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Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



Better to be safe than sorry: Switzerland increases its emergency stockpiles

**Jangling cow bells and exploding fireworks:
Noise pollution or welcome sounds?**

**Keeping an old Swiss tradition alive:
The shingle-makers who make an art form out of roofing**



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Cover photo: Canned ravioli, ideal for emergency stockpiling. Photo: iStock

The return of emergency stockpiling



Works of literature can come from anywhere. Even government offices. One salient example being the official slogan from the early 1970s: “Kluger Rat – Notvorrat!” (We advise – emergency supplies).

This pithy, rhyming official guidance is particularly convincing in the original German: six short syllables that – in the middle of the Cold War – encapsulated the sentiment of the time. Six syllables saying that reserve stocks are needed in case things go wrong. We knew what to do: keep a well-stocked cellar with solid wooden bars. No wonder that many cellars from that time, with their thick concrete walls and massive armoured doors, still resemble a bunker.

The slogan “Kluger Rat – Notvorrat” has faded away over time. Globalisation turned it into little more than a joke. Dense supply chains spanning the globe made the emergency stockpile mentality seem obsolete. Stocking reserves was seen as a quirk of those who lived in the past. Storing supplies was for squirrels. Modern consumerism had society firmly in its grip: if you needed something, order it online and it would be delivered to your door “just in time”.

The idea of stockpiling returned with the advent of the coronavirus pandemic. People found themselves having to compete for all sorts of things, not just toilet paper. This made the state dust off and bring back its over 50-year-old slogan, prompted this time by wars and crises that have shown us that the completely unimaginable can actually happen.

Emergency stockpiling Swiss-style counts the luxury product coffee as one of life's essentials: the Swiss must not be deprived of their coffee, no matter how bleak the situation. That's the official line. At the same time, there is some justification for this position, as Switzerland is a leading consumer of the product worldwide. The inhabitants of Switzerland enjoy almost 1,100 cups of coffee per year on average. Talking of which, I think I'll put the kettle on.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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

**Swiss
Community**



Switzerland's emergency stocks

The availability of goods vital for human life is becoming more of an issue in view of global conflicts and pandemics. Switzerland has kept emergency supplies for its people since the world wars – and aims to be even more well prepared for future crises.



Caffeine in a crisis: importers like La Semeuse in La Chaux-de-Fonds store a mandatory stockpile totalling 18,000 tonnes of green coffee.

Photo: Sophie Stieger 13Photo

most coffee drinkers) came out against it. The Federal Council ultimately backed down – not least on “psychological grounds”.

Food and warmth

Defining which goods are important for survival is “not an exact science”, says Peter Lehmann, head of Compulsory Stocks at the Federal Office for National Economic Supply. The key criterion for foodstuffs is the number of calories: the authorities work on the basis of an average energy consumption of about 2,300 calories per person per day. Accordingly, tens of thousands of tonnes of non-perishable foodstuffs such as rice, wheat, cooking oils and fats, sugar and the ingredients needed to make yeast are stockpiled. The compulsory stocks also hold fertilisers and canola seeds for agriculture. These reserves are enough to meet the needs of Switzerland’s population for three to four months.

13 Swiss francs per person

The federal government does not hold the stocks itself. They are provided and managed by the relevant sector, for example grain mills, as they make flour out of wheat. “That means the goods are already where they are needed,” explains Lehmann. The 300 companies involved receive compensation for holding the stocks. This compensation is financed by import surcharges and fees: every inhabitant of the country pays 13 Swiss francs a year towards it.

Crisis survival involves more than having enough to eat. “A heated apartment is also a basic requirement,” explains Lehmann. The compulsory stores thus include heating oil and fuels, such as petrol, diesel and aviation gasoline. These reserves are released in the event of supply issues or supply chain gaps. In 2015, a strike in



Peter Lehmann, head of Compulsory Stocks at the Federal Office for National Economic Supply. Photo supplied

France resulted in a shortage of aviation gasoline at Geneva airport. In 2018, a dry summer caused mineral oil supply issues: low water levels on the Rhine meant the ships could only load their holds up to one third of full capacity. In 2021, the country had to dip into its emergency fertiliser stocks due to supply problems on the global market. The Swiss agricultural sector is fully reliant on imports to meet its demand for fertiliser.

The pandemic revealed supply shortfalls

The country regularly accesses its strategic medical reserve supplies. From 2019 to 2022, there were 416 instances of medicines being taken from emergency stocks to pre-empt shortages, mainly for antibiotics. At the start of 2024, the authorities initiated additional measures. Obligatory storage and reporting were extended to include other substances in order to mitigate supply bottleneck risks.

There were major national supply issues during the coronavirus pandemic, with a shortage of face masks, ethanol and disinfectant. The Swiss Alcohol Board had kept ethanol reserves up to 2017 prior to its dissolution in the interests of deregulation,

THEODORA PETER

Could you go without your morning coffee in the event of a crisis? In Switzerland, you won’t have to, as the government has contingency planning in place: importers have more than 18,000 tonnes of coffee bean stocks in reserve. This mandatory reserve is enough to meet demand from the country’s coffee drinkers for three months should there be an import outage. The real question is whether coffee, which has practically no nutritional value, is really as important to human survival as wheat or rice. The last time the authorities pondered this issue was during a review in 2019, when plans were made to remove coffee from the country’s emergency stockpile. This was met with strong resistance: not only suppliers but also consumers (bearing in mind that the Swiss are among the world’s fore-



Cultivation campaign during the Second World War

Harvesting potatoes in front of the Federal Palace: during the 1940s, wheat and potato growing spread to the cities. Switzerland aimed to become more self-sufficient by increasing its amount of arable land. Although the country fell well short of achieving its goal of agricultural autarky,

the authorities nonetheless considered the “Wahlen Plan” a success in terms of its morale boost: the cultivation campaign strengthened the people’s resolve during a difficult political and military period. Photo: Keystone

Dutti’s underwater supplies

Migros founder Gottlieb Duttweiler was also mindful of the need to safeguard food supplies during the war years. On his own initiative, he organised the storage of big underwater tanks filled with wheat in Switzerland’s lakes. He argued that the supplies would be more secure from bombing there than in warehouses. However, the Federal Council declined to take part in the project. “Dutti”, as he was popularly known, went ahead with it anyway under his own steam and continued to store food underwater until the 1950s. Find out more at: www.revue.link/submarine Photo: Keystone



which meant no more emergency ethanol stocks. No one suspected at the time how urgently ethanol would be needed just a short time later. The sector has since reestablished its reserve stock of the product.

The Ukraine war accentuated Europe’s energy crisis. However, electricity cannot be kept in reserve. The Federal Council approved the construction of a reserve power station last year to ensure the country would be prepared in the event of an acute electricity shortage (see Review 2/2023).

Switzerland depends on imports

The origins of national economic supply go back to the early 20th century. Many goods were in short supply before the First World War, and the situation only became worse after that. At the start of the 1930s, the federal government obliged private mills to hold a certain volume of grain in reserve. In the Second World War, the authorities launched a veritable cultivation campaign to make Switzerland less dependent on imported foodstuffs. Although this goal was not achieved, the “Wahlen Plan” – named after the agriculture minister and subsequently Federal Councillor Friedrich Traugott

Medicines are one of the country’s essential supplies. The mandatory stockpiles recently played a big part in ensuring those supplies.

Photo: Keystone



Wahlen – did strengthen the people’s resolve.

Following the world wars, the emergency stockpile was expanded in the interests of preserving security. Products including cacao, soap, coal, metals and screws were added to the mandatory reserves. During the Cold War, stocks were built up to last 12 months. However, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the advent of globalisation made stockpiling less of a priority, and reserves were scaled back

There are enough foodstuffs and commodities stockpiled to provide every person in the country with 2,300 calories per day for three to four months.

during the 1990s. Nonetheless, Switzerland remains reliant on functioning supply chains and imports, as the country only produces about half of the food supply needed to meet domestic consumption.

Given the uncertain state of the current world, the Federal Council proposed last summer to top up the mandatory reserves again and store more grain and cooking oils. However, during the consultation process, these plans were met with scepticism: the sectors in question considered a one-year import outage excessive. At the same time, an expert survey showed

that they believed the priority should be on doing more to secure complex supply chains. In December 2023, the federal government commissioned a more detailed review. The government does not just want to know whether more products should be included in the compulsory stockpiles but also whether additional instruments are needed to monitor international supply chains of critical goods and services. The conclusions of the review should be published by the end of 2024.

Switzerland as a role model

By international comparison, Switzerland is something of a role model in its approach to stockpiling foodstuffs. That finding emerges from a country analysis commissioned by the Confederation from research institute Polynomics. The study covered the neighbouring countries of Germany, France, Italy, Austria, as well as Finland and the non-EU state Norway. These countries apply different approaches, ranging from Finland with its extensive national stockpiles to France, where there are no emergency food reserves, which is understandable as the country has a large agricultural sector and does not rely on imports.

In any case, Switzerland’s penchant for hoarding coffee makes it a global anomaly: “If disaster strikes, the Swiss want to be caffeinated,” is how the British publication “The Economist” reported on the matter with a hint of irony.

