton voted yes. The major cities are normally fertile ground for left-green ideas, but urban voters were also

A losing battle for JUSO chair Mirjam Hostetmann – her organisation's proposal to introduce an inheritance tax for the super-rich was overwhelmingly rejected.

Photo: Keystone

less than impressed. Only Berne gave approval. At 66.6 per cent, the Swiss Abroad no vote was a little less clear-cut than the national average.

The authors of the initiative blamed their resounding defeat on "scaremongering", with JUSO accusing right-wing parties and industry groups of trying to shut down debate about the climate crisis and the concentration of wealth in Switzerland. "Anyone who questions the privileges of the wealthiest is shot down," they said.

The no camp called JUSO's proposal "socialist expropriation", warning that it would damage the economy. Some wealthy businessmen even threatened to move abroad if the initiative was approved. This alarmed many voters, political experts say, adding that proponents of the initiative were unable to frame their cause in positive terms (i.e. more money for climate action). Hence, the debate focused mainly on the additional tax burden.

### Uneven playing field

Opponents of the initiative spared no expense, ploughing some 3.7 million francs into the no campaign. Switzerland's main business federation, Economiesuisse, provided most of these funds. The initiative committee, on the other hand, only had 400,000 francs to play with.

Following the exceptionally clear result, an inheritance tax at federal level looks to be off the table for now. A similar initiative was also flatly rejected ten years ago, with 71 per cent saying no. It remains to be seen whether the left will try again at some point. Despite the setback, JUSO says it wants to continue "fighting for socially equitable climate action and against growing inequality".

On that note: it is undeniable that the richest percentage of the population owns over 30 per cent of all private wealth in Switzerland. The 300 richest people in the country accounted for total assets worth 850 billion francs last year – a new record.

Unequal distribution of wealth also appears to be an issue for the wealthy. On the day after the vote, billionaire Alfred Gantner surprised everyone by suggesting that the super-rich should pay more wealth tax. Gantner, a financial investor who made his fortune from equity deals, said in newspaper interviews that such a levy would be much more effective than an inheritance tax. He himself was willing to pay more tax, because his wealth was not something he had simply earned. "It was also down to a lot of luck." Gantner criticised the continued concentration of wealth: "A handful of people in this



country own vast amounts of money, while others struggle to pay their health insurance premiums and their rent. This cannot be right.”

### Public service for all – emphatically rejected

There was also a thumping defeat for the authors of an initiative calling for a revamp of Switzerland’s conscription system that would have widened the concept of military/civilian service and obliged all Swiss citizens to do public service of benefit to the community and the environment (see “Swiss Review” 4/2025). The idea failed to gain any traction at all, with 84.1 percent of the electorate voting no. The “Fifth Switzerland” also expressed clear opposition to the proposal, with 76.5 percent against.

For Noémie Roten, who co-authored and drove the initiative, the result shows “how difficult it is for a small grassroots campaign to take on the entire political establishment”. Indeed, the idea of broadening the definition of military/civilian service came under fire from various quarters: the left bemoaned the mandatory nature of the scheme, which would have also applied to women, while the right were worried that the notion of public service for all would erode the concept of traditional military service.

Besides, the conservative parties want more, not fewer, young men to do military service. This is because,

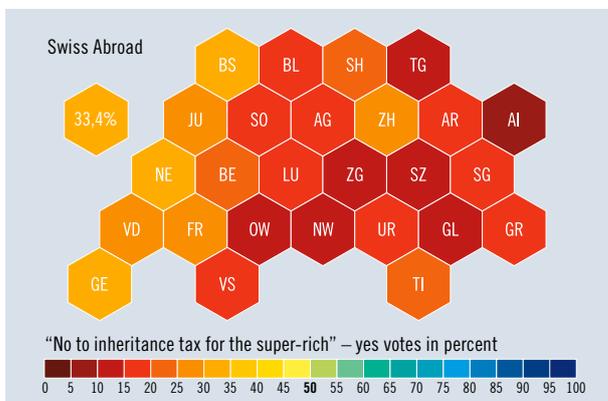


since civilian service was introduced in 1996, a growing proportion of men have opted out of the military in favour of the alternative. In autumn 2025, parliament passed a bill to make civilian service less attractive – by increasing its duration, among other things. Switzerland’s civilian service association, Civiva, and the SP and Greens consequently launched a referendum petition to contest the bill. If they get enough signatures, voters will again have the last word.

Noémie Roten (middle) and her team put on a brave face, but their campaign to revamp Switzerland’s conscription system ended in disappointment.