Bunker mentality during the Cold War

Civil defence shelters arose in many places during the 1970s to offer refuge to the Swiss in a state of emergency – pic-



tured here is the now-decommissioned shelter in the Sonnenberg Tunnel, designed to accommodate 20,000 people. Besides the threat of nuclear conflict, the Cold War between the major powers also raised concerns over possible supply shortages. The mandatory reserves were kept well stocked – with adequate provisions for 12 months. Photo: Keystone

Precarious supply chains

Switzerland depends on imports for its needs. Besides pandemics and wars, climate change also impacts supply chains and logistics. During the 2018 summer drought, water levels in the Rhine (pictured here near Düsseldorf) were so low that ships



were only able to transport part of their normal load. Switzerland responded by releasing some of its mineral oil reserves to ensure there was enough petrol and heating oil. Photo: Keystone

What to store in your own cellar

“We advise – emergency supplies”: this over-50-year-old slogan has received a new lease of life since the coronavirus pandemic.

Empty pasta shelves, and a run on toilet paper in the supermarket: the coronavirus-induced lockdown in 2020 triggered supply fears and panic buying. The shelves emptied more quickly than retailers could fill them, which only stoked anxieties further.

The authorities recommend that people keep personal supplies at home to last for about a week. “That way, people can respond more calmly to difficult situations and avoid becoming nervous or panicking,” states an official brochure available in French, German and Italian, the title of which translates into English as “We advise – emergency supplies”. The slogan is over 50 years old – and it has been revived by the global crises.

Your personal supplies should contain enough food for a week – it’s even more important to have **drinking water for at least three days.**

The first thing to stockpile is non-perishable foodstuffs, for example rice, pasta products, oil, ready-made meals, salt, sugar, coffee, tea, dried fruit, muesli, rusks, chocolate, UHT milk, hard cheese, dried meat and preserves. Drinks are equally if not more important: every household should store nine litres of water per person. That is enough to provide three days of drinking and cooking water in the event of an emergency. Although Switzerland has an almost unlimited supply of drinking water, supply interruptions could still happen due to broken pipes or contamination. In such a case, water companies are obliged to provide people with a minimum amount of drinking water from the fourth day.

electricity outage: battery-operated radios, torches, spare batteries, candles, matches and a gas cooker. Medicine, toiletries, pet food and small cash sums should also be kept at hand.

It is advisable to use your food reserves for everyday cooking, i.e. keep using them and replacing any used items. The contents of the freezer also count as emergency supplies: you can still consume frozen foods after an electricity outage. Once thawed, however, food should not be refrozen.

Offers from private companies for “complete solutions” with canned food for one month or longer far exceed the government recommendations. Their customers include preppers, who want to be well prepared with everything they need to keep going in the event of a crisis – tents, radio devices, tools etc. There are detailed checklists for crisis survival online. (TP)

Spare batteries and cash

You should also keep items at home that can be of use in the event of an

Link to the brochure (in German): [revue.link/notvorrat](https://www.revue.link/notvorrat)



Carole Durussel



How many Swiss can say they have had the privilege of setting foot in Antarctica, the continent of land and ice? At least one: Carole Durussel, from the canton of Vaud. Last November, she reached the South Pole by sea together with 67 other woman scientists. “Antarctica’s different shades of white and blue will remain etched in my memory forever,” she declared on returning to Argentina on 2 December. This three-week expedition was organised under the aegis of the Homeward Bound foundation, which aims to increase the visibility of women in natural sciences. This NGO, founded by four women, believes that gender equality is good for the environment. Why the South Pole? Because its virgin territory lies at the heart of the concerns about the climate and pollution. The voyage to the end of the earth included a number of meetings, notably about leadership.

Carole Durussel fell in love with the sea when whale watching as a little girl. She studied marine environment sciences and holds a doctorate in international environmental law. Based in London, she is Deputy Secretary of the OSPAR Commission for the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, an area impacted by overfishing and industrial waste. She contributed her expertise to the drafting of a treaty designed to protect marine biological diversity in areas of the high seas. Her voyage to Antarctica brought together women in highly visible positions. “You need role models if you are to get to those high-level positions,” argues Durussel. The contacts made during this expedition will be “an invaluable asset” for her future work, she says.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Switzerland prepares Ukraine peace summit

Switzerland plans to host a Ukraine peace summit this year, announced President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy following a joint meeting in January. Amherd said all countries that respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine are eligible to attend the conference. Volodymyr Zelenskyy would be particularly happy to see countries from the Global South at the event: “It’s important for us to show that the whole world opposes the Russian aggression and that the whole world supports a just peace.” Moscow immediately questioned the rationale behind a Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland, saying that Switzerland is not the neutral intermediary it claims to be. Nonetheless, there was an initial meeting in New York shortly afterwards between Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. According to Cassis, they discussed “war and peace”. Cassis described the exchange as a first major step towards dialogue.

(MUL)

Old Swiss trams bound for Ukraine

Berne and Zurich are renewing their tram fleets. Both cities will send their old but still fully roadworthy trams to Ukraine. The trams will be used in Lviv and Vinnytsia. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs will organise transport to the war-torn country and training for the staff of the Ukrainian transport companies. Switzerland has a tradition of exporting its old but well-maintained Swiss trams to partner countries. For example, trams from Berne have been running in Iași (Romania) and green Basel trams in Belgrade (Serbia) since 2003.

(MUL)

No more visa requirement for Kosovo

As of 1 January 2024, Kosovars no longer need a visa to enter the Schengen zone, which includes Switzerland. Kosovars can now stay in the Schengen area for up to 90 days without a visa. This waiving of the visa requirement is especially helpful for those visiting family. And that means something in Switzerland, where so many people have Kosovan roots.

(MUL)

ETH Zurich strengthens its focus on AI

ETH Zurich has received possibly the biggest donation ever made to a Swiss university: German entrepreneur Dieter Schwarz, former boss of the retail chain Lidl, is financing 20 professorships over the next 30 years at the ETH, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence (AI). This also entails expanding the ETH to Germany, where the university is establishing a teaching and research hub in Heilbronn. Heilbronn is Dieter Schwarz’s hometown. The exact amount of the donation has not been disclosed but is thought to be in the region of several hundred million Swiss francs.

(MUL)

The big wolf hunt in the Swiss mountains

The wolf is under strict protection in Switzerland. Yet, last December and January, hunters shot about one sixth of the country's wolf population with official authorisation. It's a long story.



MARC LETTAU

In 1871, a shot rang out through the woods near Iragna (canton of Ticino) – and Switzerland's last known wolf was dead. That was the end of them; at least until 1995 when wolves returned to the Swiss Alps. They made themselves at home, formed packs and extended their living space. In November 2023, Switzerland had 30 packs or about 300 wolves. Most Swiss welcome the return of the predator. That was confirmed by the popular vote in 2020 on a new hunting law opposed by nature conservation organisations. One of its provisions had been the culling of the wolf population. The people said no. Although there was widespread agreement with shooting wolves who were attacking sheep and causing damage, killing the protected animal as a pre-emptive measure was deemed a step too far by a majority of the electorate.

However, 'proactive population control' has since been passed into law. In 2022, the parliament approved a revised hunting law allowing the culling of wolves as a pre-emptive measure. So, the paradigm shift that the people didn't want has nonetheless occurred. At the end of 2023, the Federal Council furthermore decided, in spectacular haste, to fast-track and implement specific provisions of the revised law. New Environment Minister Albert Rösti (SVP) spelled out what this meant in practice: from 1 December 2023 to 31 January 2024, the cantons with a wolf population were allowed to kill a total of 12 packs and partially cull six more. The other 12 packs were to be left untouched. The response was immediate, with 800 hunters in Valais requesting further instructions on how to proceed with the wolf hunt.

The courts throw a spanner in the works

The start of the hunt shook three nature conservation organisations out of their shock-induced paralysis. They launched objections to some of the pack culling authorisations granted by the Federal Council and met with a measure of success: on 3 January 2024, the Federal Administrative Court confirmed, halfway through the big wolf hunt, that the objections would postpone the cull. The hunt, or part of it at least, was suspended. The legal argument on which the ruling is based centres on irreversibility: if a wolf is shot, the wolf is dead; if the court subsequently decides the shooting was not legal, the wolf cannot be brought back to life. Death is final.

The interim ruling by the Federal Administrative Court applied the brake to the hasty measures adopted by the Federal Council. At time of publication, the court's final decision was still pending. Still, whatever the judges decide, one thing is for sure. During the December/January window, over 50 of Switzerland's 300 wolves were killed, or one sixth of the population. As the final ruling is awaited, the debate remains heated due to the new measures introduced by Environment Minister Rösti. Previously it had been up to the scientists and wildlife biologists to give guidance on these matters. They maintain that 20 packs must be left untouched to ensure the wolf's sur-

vival in Switzerland. Reinhard Schnidrig, who heads the wildlife conservation section at the Federal Office for the Environment has consistently held that position. He first told "Swiss Review" in 2015 that 20 packs were needed for survival of the species; 60 packs were ecologically sustainable; and "somewhere in between" lay "what is socio-economically feasible". Federal Councillor Rösti now finds that 12 packs are enough. The nature conservation organisations aren't the only ones scratching their heads wondering what lies behind this much lower threshold. Is the environment minister prepared to accept the extinction of this protected species in Switzerland? Going forward, is politics to be the sole arbiter of Swiss environmental questions instead of science? And, if so, how does that translate into managing the huge environmental challenges facing us: climate change and species extinction?

Urban versus rural Switzerland

Social tensions are also simmering following these recent events. Switzerland's urban population, which is detached from nature, is accused of having a romanticised view, seeing the wolf as evidence that a real Alpine wilderness is still out there, conveniently glossing over the fact that the urban Swiss are overexploiting the Alpine region for leisure purposes and changing its very nature. At the same time, sympathy is also thin on the ground for Switzerland's mountain folk, for whom letting sheep roam the Alps during summer is a cherished tradition. The Federal Administrative Court sees it thus: federal authorities have authorised the hunting of entire wolf packs in areas where measures to protect the sheep would have been entirely feasible but were not taken. Choosing to shoot the wolves instead when the federal government has earmarked millions of Swiss francs every year for the purpose of protecting flocks (2024: 7.7 million) is what is causing friction between urban and rural Switzerland.

This dispute also helps demonstrate why nature conservation in Switzerland is under pressure right now. It has to do with the urban-rural balance of power in the Federal Council. Albert Rösti's proximity to the farmers explains his wolf policy. His department is also riven by conflicting objectives: it is responsible for building roads, railways, dams and power plants – all potentially environmentally harmful constructions – but at the same time is also responsible for protecting the environment. These conflicting interests are a legacy: through the decades, Swiss environmental policy has primarily been about exploiting the natural environment, with conservation coming second. Whether conservation or exploitation has the upper hand depends on who leads the department. Rösti's predecessor, Simonetta Sommaruga, preferred the former; Rösti leans more towards the latter. Be that as it may, the last chapter of the wolf saga has yet to be written.

An extended version of the article can be found at revue.ch

“Birds are a reflection of the environment”

Sempach Ornithological Institute in the canton of Lucerne celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2024. This charitable institution is a highly regarded centre of competence in Switzerland and very popular among the population. It also has a warning for us: the diversity of domestic bird life is under threat.

SUSANNE WENGER

This winter, the evening skies above Langenthal in the canton of Berne were the showcase for hundreds of thousands of bramblings descending on the fir trees to spend the night. Every winter, the bramblings come from Scandinavia to Switzerland, explains Livio Rey, a biologist at Sempach Ornithological Institute: “However, you will only see a mass migration every few years, when the conditions are right.” They need enough beech nuts and there can’t be any snow; the conditions also have to be worse further up north. That’s when the birds move south.

Sempach Ornithological Institute is considered something of an authority on all things bird-related. Founded by the Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Vogelkunde und Vogelschutz (Swiss society for ornithology and



Sempach Ornithological Institute on 6 April 1924.

Archive photo: Sempach Ornithological Institute

bird protection) in April 1924, it is a longstanding institution in Switzerland. The foundation employs almost 160 people and advises the authorities and professional groups, responds to enquiries from the general public and provides information on all things avian. The fact that 75 per cent of its funding comes from donations and legacies testifies to the

trust and affection in which it is held by the general public. Although it is not funded by the public sector, it does perform assignments for the Confederation and cantons.

Early conservationists

The founders, including the first head of the institute, Alfred Schifferli from Sempach, an accountant and ornithologist, wanted to support research into bird life, which was an up-and-coming discipline at the time. Schifferli and his assistants ringed many birds to find out more about bird migration. The institute became the main reporting centre for ring recoveries and it provided specimens and eggs for studies. Its foundation is also connected with early nature conservation movements at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in Switzerland. The institute’s purpose has always been to apply its learnings about bird life to benefit the birds.

“We have to understand birds in order to protect them and preserve their diversity for future generations,” says Rey, who is based at the headquarters at Lake Sempach, which is just outside the town and comprises a treatment centre for injured birds and a visitors’ centre. On this particular winter day, if you look out at the right time you can see a brightly coloured common kingfisher. Understanding, protection and preservation underpin the work of the institute and, according to Rey, its mission is now more urgent than ever.

One of the longest red lists

Although birds hold a certain fascination for many people through their song, general visibility and ability to fly, most people do not realise just

how bad their general situation is: 40 per cent of Switzerland’s roughly 200 bird species are currently under threat. The red list of endangered bird species is one of the longest in Europe, according to Rey. And the situation has failed to improve over the past ten years: the number of ‘potentially endangered’ birds on a type of prewarning list has increased. “Contrary to general opinion, Switzerland does not set a good example in terms of bird protection,” stresses the biologist.

However, some types of bird are faring better than others, as Rey points out. The birds that live in the forest are prospering, thanks to Switzerland’s relatively stringent forest conservation. The fortunes of herons and birds of prey are also improving. There is a ban on hunting these birds, so their numbers have picked up as a result. Examples include the golden eagle, the reintroduced bearded vulture and the red kite. The red kite was on the verge of extinction, says Rey, but “today we have ten per cent of the global population here in Switzerland”.

Cultivated land is bad for birds

Many bird species suffer a lot on cultivated land, where intensified crop cultivation has interfered with their habitat. Frequent mowing destroys broods. Extensive use of fertilisers and pesticides is affecting their food supply, i.e. insects. There is also a dearth of small structures, such as hedges or cairns. As a result, some types of bird have disappeared. Bird species that used to frequent the Swiss Plateau have died out, from the grey partridge to the ortolan bunting, a type of songbird. The bright song of the eurasian skylark has become something of a rarity.



Bird species in wetlands, bodies of water or marshes, are also suffering. Leisure activities as well as other things are impacting their livelihood. “Birds are a reflection of the environment,” concludes the expert. “They are a very accurate indicator of how we treat the environment.” Knowledge of how things are developing is also based on the extensive data held by the institute. Monitoring, i.e. counting numbers, has been one of their top priorities for decades. They have more than 2,000 volunteers supporting them all over the country, from retired natural scientists to track layers.

The peregrine falcon – seen here diving at speed – is an example of successful species conservation. In the 1960s, it stood on the brink of extinction due to the use of a particular insecticide. A measure taken in 1972 ensured the species’ survival.
Photo: Keystone

Teaming up with agriculture...

Researching bird migration is another cornerstone of the institute’s mandate. The nature of this work has changed in line with technological advances. Migratory birds aren’t just ringed anymore; they also carry extremely light data storage devices known as geolocators that are attached to the birds like a rucksack. They deliver “impressive findings”, says Rey. For example, the alpine swift remains airborne for 200 consecutive days. The small great reed warbler reaches heights of up to 6,000 metres during migration.

Although the ornithological station has been working more closely on the living conditions of birds for about 50 years, it stays out of politics. The institute wants to focus on providing information, explains the biologist. The biodiversity initiative is an exception, however. It goes to the vote in 2024. The institute agrees with the popular initiative calling for more space and resources to cultivate diversity. To improve the birds’ living environment, the institute works mainly on site by cooperating with farmers that work in close harmony with nature.

...to the benefit of the birds and hares

In Champagne (canton of Geneva) and Klettgau (canton of Schaffhausen), the institute has contributed to establishing award-winning ecological areas for the birds on agricultural land. Eurasian skylark numbers are on the rise in these areas and the hare has also made a comeback, says Rey. The 33-year-old Bernese native has been working at the institute for eight years. His favourite is the attractive peregrine falcon, a speed record-holder in the animal kingdom: it can dive at 200 kilometres per hour. It can be seen almost anywhere in the world: “It’s a unifying force.”

The peregrine falcon is also an example of successful species preservation. In the 1960s, the widespread use of the insecticide DDT brought it to the brink of extinction. An international environmental movement campaigned against the product, leading to it being banned in 1972. The peregrine falcon has since recovered. “It is living proof of what can be achieved if you try hard enough,” says Rey.

www.vogelwarte.ch
www.ornitho.ch

Quiet, please!

The calls for quiet can be quite deafening

No more loud fireworks, less ringing of church bells, more whisper tyres and noise-reducing roads: is Switzerland becoming quieter? One thing is for sure: the dispute over noise levels is as loud as ever.

DÖLF BARBEN

Don't say it out loud, but in purely subjective terms, Switzerland seems to have grown quieter in the past few decades. And it seems set to go quieter still: last November, a fireworks initiative was submitted. It calls for a nationwide ban on private individuals setting off loud fireworks and bangers. Many nature conservation and animal welfare organisations are backing the initiative, including Pro Natura and Zoo Zurich.

It may go through. A survey at the end of 2023 revealed a 76 per cent approval rate. Animal welfare is the main driver of the ban. The rival camp has been rather subdued thus far. In an interview with "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", the head of a firework company lamented the emergence of a "banning culture".

Granted, a firework ban for private individuals would make Switzerland quieter, especially on 1 August (Swiss national day) and New Year's Eve. These bans are actu-

ally already in force in some municipalities, such as St. Moritz and inner-city Berne. However, there is a lot more to noise than things that go pop or hiss. Top of the list is traffic and, in many instances, there are also cow or church bells.

More people affected by noise

Objectively speaking, Switzerland has not really grown quieter over the years. The latest environmental report by the Federal Council even states that many more persons are now affected by harmful and sustained noise than over 30 years ago, when the Noise Abatement Ordinance came into force.

Noise pollution on the whole has not receded despite technical improvements to cars, trains and planes, states the report. The reasons include traffic growth and especially cars' increased weight and broader tyres. Population growth and residential development is another factor. People in cities and agglomerations are particularly affected by noise.