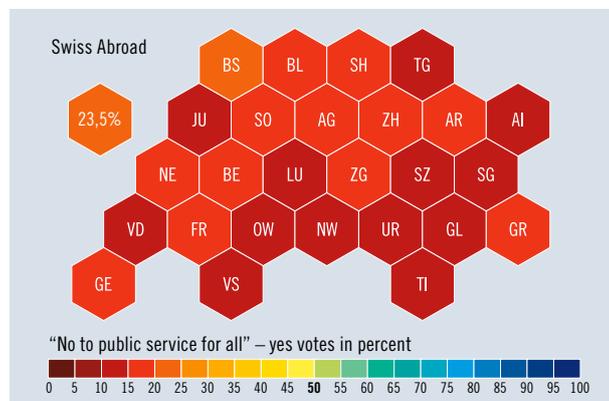
Photo: Keystone

### No to inheritance tax for the super-rich:



The “Initiative for a future”, proposing an inheritance tax for the super-rich, was met with a firm no from 78.3 percent of the electorate. The “Fifth Switzerland” also voted no, albeit less emphatically (66.6 percent). Not a single canton voted yes.

### No to public service for all:



The popular initiative calling for a revamp of Switzerland’s conscription system and the introduction of a new civilian service for all was rejected by an overwhelming 84.1 percent. The “Fifth Switzerland” also voted no, with 76.5 percent against. All cantons opposed the idea.

## “He was never concerned with literature, but with life, his life”

On the unhappy but brilliant writer Hamo Morgenthaler (1890–1928).

CHARLES LINSMAYER

In 1922, the “*Berner Tagblatt*” returned Hans (also known as Hamo) Morgenthaler’s “*Ich selbst. Gefühle*” (Myself. Feelings) to Orell Füssli with the following note: “We cannot review the book. This is regrettable, but we really are unaccustomed to reading such worthless ramblings.” As with every work since his 1916 debut “*Ihr Berge*” (You Mountains), Morgenthaler – who was born on 4 June 1890 in Burgdorf, studied botany, zoology and geology at ETH Zurich, and had been incurably ill with tuberculosis after living in Siam from 1917 to 1920 – had once again used atmospheric sketches as a technique to marry scientific rigour with personal experience.

The passionate alpinist, for whom mountaineering was an addictive, hypnotic pastime, had declared his love of the mountains in “*Ihr Berge*”, whereas his other works focused on his time in Asia. “*Matahari. Stimmungsbilder aus den malaysisch-siamesischen Tropen*” (Matahari – sketches from the Malay-Siamese tropics) in 1921 reflected the experiences of a European weary of civilisation. It sought to overcome colonial prejudices and better understand the mentality of the native population.

Its more pessimistic sequel “*Gadscha Puti. Ein Minenabenteuer*” (Gajah Putih. A mining adventure) was rejected by Orell Füssli in 1926 and was not published until after Morgenthaler’s death. The same fate befell the autobiographical novel “*In der Stadt. Die Beichte des Karl von Allmen*” (In the city. The confession of Karl von Allmen), which plumbed the depths of Morgenthaler’s “literary misery” and only appeared posthumously decades later. “*Ich selbst. Gefühle*”, however, contained no “worthless ramblings”, but rather, as

“What good is it to me to have proved that I can produce something beautiful, write a lovely little sentence here and there? What use is it if I must suffer for it so much, mentally and physically, in our pristine Europe, must literally starve in more ways than one, and receive the devil’s thanks precisely when I try to give my best?”

Excerpt from “*Woly, Sommer im Süden*”, Zurich, 1924

Kurt Marti noted in 1981, the cries of a human being who was “never concerned with literature” but always “with life, his life”. It is astonishing that, at the same time, Morgenthaler produced a work that was both sensual and erotic but also philosophical and critical of its era, even humorous.

“*Woly*” – a chaste, passionate love story

Set in Ascona, “*Woly. Sommer im Süden*” (Woly. Summer in the south) is a 1924 novel about the impossible

love of the brooding, sensitive writer Hamo for the self-confident, emancipated Danish woman Woly. “Never before have I encountered the love story of a man so chaste, so passionate,” Emmy Ball-Hennings wrote to the publisher after reading the book. Ultimately, “*Woly*” is about the impossibility of a love yearned for by the male protagonist, and it seems miraculous that Morgenthaler was indeed gifted a fulfilling relationship after all. The author had already mentioned the physician Marguerite Schmid back in 1916 as his climbing companion for an ascent of the Weisshorn in “*Ihr Berge*”.

But now in 1926, as madness and depression increasingly terrorised him, Schmid took him under her wing. Yet the incurably ill Morgenthaler could no longer lead Schmid, who cared for him like a mother, up to the Weisshorn – besides, in 1920, he had cast his mountaineering equipment into a crevasse in anger at mass tourism! But with her, he finally found himself – and he died in her arms on 16 March 1928 at the age of 38 in Berne. His last poem was a prayer. It reads as follows: “Dear God, / strike me down. / Take me from this desolate life. / Then I’ll give you a little kiss.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Hamo, der letzte fromme Europäer. Ein Hans-Morgenthaler-Lesebuch” (Hamo, the last pious European) (edited by Roger Perret; Lenos Verlag, Basel) is currently the only Morgenthaler book available in print.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH



Hamo Morgenthaler  
(1890–1928)

## The winner is... Dorothee Elmiger

Swiss author Dorothee Elmiger has achieved a rare triple win, receiving the German, Bavarian and Swiss book awards for her novel “Die Holländerinnen” (The Dutch Women).