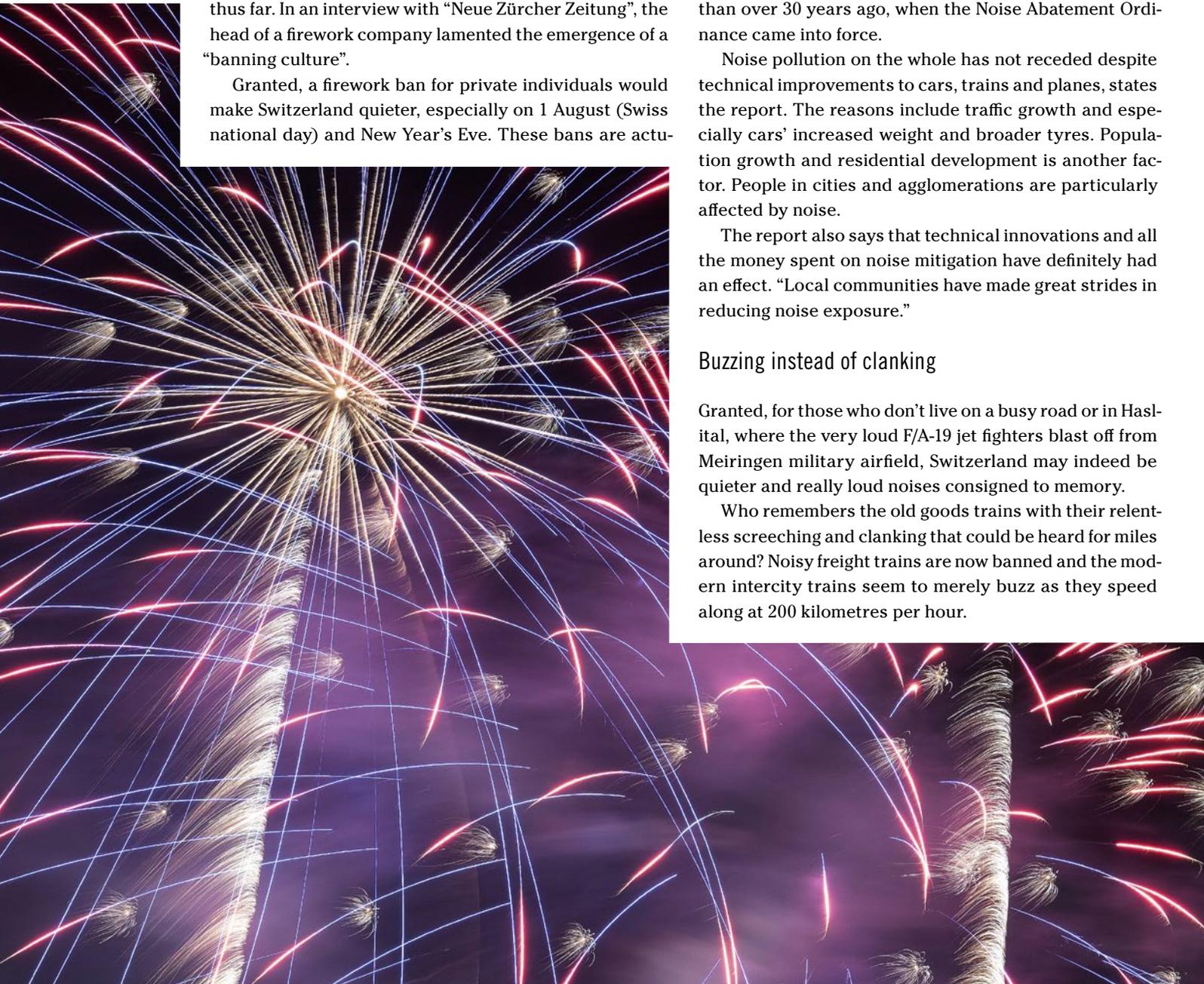
The report also says that technical innovations and all the money spent on noise mitigation have definitely had an effect. "Local communities have made great strides in reducing noise exposure."

Buzzing instead of clanking

Granted, for those who don't live on a busy road or in Haslital, where the very loud F/A-19 jet fighters blast off from Meiringen military airfield, Switzerland may indeed be quieter and really loud noises consigned to memory.

Who remembers the old goods trains with their relentless screeching and clanking that could be heard for miles around? Noisy freight trains are now banned and the modern intercity trains seem to merely buzz as they speed along at 200 kilometres per hour.

It will soon be time for the people to vote: an initiative to contain the noise from fireworks will go before the people.
Photo: Keystone





Then there were the cars, lorries and tractors 50 years ago. They used to really rattle and roar. That is also history. The noise now comes from rolling wheels; engines are practically silent. The sound comes from the compressed air between the tyres and road surface hissing as it tries to escape. Broad wheels compress more air, which is why they are louder than narrow ones. There is even a solution to that: whisper tyres equipped with special grooves and quiet asphalt with broad pores where the air can disappear with barely a sound.

Young drivers with souped-up cars ironically bring back the old, noisy days. They convert the exhaust systems of their flashy motors to make them sound as powerful and noisy as possible. It is of course forbidden to drive a car like that through a low traffic inner-city zone, which only makes it all the more tempting.

Dangerously quiet vehicles

Contrary to popular opinion, sometimes the problem is not too much noise, but not enough of it. When electric cars travel slowly, they are so quiet as to be practically inaudible, and that is dangerous. That is why they must be equipped with electric vehicle warning sounds.

There are two distinct types of noise. The sound of lawnmowers or concrete mixers, for example, is just a side effect. If this type of noise can be reduced, most people will approve.

On the other hand, there are also sounds and noises that are meant to be heard. Examples include church bells, cow bells and the alphorn. Calling these sounds noise pollution and demanding quiet is likely to attract some protesting noises from other residents. The authorities have to decide on each individual case.

The cowbell classic

It can be difficult to resolve such conflicts. They often end up before the judge. Almost 50 years ago, the Federal Supreme Court had to rule on a dispute over cow bells. Its ruling was that the ringing of cowbells in a residential area at night went beyond what could reasonably be considered tolerable.

However, the farmers do not always lose these cases. In Aarwangen, an attractive municipality in Berne's Oberaargau where the cowbell classic recently flared up, there was a surprising reversal: the inhabitants collected signatures – this time in favour of the farmer. And, as a precautionary measure, they also signed in favour of the ringing of the church bells. Suddenly the issue became much big-



ger than the sound of bells on damp pastures: “the culture and tradition of our country” were at stake. The pro-bell camp won a resounding victory at the Communal Assembly in December 2023. It is now forbidden to call for a ban on cowbells in Aarwangen.

Intermission in the church tower

Arguments over church bells are the other perennial issue. However, these disputes only seem to be going one way. As the numbers of churchgoers decrease, the ringing of the bells from the church towers is also abating. In many places, the bells already ring a lot less than they used to. Sometimes they don't ring at all. And when a flash of lightning hits the church tower, as happened last summer in Menziken (canton of Aargau), sympathy is in short supply. Opponents of the bells claimed, unsurprisingly, that God had made His feelings on the matter clear by calling for an intermission.

Snoring trains

Sometimes the arguments over noise border on the surreal. In Rapperswil-Jona (canton of St. Gallen), for example, the residents complained about trains that were just parked on the tracks. As it was not practical to shut down the electronics and air-conditioning overnight, the trains kept emitting noises; it was as if they were “snoring”, as reported in the “Tages-Anzeiger”.

Snoring trains preventing people from snoring – how about that. The SBB was ultimately obliged to take remedial action. Although the problem did also resolve itself over time: the new trains are quieter when in use, they also snore more quietly. So quietly in fact, that hardly anyone hears them.



Ringling church bells – and very often jangling cow bells too – are a particular noise irritation for many people in Switzerland. Photo: Keystone

“Working with 150-year-old wood is an honour”

The tradition of *tavillonnage*, or wood-shingled roofs, can be found in some of the French-speaking foothills of the Swiss Alps. A small number of passionate artisans are keeping this tradition alive. One of them is Tristan Ropraz from the western canton of Fribourg.

MARTINE BROCARD*

From a distance, the pastel-hued chalet roofs seem to blend into their gently undulating surroundings. They stand out more close up, their rounded forms consisting of tightly packed rows of overlapping, small, thin wooden boards. This, the tradition of *tavillonnage* (wood-shingled roofs), is particularly strong in the Alpine foothills of Fribourg and Vaud. But it can also be found in other parts of Switzerland.

Shingle-making is an ancient Swiss craft that has been kept alive, although very few now practise the art. There are around a dozen shingle-makers in French-speaking Switzerland. Most of them originally worked as carpenters or joiners before catching the *tavillonnage* bug. It is a niche profession, and the shingle-makers are keen to pass on their knowledge and expertise every so often. To people like qualified carpenter Tristan Ropraz, who picked up the skill six years ago.

Tristan Ropraz at work. His skill lies in splitting the wood along the grain without damaging the fibres. That makes it leakproof.

All Photos:
Pierre-Yves Massot

side.” For him, none of this work is boring or laborious. It is a monotonous procedure, but every shingle is different. “My teacher says you need to have eyes in your fingers.” Splitting the wood along the grain without damaging the fibres is the tricky bit. If you get that right, the wood – and the future roof – will remain leak-free. Every strike with the mallet has to be perfect.

Shingle-makers live according to the rhythms of the seasons. “We are like marmots,” he laughs. “We retreat to our dens when it gets cold, and re-emerge when it gets warm.” Topaz

has a tanned complexion. He spends winter making shingles, spring and autumn putting the shingles on roofs down in the valleys, and summer lay-

“I have great respect for these trees. They were here long before us and will remain on roofs long after we have gone.”

Tristan Ropraz

“We are like marmots”

We meet Ropraz on a slightly chilly morning at his workshop in Sorens (canton of Fribourg). From his window he can see Moléson, a well-known mountain in the Fribourg Alps. Ropraz, 26, surveys his next task. He has a pile of wood in front of him. Using a wooden mallet and a froe, he will split the logs to make six-millimetre-thick *tavillons*, or shingles. He will tie these in the exact order in which he cut them, then start over. All day long. And all week long, from mid-November to mid-April. This is the time to make shingles.

“My body and soul recover in winter – I no longer have to think,” he says. “You split the wood, tie the pieces together and stack them out-



ing them on roofs up in the mountains. “We nail them non-stop during the warmer months.” A shingle-maker will knock in between 150 and 200 kg of nails every year, or around 1,000 nails on every three square metres of roof. “But I would go crazy if I kept count.”

One out of every thousand

The shingle-maker’s year begins in autumn, when they select the trees that they need to make the *tavillons*. They only chop spruces in the canton of Fribourg. “This is the best moment, when the whole process begins.”

The search for suitable trees starts at 1,000 metres. “At higher altitudes, there are fewer nutrients available to the trees – and the trees grow more slowly. This provides shin-

Once Ropraz has split a log, he ties the shingles together in the order in which he cut them. That way, there are no irregularities on the roof.



A shingle roof will last for 35 to 40 years, which more or less corresponds to the length of a career in *tavillonnage*. This is why it is rare for a shingle-maker to still be working when one of their roofs needs to be re-laid.

Tristan Ropraz





Have the shingles been laid properly? Tristan Ropraz checks the surface he has just laid, which will keep out the wind and weather for 35-40 years.

are going to lay out the wood to dry as quickly as possible."

"It is always a poignant moment when I lay my shingles," the young man says. Ropraz also gets emotional after he nails the final shingle on any chalet roof. "I sit down, look towards the horizon and think of these little tiles of wood, each and every one of which I made and laid."

But let us not romanticise the profession. "Many people only see these chalets, the tranquility and the surrounding landscape. They never think of the work we put in. These bundles of shingles don't end up on the roofs by magic. It's hard work." Ropraz used to be a talented Swiss wrestler who threw opponents into the sawdust. He says that making a healthy living from *tavillonnage* is not easy either. The price for one square metre is approximately 175 Swiss francs, which covers sourcing, transporting, preparing and laying the wood. A carefully laid shingle roof will last for an average of 35 to 40 years.

Ropraz, whom friends used to rib for doing this old-fashioned job, believes that *tavillonnage* still has a future. "Everyone talks about sustainability nowadays. Wood is an eco-friendly building material, and our trees come from the nearby forests of Gruyère. It does not get much better."

revue.link/shingles

*Martine Brocard is editor of the Swiss Alpine Club magazine "Die Alpen", in which the original version of this article appeared.

gles that are drier and will last longer." Shingle-makers prefer to source trees from mountain dells or shady, sheltered spots conducive to straight growth. Only one spruce out of every thousand is suitable for *tavillonnage*, according to Ropraz, who will need 25 to 30 trees during the course of every year. "I have great respect for these trees. They were here long before us and will remain on roofs long after we have gone," he says. "I feel honoured and humbled to work with 150-year-old wood." The trees are felled in mid-November during the last quarter of the waning moon, when it is believed that the sap is at its lowest and the wood is dormant.

This protects the trees from any wood pests.

From tree to roof

The scent of wood fills the air. Ropraz is in the process of splitting logs. He looks up and points to a forest up on the slopes of Moléson. "This wood comes from over there," he says. "A swathe of trees in the forest was cut down to make space for a new ski piste. The trees were good for making shingles. The master *tavillonneur* and I were anxious, so we drove up the hill. At least we rescued six trunks." The trees were felled at the wrong time and are full of sap. "We

Ban nuclear weapons? Yes, but ...

Switzerland wants a world without nuclear weapons. Yet the Federal Council has not yet signed the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This has something to do with Swiss-NATO rapprochement.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

Switzerland is defined, among other things, by its commitment to conflict resolution, nuclear disarmament, and world peace. The Federal Council applied for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council with these very goals in mind. Switzerland will remain at the high table of UN diplomacy alongside the world's major powers until the end of 2025, debating political crises, sanctions and peace missions. Which is why signing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) immediately would seem to be a no-brainer for the Federal Council. Switzerland was one of the 122 UN member states to negotiate and adopt the TPNW in 2017. But it is yet to ratify it.

The TPNW goes way beyond other existing treaties. It prohibits the production, possession, transfer, testing, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons. The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), meanwhile, is the cornerstone of today's nuclear world order, defining the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China as nuclear-weapon states.

The new treaty is hard to swallow for Switzerland's policymakers. On the one hand, the Federal Council believes that the TPNW fills a gap in international law, with nuclear weapons the only weapons of mass destruction never to have been subject to a comprehensive prohibition treaty until now – unlike biological and chemical weapons, for example. To ratify the TPNW would also be in keeping with Switzerland's humanitarian tradition. And yet the same Federal Council has hit the brakes. After the TPNW was adopted, Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis said that the treaty was not the way to achieve these objectives. This has been the government's view ever since.

Yet pressure is coming from parliament, which has already urged the government to sign the treaty on several occasions. Members of all the political parties have called for a nuclear ban, albeit for different reasons. The left-wing parties are committed to pacifist principles, whereas representatives of the SVP want ratification of the TPNW because this would make it harder for Switzerland to move closer to NATO – probably the very issue that explains why the Federal Council is stalling in the first place. Since the war in Ukraine began, the Western defence alliance NATO has taken on greater importance for Berne. By signalling its intention to join the Sky Shield air defence system (see Review 5/2023), the government has made its latest step towards NATO. Switzerland has been a NATO partner country under the Partnership for Peace programme since 1996.



But NATO also cooperates with countries like Austria that have already signed on the dotted line, say advocates of the treaty. Accession to the TPNW would not jeopardise Swiss security interests, in their opinion. Nevertheless, Western countries are exerting pressure on Switzerland to ditch the treaty for good. Once-neutral Sweden recently went through a similar process. NATO wants more in return for its friendship.

A federal government report published in 2018 already goes some way to allaying doubts, saying that Switzerland would probably cooperate with nuclear-weapon states or their allies, in the extreme case of self-defence against an armed attack. As a party to the TPNW, Switzerland would abandon the option of explicitly placing itself under a nuclear umbrella within the framework of such alliances. Commentators in Berne agree that Switzerland would be ill-advised from a foreign and security policy perspective to sign a treaty that not only questions the security doctrine of our most important partners but also attacks it directly by stigmatising nuclear weapons.

Closer ties – NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Swiss Defence Minister Viola Amherd met at the 2022 World Economic Forum in Davos. Photo: Keystone

Immediately after the Second World War, Switzerland made plans to build atomic bombs of its own. Read the Swiss National Museum's blog post for more details: [revue.link/bomb](https://www.snm.ch/en/revue/link/bomb)

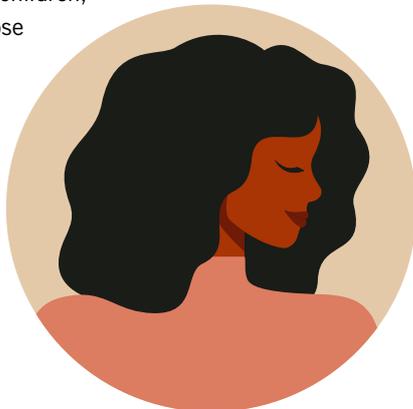
Switzerland: an ageing, happy country of solo households

The 2022–2023 Statistical Yearbook provides a snapshot of Switzerland. A country of strong demographic growth, solely due to immigration. The people consider themselves happy. They are also highly mobile: everyone has a car.

20%

A country of single-person households

The richer a country is, the more people live alone. Wealthy Switzerland is no exception. Over one third of Switzerland's one million households comprise one person. In other words, almost 20% of the permanent resident population live alone. Households without children have more than doubled since 1970. At the same time, single-person households have tripled. That said, even if family households with children represent less than a third of the total, they still account for 41% of the population. As for single-parent households, they account for 16% of all family households. Do people like living alone? It seems that those who live with a partner, with or without children, are a lot more content with life than those who live alone or as a single parent. In 2010, it was estimated that one marriage in two risked ending in divorce. Going by current forecasts, that statistic is now two marriages in five. Finally, more women than men are subjected to violence. In 2022, the police recorded a total of 42 homicides, 25 of which took place within the home; 18 of these 25 casualties were female.



85 years old

An ageing country

Switzerland is an ageing country, and the population is no longer self-sustaining, as there are more deaths than births. At the start of the twentieth century, Switzerland averaged 3.7 births per woman, compared to 1.39 today. A rate of 2.1 births per woman is needed to sustain the population. The country's growth is thus attributable to its foreign nationals. The population of Switzerland grew from 4.717 million in 1950 to 7.204 million in 2000. It passed the eight million mark in 2020, rising to nine million in 2023: a European growth record! The age pyramid is inexorably inverting. Between 1900 and 2022, the proportion of young people aged under 20 halved, from 40.7% to 19.9%. Over the same period, the proportion of the population over the age of 64 rose from 5.8% to 19.2%. The share of people aged 80 and over actually increased multiple times over, rising from 0.5% to 5.5%.