BEAT MAZENAUER

All three award juries were unanimous in praising the deft manner in which Dorothee Elmiger pulls her readers in and never lets go, taking them to a place where light and hope seem to vanish. In short, her novel has attracted universal acclaim.

Dorothee Elmiger (1985) grew up in the canton of Zurich and has been living in New York since 2022.

Photo: Deutscher Buchpreis; provided



Elmiger has indeed pulled off quite a feat. Her writing style is challenging, but what she writes is absorbing. In the strict mode of indirect speech, Elmiger narrates the account of an author who, in a lecture, talks about a theatre experiment: “A theatre director phoned her in January three years ago,” she said, asking her whether she would like to take part in a project. He wanted to investigate and re-enact the disappearance of two Dutch women in the jungle.

With formal concision and subtlety, Elmiger draws her readers into a labyrinthine thicket of stories and references, where the actual events dissolve into the layered act of retelling. The speaker recounts how they would tell each other frightening tales in the jungle camp to ward off the horror stirred by the surrounding darkness and sounds. In her talk, the real jungle becomes a projection of existential fear.

The speaker overlays lived experience with cultural references to theory, literature and film. She says that the theatre director often expressed his fondness for Werner Herzog, who always heroically defied every danger during his rainforest productions.

Elmiger knows that all storytelling is inherently uncertain and blurred, and that it always retains an element of indirectness, challenging the notion of what has truly taken place and what is true and genuine. Though it may sound abstract, the art of this novel is that it brings such considerations to life and seduces the reader onto all manner of digressive paths. Indirect speech, however challenging, is handled by Elmiger with such agility and subtlety that it haunts the reader beyond the last page.

Winning three literary awards in quick succession is remarkable. The Bavarian Book Award is a particular surprise, since it is also open to Swiss authors despite its regional nature. This would not happen in Switzerland. Inevitably, one wonders whether books from French-speaking Switzerland or Ticino could achieve something similar.

Prestigious French literary prizes, like the Prix Goncourt, share the same spirit of openness. But only one Swiss author has ever won the Prix Goncourt: Jacques Chessex in 1973 for “L’Ogre”. To date, the returns have also been meagre at the Prix Renaudot (Georges Borgeaud, 1974) and the Prix Femina (Robert Pinget, 1965). Matthias Zschokke won the Prix Femina Étranger for his novel “Maurice à la poule” in 2009, while the 2022 prix du roman Fnac went to Valais author Sarah Jollien-Fardel for “Sa préférée”.

Literary accolades for Ticino authors in Italy have been few and far between. There has never been a Swiss nomination for the renowned Premio Strega. Fleur Jaeggy, who lives in Milan, won the Premio Viareggio in 2002 for her book “Proleterka”. She was also awarded the Premio Bagutta in 1990, a distinction previously conferred on Giorgio Orelli in 2002. However, it will never be possible for a French- or Italian-language author from Switzerland to emulate Elmiger’s triple win for the simple reason that the Swiss book award is only open to German-language works.



DOROTHEE ELMIGER  
“Die Holländerinnen”.  
Novel. Hanser Verlag,  
Munich 2025, 160 pages.  
CHF 30

[www.dorotheeelmiger.com](http://www.dorotheeelmiger.com)

## A Swiss farmer living in France becomes National Councillor

Genevan by adoption Rudi Berli is to replace Green National Councillor Nicolas Walder in Berne. His election as a Swiss Abroad is very unusual. He has promised to represent his region, the Franco-Vaud-Geneva region of Greater Geneva.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Are there a lot of train connections between Geneva and the French station of Chancy-Pougny? “18 trains a day,” Rudi Berli answers straightaway, seated at his table at home, a beautiful house in the French countryside, 15 minutes’ walk from the Rhône and thus from the Swiss border. “We would never have been able to buy a house in Switzerland,” explains the Zurich native, born in the rural town of Hausen am Albis (Zurich). When he was a child, taking the bus to the big city of Zurich took an hour. Nowadays, it takes half that time. “Everything there is connected and hyper-efficient,” remarks this man of the land who, like other Geneva politicians, feels that Geneva deserves greater consideration, particularly with regard to the development of public transport.

From now on, Rudi Berli will pass on these messages directly to Berne, since he will be replacing his party colleague Nicolas Walder in the National Council. A market gardener, who is employed by the Les Jardins de Cocagne cooperative, Berli sells his organic products in Geneva. Over the summer, he prepared himself for the idea of playing a role in federal politics, after the original deputy, Isabelle Pasquier-Eichenberger, announced she was dropping out. The election of Nicolas Walder to the Geneva Cantonal Council on 19 October then paved his way to the Federal Parliament.