In 2022, Switzerland had 1,948 centenarians, three-quarters of whom were women. And their number keeps growing. One third of girls born in 2022 should reach the age of 100. Life expectancy at birth has doubled since the end of the nineteenth century. A baby girl born in 1950 had a life expectancy of 70 years, compared to 85 years today. Of course, ageing is not good for the health, and half of the population suffers from long-term health issues from the age of 75. Nonetheless, Switzerland's senior citizens seem happy for the most part. In 2021, almost two persons in five – from the age of 16 – said they were very satisfied with their life. And this feeling of wellbeing increases with age (not to mention level of education and income). However, this age imbalance poses massive challenges to the social insurance system, as the proportion of people paying contributions is in decline. There will also, at least in relative terms, be fewer health professionals to ensure that these cohorts of elderly people receive adequate healthcare.



26%

A country with a large foreign population

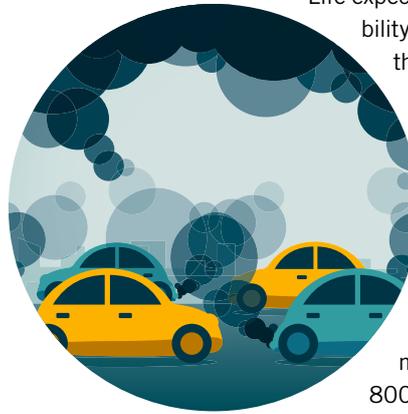
In 2022, 26% of Switzerland's permanent residents did not hold a Swiss passport. But almost one fifth of these foreign residents were born in Switzerland. In the same year, 40% of the permanent resident population aged 15 or over comprised people with a migratory background. Granted, this does include something unique in Europe – apart from Luxembourg and its 47% of foreign nationals – the contribution of cross-border workers, which has increased spectacularly in some regions. One example is the number of French cross-border workers, which increased from fewer than 80,000 persons before 2005 to almost 220,000 in 2022.

Net migration peaked in 1961 at over 100,000 persons. The figure for 2021 was 61,500 persons. This transition has been ongoing since 1999, when international migration became the main demographic growth driver, conclusively overtaking natural growth. Moreover, in 2020 61,000 Swiss babies were born in Switzerland as against 24,900 non-Swiss births. The biggest foreign communities are from Italy, Germany and Portugal. This is reflected in the languages spoken, as the proportion of persons speaking Italian (23%) is the same as that of people speaking languages other than the four national ones. As regards asylum, there were 24,511 asylum applications in 2022, which is close to what the average has been for the past 25 years (22,500 applicants). These asylum seekers are mainly from Afghanistan, Turkey, Eritrea and Syria. In addition to this total, there are about 66,000 Ukrainian refugees who had protected status with S permits at the end of 2023.



6.6 million

A highly motorised country



Life expectancy is a sign of a rich country. So is mobility. The Swiss move around a lot. In 2021, they covered an average of 30 km per person daily within the country. Most of the daily distances covered within the country – 69% in 2021 – are by car. Leisure pursuits are the main reason for mobility, accounting for 43% of kilometres travelled. Next comes work (28%). In 2022, Switzerland had almost 6.6 million registered motorised vehicles, 4.7 million of which were passenger cars and 800,000 motorcycles. Since 1980, the number of passenger cars has more than doubled and

there are almost six times as many motorcycles. Road transport costs amount to 76.8 billion Swiss francs in total, considerably more than rail transport costs (12.1 billion). In 2022, there were 18,396 accidents on Swiss roads: 241 people lost their lives, 4,002 were severely injured and 17,896 slightly hurt. Motorised transport is largely powered by fossil fuel (93% in 2022). In 2021, motorised transport accounted for 38% of CO₂ emissions in Switzerland (excluding international aviation).

“Much like a compass, the Swiss Statistical Yearbook can help guide you on a journey of discovery through Switzerland.” That is how the director general of the Federal Statistical Office, Georges-Simon Ulrich, describes the latest edition of this statistics bible. The yearbook is 412 pages long and covers a whole raft of subjects. We cover three of the main ones here, which relate to demography, immigration and mobility and include a detailed section on CO₂ emissions.

In German: Die Schweiz in Zahlen - Statistisches Jahrbuch 2022/2023; date of publication 30 November 2023, ISBN 978-3-303-00720-4, 412 pages, CHF 90



Rejecting the violence she suffered

Author Mariella Mehr fought passionately to rehabilitate the children – like her – who were shut away from society.



Mariella Mehr
(1947-2022)

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Published in 1981, “Steinzeit” (which translates as “Stone Age”) provides a shocking piece of human testimony that many have not forgotten. The book documents the experiences of a girl called Silvia, who was a child victim of the enforced welfare measures that were once taken against Switzerland’s minority Yenish population – an injustice that she indeed calls the Stone Age.

“Listen! I want to live, despite all the predictions you made about me 30 years ago. I want to live. Do nothing but live,” says Silvia after growing into a young adult. Her will to survive, expressed with great anger, and the experiences that she describes have an immediate authenticity: the mother who did not want her child, and the physical and psychological trauma inflicted on this child – a young member of the Yenish minority with no legal rights – in various homes and institutions.

Trauma

Mariella Mehr, who was born in Zurich on 27 December 1947 to a Yenish mother and a father whose identity long remained unknown, leaves little to the imagination as to her own journey in this, her debut work. After Pro Juventute put her into foster care, Mehr was sexually abused as a small child. She spent time at a psychiatric clinic and was abused by her foster father. She was sent to an orphanage and then to residential school. She gave birth to a boy at Hindelbank women’s prison. Pro Juventute took her son away. She attempted suicide and was admitted to a clinic. Then she put these experiences into writing.

Impressive literary talent

“Steinzeit” not only laid bare the serial abuse to which Mehr was ex-

posed, but also gave a first glimpse of the literary talent that she would continue to display over future decades. In her 1994 novel “Zeus oder der Zwillingssohn”, the Greek god of gods Zeus ends up as a patient in Waldau psychiatric clinic, where one of his female victims brutally mauls and castrates him as if to avenge millions of other victims. Of “Daskind” (1995), Mehr’s novel about a character who

“For twenty-five years, I have been grappling like crazy with the words to articulate fear. I was mute for the first five years, bereft of interaction. Autism means meeting the world and responding with deafening silence.”

Excerpt from “Steinzeit”, Mariella Mehr, paperback, Zytglogge Verlag, Basel.

suffers repeated torture and abuse before rising up against this injustice, the “NZZ” wrote: “If prose made people ill, this book could fill entire hospitals.” “Brandzauber” (1998) is a lament to a Yenish and a Jewish girl who are inseparable at boarding school and meet death “like two angels of fire”.

And in “Akte M. Xenos ill.* 1947 – Akte C. Xenos ill.* 1966”, a play named

after the title of the file that Pro Juventute kept on her, Mehr documents the devastating impact that Switzerland’s racist child welfare policies not only had on her but others too. The author never let the issue go and continued to exercise her agile mind right to the end, writing poems that constitute her final and perhaps most shocking testimony of all. “The future? / It will never free me, / the unwanted child. / Come, she says, / death is an eyelash / on the eyelid of light.”

Making peace with the past

On 5 September 2022, Mariella Mehr died in a Zurich care home at the age of 74. Anyone who met her in her final months would have encountered a woman who had made peace with her almost unbearable past experiences. Her weathered features may have told a different story, but she gave a cheerful, relaxed impression.

Mehr took one of her final journeys in November 2021. Not to the Grand Canyon in Arizona, a natural wonder she would have loved to have visited, but to Berne and the “Vote now!” exhibition, which included a section devoted to her own tireless campaigning. She took fiendish delight in the curator refusing to believe that the anonymous wheelchair user taking part in a tour of the exhibition, clad in a black leather jacket, was none other than Mariella Mehr.

Bibliography: “Steinzeit” is available in paperback from Zytglogge Verlag in Basel. The French translation, “Age de pierre” by Jeanne Etoré, was published in 1987 by Aubier-Montaigne in Paris.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZURICH

Declaration of love for the threatened Alpine glaciers



NICOLE HERZOG-VERREY:
“Gletscherliebe.
Glacier, mon amour”
Book of photographs with texts in
German and French. Weber Verlag,
Thun 2023. 255 pages, CHF 69

This special love story stems from a seminal experience: in 2007, Swiss Abroad Nicole Herzog-Verrey, who spends every summer in the Valais Alps, visited Trient Glacier with some Spanish friends. However, where just a few years before an imposing glacier snout had stood, there was nothing left. That made her very sad, writes the author in the introduction to her work “Gletscherliebe. Glacier, mon amour” (which translates as “My love for glaciers”). Following her thought-provoking experience, she wondered how, as a visual artist, she could draw attention to the consequences of climate change.

For the next 14 years, Herzog-Verrey visited Alpine glaciers in Switzerland and France every summer – totalling 40 glaciers by 2022. She compiled an illustrated book of these visits, showing the past beauty of this threatened world in all its glory: imposing glacier crevasses, turquoise blue colours and lighthearted close-ups of pieces of ice and stone resembling forbidding statues surveying the landscape from their thrones.

The author did not make any scientific statement through her work; she let her feelings guide her instead: “I was looking out for ‘my’ glaciers as if they were suffering beings.” She recorded her impressions of her visits to the vanishing ice in brief texts, which she uses as introductions to the chapters on the different glaciers. Nicole Herzog-Verrey visited some sites more than once over those years. She was especially interested in glacier snouts, where the disparity is clearest. The foot of the Rhone glacier at the Furka pass is one such example; here, protective covers are placed on the ice in the summer to preserve the ice grottos for the tourists.

Valais mountain guide Herbert Volken wrote the preface to the book. He accompanied the photographer on a two-day tour of the Aletsch Glacier. Volken wrote that he had rarely met someone who saw and appreciated the innumerable aesthetic features and wonders of nature with such a keen eye and refined sensitivity.

The author was born in Zurich in 1947, has roots in French-speaking Switzerland and lives in Madrid. She spent 25 years working as a photographer for many magazines and has been a freelance visual artist since 2005.

THEODORA PETER

A possible dignified farewell



ZÜRI WEST:
“Loch dür Zyt”
(Sound Service, 2023)

A new Züri West album. This is great news in itself – and more than we might have expected. After frontman Kuno Lauener, 62, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis six years ago, it looked like the Züri West story had come to an end that was as abrupt as it was sad.

What we can be sure of is that the band will never perform live again. Nevertheless, the Bern combo have made another record. “Loch dür Zyt” (Hole Through Time) is their first since “Love” in 2017. And some things have changed. Gere Stäubli and Wolfgang Zwieler have left the band, while Florian Senn (former Lovebugs) on bass and Kevin Chesham on drums have joined.

There are 13 new songs, mainly written by Kuno Lauener, including a couple of covers. It is a relaxed, accomplished, compact series of tracks that recount the passing of time, look to the past and question the meaning of life. The lyrics tell of resignation, bewilderment, acceptance, fatalism, melancholy – and defiance. They reflect Lauener’s personal journey with his illness and are both relevant and real. A form of poetry that cuts to the bone.

It is a moving album. Lauener is clinging on as best he can. He will never give up. “I louffe und i louffe u d’Chäuti stieucht mr schier dr Schnuuf / Aber chum du nume du Jahr du Nöis / No grad gieben i nid uf,” he sings on “Winterhale” (I walk on and on, and the cold almost takes my breath away / But come on, new year / I’m not giving up yet). “Blätter gheie”, an adaptation of a poem by Franz Hohler, is another standout track: “Blätter fallen, sie werden vom Wind zu einem letzten Tanz gebeten, sie sterben. Und dann wird es still,” the poem reads. (Leaves fall. They dance a final dance in the wind before they die. Then quiet descends.)

But the title song steals the show. Most of its lyrics originate or – to be precise – are derived from an old song called “Z.W.,” which dates back 35 years to the band’s debut album “Sport und Musik”. The new, updated version is a nod to the past. Life has come full circle. And we are here to witness it. “U mis einsame Härz schmärzt so fescht” (Oh, my lonely heart hurts so bad) in “Z.W.” has morphed into “U mis einsame Härz wo chlopfet u chlopfet” (Oh, my lonely heart keeps on beating) in the new album. A subtle but telling difference.

Does this LP finally mark the end of the road for Züri West? If so, it is a dignified, poignant farewell.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Lio still has a lot to learn

Will robots be our carers in the future? Machines may well support nursing staff one day. But before then, nurses want most of all to see the implementation of the popular initiative “For better nursing care”, which received the thumbs-up from the electorate in 2021.

EVELINE RUTZ

Lio tells jokes, plays music and knows what the weather will be like. Lio can use a lift and transport things - listens and is patient. Lio is a robot created to ease the burden on nursing staff. First of all, however, the “assistant” has to learn the ropes. “It currently creates more work rather than supporting us,” says Marlies Petrig from the Kompetenzzentrum Pflege und Gesundheit (KZU) nursing home in Embrach. Lio must be spoken to clearly and often has to be told things more than once. Even bringing a drink is a stretch for the robot. Its fine motor skills are limited and it needs regular updates. Lio is far from being able to compete with the staff. Petrig says: “Anyone who was worried about being replaced by Lio wasn’t worried for long.”

The service robot has been at the KZU since June 2022 as part of a pilot project. “We are going to work more with technology going forward,” says Marlies Petrig. It’s especially helpful for the younger employees to get used to these innovations at an early stage so they can familiarise themselves with the technological and ethical issues, she adds.

Designed for repetitive tasks

One day, assistant robots like Lio may well help alleviate the nursing crisis. “They can help offset the staff shortage,” says Albino Miglialo from F&P Robotics, the company that created Lio. Machines are best suited to repetitive tasks, so the professionals have time to do other jobs. “Robots have a lot of potential and are developing fast,” says Miglialo.

In the meantime, the staff hope most of all to see the popular initiative “For better nursing care” bear fruit. It won a clear majority when it

came to a vote on 28 November 2021, with 61 per cent of the Swiss electorate voting in favour. The Swiss Abroad approved the initiative with a similar majority. Hospitals, retirement and nursing homes celebrated: finally, there would be more autonomy and better working conditions for nursing staff. A training drive was also going to attract more people to the profession, at a time when the ageing nature

Robot Lio can also help with making people laugh – it can tell jokes.

Photo: Keystone

of society is posing major challenges. Two years on and not much has changed on the ground. Marlies Petrig feels patience among the nurses is wearing thin. They had expected prompt improvements, she says: “People tend not to realise that it takes time to convert political initiatives into something more tangible.” The situation has actually deteriorated since 2021: the labour market



has dried up and universities of applied sciences are receiving fewer applications. Some cantons and establishments have increased salaries. The Nursing Care Initiative itself, however, is still awaiting implementation.

The professional association wants more action

“You could say that is the price of our democracy,” says Yvonne Ribi, managing director of SBK, the Swiss professional nursing association. Although it may be understandable in political terms, practically speaking the implementation really needs to proceed “much more quickly”, she says. “Many skilled nurses have left and are continuing to leave the profession and too few nurses are receiving training.” Many jobs are not being filled: the workload is being shared among fewer workers.

The Federal Council promised to move the process forward on the day of the vote. As an initial step, it adopted the demands for basic and advanced training. The cantons must, for example, contribute in future to the costs incurred by health facilities when delivering practical training. Moreover, aspiring nurses attending a college of further education or university of applied sciences are to directly receive financial support in the form of education grants if they need help with their living expenses. These new provisions will come into force on 1 July 2024.

A second stage targets better working conditions. The planned measures include more stringent roster requirements. Staff must know in advance when they have to work and receive extra compensation for changes made at short notice. Nurses are also to be able to charge for cer-



Photo: Raphael Moser, Berner Zeitung

“We have to move as quickly as possible to encourage people to stay in the job after completing their training.”

Yvonne Ribi

tain services directly without authorisation from a doctor. This point may still be the subject of discussions in parliament. A decision is expected by the end of 2025.

Employers can make their own improvements

“Of course, we would rather have seen direct improvements than have to go through an incremental process,” says SBK representative Ribi. There will be investment in training from mid-2024 but it’s not enough. “We also have to move as quickly as possible to encourage people to stay in the job after completing their training.”

Yvonne Ribi is pleased that some institutions have acted on their own initiative since the popular decision. They recognised the urgency of the matter and “took steps in the right direction”. The Federal Council has also mentioned taking the opportunity to introduce improvements quickly. In response to criticism from parliament, it wrote that the onus is on the cantons, companies and so-

cial partners to initiate measures within their areas of responsibility – “without waiting for the popular initiative to be implemented at a national level.”

So, what is the KZU nursing home doing to offer an attractive working environment? The first priority is the team leaders, says Marlies Petrig. When the working day can be very challenging and draining, the atmosphere within the team is a game changer. That’s why social skills are needed in addition to professional expertise. The KZU supports staff in their career development and makes a point of keeping work processes simple. “And we convey the meaningfulness of our job – we work at the heartbeat of life itself.”

Lio is well received by most people

Lio gets noticed as he moves along the corridors at Embrach. Residents, visitors and staff greet him with curiosity for the most part. However, some react sceptically or even dismissively. “That’s their prerogative,” says Petrig. She points out that the robot is unmistakably a robot and doesn’t look human. “The distinction has to be clear.” Lio could one day be transporting blood samples to the KZU laboratory, documenting processes and providing entertainment. Sensitive and complex tasks, however, remain reserved for the health-care professionals. Marlies Petrig stresses that “Whoever needs care must be able to rely on it coming from people. Robotics plays a supporting role.”

Incidentally, even a robot feels the strain after a long shift. When Lio is low on energy, it goes to the charging station to dock and take a break.

Changes to OASI – what these mean for the Swiss Abroad

New rules on pension provision came into force on 1 January 2024. These also have important implications for the Swiss Abroad. This article takes a closer look at the changes and explains how they could affect your future plans.

On 25 September 2022, Swiss voters approved the OASI 21 reform package to stabilise the old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) state pension system. The aims of OASI 21 are to safeguard and maintain the level of state pension, secure the financial equilibrium of OASI in the next decade, and respond to the need for greater flexibility.

Change 1:

Harmonising the reference age

Instead of talking about the retirement age, we now refer to the reference age. This is the change that has made headlines, because the reference age for women will now be 65 – the same as for men. However, the female reference age will not be increased immediately but gradually, starting from 2025.