What will Berli do in Berne? The father and family man intends to defend his region and its million inhabitants (residing in Geneva and the surrounding areas in Vaud and France). The village in which he lives, Pougny, reflects the region as a whole. On 14 July, the Swiss cross the Rhône to take part in French national day



festivities. On 1 August, the French party in Chancy. “People will go dancing wherever there are dances,” the new National Councillor says. The rural section of the region in France bears host to numerous cross-border workers. These villages share family connections too.

Rudi Berli is not anti-European, but he champions two major principles: the defence of the work of farm-

Rudi Berli, as he has expressed his political views up until now: through a megaphone at farmers’ protest meetings.

Photo: Keystone

ers and craftspeople in the region – which he calls relocalisation – and the protection of the products of agriculture through taxes. “It is possible to achieve this, even within the European Union,” he says. Berli, who came to Geneva in 1985 to train at the Lullier School, where he gained several qualifications (fruit tree cultivation, market gardening and landscape gardening, amongst others),

describes the world of agriculture as being under pressure. “In this sector you are either badly or very badly paid,” he says, citing the example of dairy farmers earning ten Swiss francs an hour. Swiss farms are dropping like flies, with farmers being wiped out by the workload, debts and the mental strain, the former Uniterre trade unionist says.

The new parliamentarian knows the paradox well: society wants to protect the environment without paying for it. Les Jardins de Cocagne, which prepares a weekly produce basket for its members, has also fallen on hard times. For a few years now, the cooperative has found it hard to reach the minimum 420 subscribers required for the basket service.

For this Zurich native who has fallen in love with French-speaking Switzerland – “the food is better here than in the German-speaking part of the country and, in Geneva, people take their time more” – the solution lies in smart polyculture and livestock cultivation. “The aim is to provide good-quality food locally. This model makes sense with regard to climate hazards, because of its resilience. It means creating an agricultural microcosm that is not being pumped full of fossil and chemical in-

On 1 December 2025, Rudi Berli, currently the only Swiss Abroad in the National Council, took his oath of office in Berne. Photo: Keystone



puts,” the farmer argues. Rudi Berli does not blame the farmers. “No one loves chemicals. Everyone is just trying to make enough profit.”

What does he think of the development of Geneva, overseen for 12 years by his fellow Green representative Antonio Hodgers, the former State Councillor who is accused of having concreted over the canton and defended the construction of 175-metre towers in the emerging neighbourhood of Praille-Acacias-Vernets? “What’s wrong with living in a tower? You get a good view,” the country dweller replies.

Should Geneva, which lets France shoulder some of its housing burden, start building on its arable land? “Absolutely no way.” The farmer ferociously defends this dense central region, rich with verdant countryside. He describes the French territory as pock-marked by housing and retail areas. So where should we build? Rudi Berli evokes the free zone principle, which lets Swiss farmers grow their crops on neighbouring French land but under the Swiss system. He suggests we adopt the same approach for housing, judging that public pension funds could build in the border area. In his view, Switzerland could also invest in infrastructures in France, particularly medical ones, to balance out the region. Geneva, on the other hand, could densify its villa zone and ensure that the richer towns, such as Coligny, which he cites as an example, also build social housing.

The situation has led to a regional crisis, with the Geneva Cantonal Council ruling that the children of people living in France would no longer be able to attend Swiss schools from 2026 onwards. This measure affects 2,500 children. It has ignited tensions between the two countries.

Rudi Berli is going to find out what it is like, since one of his own children is affected, and he is not about to give up. “This is a discriminatory, arbitrary decision,” he argues. The National Councillor is furthermore involved with one of the collective appeals from Swiss cross-border workers against the canton of Geneva.

In Berne, Berli will be earning a salary of around 6,000 francs a month, plus expenses, and will have the resources to hire a parliamentary assistant. “You need one in order to be effective,” he says. He would like to “bring the French-speaking Swiss together”, but parliamentary old hands in Geneva have warned him that the atmosphere in the corridors of the Parliament can be toxic. Which language will he speak to win over his peers? “I represent Geneva, so I will be speaking French.” Except perhaps in key moments, following the advice of former Green National Councillor Ueli Leuenberger. Does he see himself as a Swiss Abroad? “I am a Swiss citizen who lives in Europe,” the Genevan counters.

### Swiss Abroad politicians in Berne are the exception

Switzerland has seen three of them: National Councillors Stéphanie Baumann (SP, BE/France, 2001–2003), Ruedi Baumann (Green, BE/France, 2001–2003) and Tim Guldimmann (SP, ZH/Germany, 2015–2018).

Rudi Berli stood in the 2023 federal elections but did not win, despite receiving almost 12,000 votes. He was the second deputy. He is the fourth Swiss Abroad to be elected to serve in the Swiss Parliament.

(SH)

## Measuring time: Swiss expertise applied to sport

Switzerland is known internationally for its “mastery of time”. Ever since the mid-16th century, the Swiss watchmaking industry has been crafting measuring devices that attribute a specific value to every moment. This expertise, patiently passed down and continually improved, is one of the benchmarks of reliability and precision that characterise our nation.

### APOLLINE SIX

Contrôle suisse des chronomètres (COSC), a charitable organisation founded in 1973, plays a central role in guaranteeing Swiss timekeeping accuracy. This institution, which is independent and recognised at an international level, puts mechanical watches through a battery of tests. Only timekeeping devices with a precision that meets ISO 3159 standards are certified as chronometers.

This search for precision is particularly evident in sports, where events are constantly becoming more professional and more competitive. Time measurement is a crucial part of this: it embodies the very essence of performance, that invisible line that separates effort from a record.

Swiss watchmaking, in the same way as Swiss diplomacy, has played a major role in this field for decades, especially when it comes to timekeeping at the Olympic Games, a sector where technology is constantly evolving.

### The St. Moritz Winter Olympics

The St. Moritz Winter Olympics in 1928 was the pinnacle of years of effort designed to promote alpine tourism and bolster Switzerland’s image on the international stage. The event represented a major diplomatic opportunity for the Swiss government: it was the perfect venue for gathering together a broad diversity of participants and to portray Switzerland as an appealing and reliable partner. The second Olympic Games held in Switzerland, in 1948, let the country showcase its watchmaking expertise, marking the first time an entirely automatic Omega chronograph was used to record the exact time at which the finish line was crossed. These Games also enhanced Switzerland’s profile internationally, confirming its role as a neutral host in a world marked by postwar fallout.

During the 1960s, against a backdrop of intensifying rivalry, the dominant position of Swiss companies in timekeeping for major sporting competitions was shaken by the appointment of Japanese firm Seiko as the official timekeeper for the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.

### Competition in sports timekeeping

Renowned Swiss watchmaking firms took to diplomatic channels to defend their expertise in sports timekeeping. Swiss representations abroad were called upon to promote Switzerland’s know-how to the host countries of major international competitions, such as the Mexico Olympics in 1968.

Alongside competition from Japan, which was gaining ground, including by providing the timekeeping for the Sapporo Winter

Olympics in 1972, a second challenge was emerging: a growing rivalry between Swiss companies themselves. Omega and Longines fought for the strategic territory of sports timekeeping, which caused serious concern for the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry (FH).

The brands responsible for timekeeping, which were initially paid for their services, were quick to understand the advertising value of the fact that major competitions began to be broadcast in colour in the 1970s. Since the Olympic Games were the event that got the largest media coverage in the world, these brands sometimes even offered their services free of charge.

Following years of tension and in full awareness of what was at stake, the major Swiss watchmakers finally decided to join forces and founded Swiss Timing in 1972,



With his chronometer around his neck, a man carefully watches the speed skaters go by at the Innsbruck Olympics in 1964. Photo: Norwegian National Archives

which would join the Swatch Group in 1983. This strategic alliance between Omega and Longines, driven by a desire to consolidate Switzerland's position, was made possible thanks to the efforts of sporting institutions, the watchmaking industry and the diplomatic world.



Mountains, snow and speed define downhill racing. But the clock decides who wins. Photo: Keystone

With a few exceptions, Swiss timekeeping dominated the Olympic Games for the first half of the 20th century and made a name for itself as a global standard for precision. This tradition of excellence continues today: Omega is currently the official timekeeper of the Olympic Games and has signed a partnership with the IOC that is set to run until 2032. Behind this symbolic image, Swiss Timing organises the measuring technology. These organisations will be responsible for keeping time “down to a millionth of a second” at the next Winter Olympics.

## 2026 Olympics and Paralympics in Italy

The Winter Olympics and Paralympics will take place largely in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo on 6–22 February and 5–15 March 2026. This will be the 90th anniversary of



The House of Switzerland in Cortina d'Ampezzo, the Swiss meeting point for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Computer-generated image: Presence Switzerland

Omega providing timekeeping for the Winter Olympics. The Swiss delegation is expected to be significant: according to estimates, almost 190 athletes from the Swiss Olympic Team will be representing Switzerland in Italy.

As a nod to Switzerland's longstanding commitment to supporting major sporting events, the House of Switzerland Italia 2026 will proudly continue this tradition. Opening its doors in Cortina d'Ampezzo and Milan and designed by Presence Switzerland, it will showcase Swiss expertise and simultaneously act as a meeting place for athletes, partners, the media and spectators.

Flora Alpina, the theme chosen for the House of Switzerland Italia 2026, will highlight the role played by flowers in sport, medicine and culture. The hardness of mountain plants calls to mind the determination of the athletes, and their use as folk remedies makes them a powerful symbol of strength. The graphic design will be based on the codes of Swiss craftsmanship, particularly traditional Grisons cross-stitch.

The platform's set design will offer an immersive experience where creation, emotion and beauty meet the environment. According to Daniel Zamarbide, the architect and set designer for the House of Switzerland Italia in Milan, the flowers represent more than just beauty: they symbolise generosity and joy and are a frequent feature at celebrations. At the Olympic and Paralympic Games, moreover, they are traditionally associated with the medals awarded to the athletes. A pop-up alpine garden will be set up in the Centro Svizzero in Milan. It will be open to the public and will celebrate Swiss and international athletes.

At a time when sport is breaking new limits and where each performance tells a story, Swiss excellence and precision continue to offer the world an expertise that transforms emotions into unforgettable experiences.

[www.houseofswitzerland.it/en](http://www.houseofswitzerland.it/en)



## Federal votes

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

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

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

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



## Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative “To increase purchasing power (Purchasing Power Initiative)” (2 June 2027)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in French, German and Italian at

<https://www.bk.admin.ch/> > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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## Please note

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

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# Youth Service camps: laughter, adventure – and pinpoint logistics

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad organises between three and five camps every year. But what exactly does organising these camps involve? From the outside, they look like a relaxing holiday. From the inside, they are quite the logistical challenge.



Participants take a well-earned rest after walking to the summit of Chasseron (canton of Jura).  
Photo: Lorenzo Commergnat

## Finding a location

Before the campfires can crackle and the stars can come out at night, you have to find THE chalet: accessible, large enough, within budget and with enough equipment to cook fondue for 50 people. A particularly Swiss challenge.

## Training the staff

Monitors? They're heroes in t-shirts. Trained, enthusiastic and attentive, they know how to supervise young people from all around the world with energy and good humour. Finding the right people is crucial.

## Managing registrations

Precision is the name of the game from the moment registration opens until the applications and information from the approximately 140 participants are received and processed. Everything must be clear, complete and secure.

## Devising the programme

Walks, games, new experiences and culture:

a camp is a cornucopia of activities designed to be fun and safe, a subtle balance between adventure and learning. Our monitors devise their own programmes. The programmes are then approved by a sports and youth coach, who makes sure they are safe and feasible.

## Reconnaissance

The location, the paths, the train journeys, the risks and the weather (which sometimes goes wrong at the last moment) all need to be checked. This is the lion's share of our work. Everything we prepare ahead of time is aimed at one thing: making life at the camp as smooth and trouble-free as possible for the camp team.

## Preparing the equipment

Tents, first aid kits, games, camp notebooks and a positive attitude. Before heading off, everything is loaded into the camp bus. Before the return, everything is checked, sorted and tidied away. This amount of logistics represents several days' work.

## Finally: the camp

When the young people arrive, the magic happens, and a fortnight of wild adventures begins. When the camp is over, the staff often say: "OK, that was intense... let's do it again next year!" What makes them want to return? Comments like this one from Emma, this summer: "This camp was a fantastic experience! I loved travelling through the different regions of Switzerland and learning all about the features that make them stand apart from each other, and that make them so charming! We had so many adventures over the fortnight. What left the biggest impression on me during this camp is without a doubt the beauty of the location, and especially the friendships we made. Thank you for this brilliant camp!"

CLÉMENT DE VAULCHIER,  
OSA PROJECT MANAGER YOUTH CAMPS



Food fit for Swiss National Day – getting ready for fondue.  
Photo: Thomas Slatter



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## “A look beyond my own horizons”

The 18-year-old Swiss Abroad Belinda Schulz grew up in southern Germany and is currently preparing for the entrance exam to study piano. Last summer, she spent several weeks in Switzerland helping on a farm. What were her experiences there?



Belinda Schulz. Photo provided

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN

### AgriViva arranges internships for young people on farms in all language regions of Switzerland. How did you find out about AgriViva?

I read in the “Swiss Review” about a young woman who had worked on a farm. I found her experience interesting and wanted to try it myself. About two and a half months before my assignment, I searched for a farm on the AgriViva website and registered. Finally, at the end of August/beginning of September,

### AgriViva – internships on farms

AgriViva arranges short internships for young people on farms in all language regions of Switzerland. Requirements:

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We look forward to seeing you.  
www.agriviva.ch

AgriViva is a partner organisation of educationsuisse.

I spent two weeks on a farm on the Rotschalp near Brienz in the Bernese Oberland.

#### How did your typical day begin?

Most days, the cockerel woke me up and I got up at around half past six. First, I let the chickens out and gave them water. Then I usually prepared breakfast and took the cheese from the previous day out of the salt bath. After breakfast together, I stirred the milk, or rather the cheese-to-be, in the large cauldron. Then I went to the cheese cellar to clean the cheese. Later, it was time to feed the pigs.

#### And what did the afternoon have to offer?

Farmer Hänsel and his adult daughter Martina mostly worked on the valley farm, for example, harvesting hay. In the afternoon, farmer Monica drove to the nearby Planalp stop on the Brienzer Rothornbahn railway to sell the mature cheese there. So, I was often alone in the afternoon and did things like collecting the freshly laid eggs from the chickens, washing the dishes, and turning the fresh cheese. I also always had some free time. Everything on the alp was heated with wood, so I sometimes stacked firewood.

#### And how was the evening?

Shortly after five o'clock, Monica, Martina and Hänsel returned to the alp. I usually helped with milking or in the cheese cellar, and then with preparing dinner. I also put the freshly made cheese in the nightly salt bath. After dinner together, there was almost always something else to do, or we did crossword puzzles and played other games. After feeding the chickens and locking them safely in their coop, everyone went to bed early.

#### AgriViva aims to build bridges between urban and rural areas and different cultures. How did you enjoy your time on the farm in Switzerland?

Even though some things were very unfamil-

iar to me and not everything worked out the first time, I really enjoyed it. I found it very interesting to look beyond my own horizons and learn new things. It is fascinating to see how fresh cheese is made every day by a lot of manual labour on the alp.

#### What did you like most?

I really liked that there was always something to do. We went to the mountains twice, once to drive the calves to another pasture and once just to enjoy the view. I thought that was really nice. I also attended the descent of cattle. And I met another Belinda: a cow with the same name as me. On the subject of names, Adelheid is also worth mentioning: not all the chickens had names, but when they die, which happened during my time there – quite unexpectedly for me – they are all called Adelheid.

#### Would you recommend to your friends a stay with a farming family?

Yes, of course! I would also like to come back to Switzerland to help out on a farm again.

Educationsuisse offers counselling and support to all young Swiss Abroad on all matters related to education in Switzerland.



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## Movetia – Language assistance in Switzerland

Movetia arranges language assistant placements at baccalaureate schools, upper secondary specialised schools, and vocational schools in the German and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. Language assistants gain experience as teaching assistants, discover Swiss culture, and improve their language skills.

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Apply now: The deadline is 31 March each year (or as otherwise agreed). All information is available at [www.revue.link/movetia](http://www.revue.link/movetia)

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Claire Spielmann is one of the young Swiss Abroad who have enjoyed working as a language assistant. Photo provided

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## The place where people learn to teach (again)

Many school teachers see their job more as a vocation than a profession. Nevertheless, teachers need qualifications. If you are returning to Switzerland from abroad and want to change careers or try your hand at the front of the classroom again, PHBern gives you the teaching skills you require.



The “Unterrichten mit ausländischem Lehrdiplom” (Teaching with a foreign teaching diploma) pathway is the only course of its kind in Switzerland to date, producing 26 graduates in autumn 2025. Photo provided

MARCEL BIERI, PHBERN

Faced with a shortage of qualified teachers, Swiss schools are starting to recruit people without formal qualifications. The University of Teacher Education, PHBern, provides novices with numerous means to equip themselves for the challenge. Its Institut für Weiterbildung und Dienstleistungen (IWD) department offers three interlinked training blocks to help students familiarise themselves with the key aspects of pedagogical and didactic practice, and gain a good practical grounding. Training block 1 is also available to complete as part of a summer camp.

Those who are already qualified but hold a foreign teaching diploma can also benefit from the wide-ranging advice, courses and further training offered at PHBern, which empower participants in their daily work, create opportunities for networking and enhance professionalism. The “Unterrichten mit ausländischem Lehrdiplom” (Teaching with a foreign teaching diploma) pathway –

the only course of its kind in Switzerland to date – deserves special mention. This programme provides an essential understanding of the Swiss education and school system, and focuses on the specialist and cross-disciplinary skills relevant for teaching in Switzerland.

If you already have a Swiss teaching qualification and want to return to the classroom after taking time out, you are advised to take the modular “Wiedereinstieg” refresher course, which prepares you for school life again, helps you to plan your lessons and informs you of important changes.

Further information (in German):  
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[www.revue.link/wiedereinstieg](http://www.revue.link/wiedereinstieg)  
[www.revue.link/phbern](http://www.revue.link/phbern)

## OSA Director Daniel Hunziker – “working tirelessly on behalf of our global expatriate community”

Dear Swiss Abroad,

My tenure as director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) began on 1 January. I have previously worked at various places in Switzerland and abroad. After growing up in Aarau, I spent a total of five years in the United States studying economics and doing an MBA. It was in the US where I met my wife. My time across the pond gave me first-hand experience of life as a Swiss expat.

After returning to Switzerland, I worked for several years in the banking/financial and consultancy sectors. I ventured abroad again in 2007 – to my wife’s home territory of New Caledonia, where I worked as an adviser and managing director mainly in the financial, organisational and administrative fields, while also representing Switzerland as honorary consul for many years. This dip-



lomatic role gave me a direct insight into the issues and challenges facing the “Fifth Switzerland”.

I have headed several companies and executed complex projects in different sectors during my professional life, gaining broad leadership experience as well as practical expertise in developing and managing organisations.

Thanks to my numerous years abroad, I am more than familiar with the expectations, challenges and realities of being a Swiss Abroad. I am now looking forward to putting this knowledge to good use at the OSA and working tirelessly on behalf of our global expatriate community.

Kind regards,  
Daniel Hunziker

## New challenges ahead for the CSA

A recent survey saw members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) voice the issues that are particularly important to them at present. The “Fifth Switzerland” clearly wants to be listened to – and have its say.

Practical issues are firmly at the top of the agenda for the CSA members who were re-elected or newly elected in August 2025. Access to bank accounts is an ongoing concern for many Swiss expats, as are insurance cover and social security benefits. Swiss Abroad, particularly those outside Europe, often face obstacles when it comes to things like opening bank accounts.

The Swiss Abroad also want participation in Switzerland’s democratic processes to be made easier for them. E-voting finally needs to be rolled out across the board, and digital IDs (e-ID) should now be introduced quickly after the yes vote in September 2025, say many delegates. And all, not half of, the cantons should grant Swiss Abroad the right to vote at cantonal level.

CSA members  
**want participation in  
Switzerland’s democratic  
processes to be made  
easier for them.**

Meanwhile, new priorities have come to the fore. They include expanding digital communication channels, putting a more online-based “Swiss Review” front and centre of the expatriate message, and providing young Swiss Abroad with greater support. Several delegates noted the growing proportion of second- and third-generation Swiss Abroad – young people, of whom many no

longer have any direct ties to Switzerland. This is why language courses, exchange trips, and online offers are all the more important in strengthening the expatriate connection, they said.

Delegates also want greater involvement in the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and its processes, suggesting thematic working groups and regular consultations as ways to achieve this.

Based on the survey results, the OSA Executive Board will propose a set of goals for the current legislative term. CSA members will discuss these objectives in March 2026, making changes where necessary before approving them. In doing so, they will soon get their wish of being at the heart of OSA decision-making. (LW)

1/800 000



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

... **Úrsula Schläppi, 60, an educator specialising in early childhood and disability, who lives in Colombia, maintaining active links with both cultures and working in Cartagena de Indias.**

#### What does “homeland” mean to you?

It’s where my family and friends are, where I was born and raised. Switzerland with its landscapes, rich tones, history, seasons, nature and mountains, is very important to me. In Colombia, it’s also my friends, nature, the sea, the mountains, the country’s impressive biodiversity and the different landscapes, some unique in the world.

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

I’m convinced of this and feel very privileged. Having several homelands doesn’t mean that they need to be the same or in competition with each other. Loving one homeland doesn’t mean you stop loving another.

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

It’s always noticeable, my appearance, my accent, among other things. I’ll never stop being Swiss, in the perception of people in my other homeland or in my own perception.

#### What is it like for you being connected to more than one country?

I’m grateful to have two homelands. Sometimes people ask me if I still know where I feel “at home”. My answer is always the same: I have two places where I feel at home. It’s an enriching circumstance; it “broadens one’s horizons”. Getting to know a country with a different culture forces you to reflect, learn and even question your own ideas and positions on many issues and things. It means relearning a language, culture and history that are different from those of one’s native country.

#### What references to Switzerland do you have in your home?

Quartz from the Grimsel Pass region (BE/VS), pictures of the Wellhorn, Wetterhorn and Engelhörner (BE), books by Swiss authors and Swiss chocolate in the fridge.

#### Switzerland and you: What is your current relationship status?

Very close. I travel to Switzerland once or twice a year. It’s important for me to maintain my contacts with family and friends.

#### Do you have personal contact with other Swiss Abroad?

Yes, and I have more contacts on the other side of the “Röschgraben” than I did before, when I lived in Switzerland.

#### Is regularly meeting other Swiss people important to you?

Yes, because we share the same cultural background. It’s not even about the language, because with many of them I speak the language of my country of residence.

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## SWITZERLAND FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME

We need your help for it to remain that way.

Swiss Review

Swiss Community

Every “Swiss Review” is your own little home from home, regardless of where you live in the world – giving you that priceless sense of proximity to Switzerland.

But “Swiss Review” also costs money. And our magazine faces a challenging future, given that further cuts in federal funding are likely. Parliament is currently debating measures to this effect. Our magazine and other OSA offers are set to bear the brunt.

But this is where Switzerland’s strength comes into play – the grassroots strength of its citizens. Can we count on your support? It would mean a lot to us.

FILIPPO LOMBARDI, OSA PRESIDENT  
DANIEL HUNZIKER, OSA DIRECTOR

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