Female reference age transitional phase

Year	Female reference age	Birth year
2024	64 (no increase)	1960
2025	64 and 3 months	1961
2026	64 and 6 months	1962
2027	64 and 9 months	1963
2029	65	From 1964

Change 2:

Compensation for women in the “transitional generation”

As a result of the change in the reference age, women in the “transitional generation” (born in years 1961 to 1969, who will reach the OASI reference age after the reform



OASI 21 provides more opportunities for flexible retirement, but also involves challenges. Photo: Adobe Stock, freebird7977

comes into force) will be entitled to compensation. Firstly, women in this age bracket can draw their pension from the age of 62 and receive lower reduction rates. Secondly, they will receive a lifelong monthly OASI supplement if they do not draw their pension early. The amount of the supplement will depend on the person's year of birth and their OASI contributions. Provided they have no gaps in OASI contributions, their pension supplement will be at least 12.50 Swiss francs and a maximum of 160 Swiss francs per month.

Change 3: Greater flexibility in the choice of retirement date

It has already been possible for some time for men and women to draw their OASI old-age pension one or two years early or defer it for up to five years after the statutory retirement age. However, it was only for the

You have greater flexibility on when to draw your pension, but careful planning is necessary to work out what is best for you before you make any decision.

full pension amount. Thanks to the OASI 21 reform, it is now also possible to draw a partial pension. For example, you can withdraw 20 per cent of your old-age pension at the age of 63 and withdraw the remaining 80 per cent at the age of 65. The same applies if you wish to defer your retirement. This level of flexibility may be attractive in theory, but it also opens up numerous options that need to be considered depending on your individual circumstances.

The most important changes from 1 January 2024:

- Greater flexibility in the choice of retirement date
- Incentives to work beyond the age of 65
- Retirement age (now called the reference age) to increase to 65 for women (1 January 2025 onwards)

Change relating to voluntary OASI

If you pay contributions under the voluntary OASI scheme, a specific change now applies to you from 2024. Until now, you would have been automatically excluded from making further voluntary OASI contributions if you drew your old-age pension early. However, you can now take your pension early but continue to pay voluntary contributions until you reach the reference age. There is a good chance that these contributions and the subsequent contribution periods that you acquire will help to boost your pension when you reach the reference age.

The CCO – your central hub for information and advice

In the last 12 months, the Central Compensation Office (CCO) has adapted all its systems to work in accordance with the new statutory provisions that came into force on 1 January 2024. This applies to centralised systems like ACOR (pension calculation

If you pay contributions under the voluntary OASI scheme, you can now continue with these contributions even if you take your pension early. There is a good chance that this will help to boost your pension.

tool) as well as various registers and specialist applications used within the CCO. Our customer advisers underwent intense training to familiarise themselves with the flexible new options on pension withdrawal and on pension recalculation after the reference age, so that they can provide you with the best possible advice and support.

Practical advice

If you are considering various options (such as drawing your pension early or continuing to work) and are unsure how much your pension will be worth, we recommend that you obtain a pension forecast calculation as soon as possible via our website ([revue.link/prognosis](https://www.revue.link/prognosis)). Women born in the years 1961 to 1969 can also go on the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) website and work out the date on which they reach the reference age and how much their pension supplement and reduction rate will be (see “Individuelle Abfragen” at [revue.link/individuell](https://www.revue.link/individuell); French and Italian also available).

OASI 21 provides more opportunities for flexible retirement, but also involves challenges. Which is why there are some practical things that all those affected by the changes can do in preparation. The CCO will be happy to help you in this process.

EVA GORI, COMMUNICATION, CENTRAL COMPENSATION OFFICE CCO

Further information:

Further general information on the reform to stabilise OASI (OASI 21), available in German, French and Italian: [revue.link/ahv21](https://www.revue.link/ahv21)

More on pensions:	revue.link/pensions
What is changing?	revue.link/merkblatt31
OASI benefits:	revue.link/entitlements
Flexible pension withdrawal:	revue.link/flexibility
Pension forecast calculation:	revue.link/forecast
Pension recalculation after the reference age:	revue.link/recalculation

Explanatory video providing a simple, easy-to-understand overview of the reform package to stabilise OASI: [revue.link/oasivideo](https://www.revue.link/oasivideo)

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Federal votes

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

- The next voting date is 9 June 2024. The proposals for submission to the people will be published here in the next edition of “Swiss Review”, edition 3/24 May 2024.

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



Popular initiatives

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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A parliamentary group for the “Fifth Switzerland”

The spring session of the Swiss parliament saw the reconstituted Swiss Abroad parliamentary group convene for its first meeting – a fitting juncture for us to look more closely at the group.



Members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group often meet early in the morning at the Federal Palace. Here they are in discussion with former Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr. Archive photo: Danielle Liniger (2023)

Bees, the Swiss Guide and Scout Movement, and the “Fifth Switzerland” have little in common, you would think. But they each have their own parliamentary group. Parliamentary groups offer like-minded members of the National Council and Council of States the opportunity to meet, interact and share views and ideas among themselves and with representative groups from outside.

The “Fifth Switzerland” has had its own dedicated parliamentary group for the last 20 years. The Swiss Abroad parliamentary group was founded in 2004 to raise awareness of issues affecting the international mobility of Swiss nationals and to represent the political interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” more effectively. It therefore acts as an important link between the Swiss Abroad and the Swiss Federal Assembly.

New members

The composition of the group changes at the beginning of every legislative period. Some members have come and gone, but Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter (Centre, Basel-Landschaft), Carlo Sommaruga (SP, Geneva) and Martina Bircher (SVP, Aargau) remain in the group as co-chairs. The group office – cur-

rently consisting of Nicolas Walder (Greens, Geneva), Laurent Wehrli (FDP, Vaud) and the Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) Ariane Rustichelli – assists them in their work. The OSA acts as a secretariat to the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group and prepares meeting agendas with the co-chairs.

Discussing the political agenda

Meetings take place four times a year, at the beginning of every parliamentary session. Led by the co-chairs, members at these meetings discuss the political motions put forward on the agenda and their implications for the “Fifth Switzerland”. External experts are also regularly invited to provide the parliamentary group with an in-depth look at issues that are relevant to the Swiss Abroad.

The primary objective in the new legislative period will be to work out how best to meet the demands of the 2023–27 OSA election manifesto. Based on the manifesto, members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group submit motions frequently or put urgent questions to the Federal Council.

SMILLA SCHÄR, SWISSCOMMUNITY

A wonderful week of snow

Last winter, snow was hard to come by at our holiday camp in Valbella. But there was no shortage this time. There was so much snow that our coach was unable to reach our camp base, and we had to alight a few hundred metres down the road. It quickly transpired that the children were much happier with all this snow than our coach driver Casi was. We were certainly going to have a great time together.

Divided into small groups based on their level of skiing or snowboarding proficiency, the children enjoyed a wonderful week of fun in the snow. Two camp leaders were designated to each group. All our staff returned back home from camp happy but exhausted, the abundant snow having ensured a varied programme of activities. We spent most days on the piste, but gave the children a mid-camp day off to go to the swimming baths or skate at the open-air ice rink. Our intrepid children also took the opportunity to try something different: a snowshoe hiking tour offering breathtaking views of Lake Heid.

Making traditional igloos was a particular highlight. The process of building them would have been quicker without help from the children, but having fun and making memories was what mattered. We said to the children that they could spend the night in their igloos. Two kids took us up on our offer

and used their igloo as a bedroom for the rest of the trip. Our staff would check up on them every night, taking the opportunity to stretch their legs and walk a lap of the camp building.

We are planning to hold two holiday camps next winter. One of them will take place in Valbella again (for children aged 12 to 14), the other in the Melch Valley in central Switzerland (for children aged eight to 14). We are considering offering beginners the opportunity to spend the first two days of their winter holiday camp at ski school, so that they pick up skiing faster, have more fun and give our camp leaders a breather. Our leaders are very professional, but not all of them are professional ski instructors. Your opinion as parents is important to us, so please let us know what you think of the idea by writing to us at info@sjas.ch.

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA


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90 years of camps – a successful New Year camp

The 2024 jubilee year got off to a great start with a fantastic winter camp. Snow, sun, motivated campers and leaders: all the necessary ingredients were in place for an unforgettable time in the Swiss mountains.

The New Year camp at Grächen (VS) was attended by 28 young people. They had great fun hurtling down the slopes at the Valais ski resort. For some, it was their first experience of snow, while others seized the opportunity to make their first descents of the season. There were skiing and snowboarding lessons delivered by qualified instructors for all levels from beginner to advanced, allowing everyone to get the most out of their winter adventure.

Away from the slopes, the camp leaders devised a varied programme: toasting marshmallows around a campfire, karaoke evenings and board games in the chalet. Moments filled with fun, sharing and laughter. Campers and leaders rang in the New Year in glorious sunshine and high spirits. On 1 January, they gave their tired legs a rest and visited Zermatt. The group went for a walk and took the opportunity to admire the mighty Matterhorn.

After ten days enjoying each other's company and many memorable moments, the campers returned home with memories to last a lifetime.

MARIE BLOCH, YOUTH SERVICE


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Gain initial work experience in Switzerland

Interested in an internship in Switzerland or gaining an insight into the world of work? The *educationsuisse* advisory service on education in Switzerland also provides tips on initial work experience for young Swiss Abroad.

On the farm

The sound of cowbells and the smell of hay... helping out on a farm is fun and an experience for life. The Agriviva association arranges placements lasting several weeks for young people up to the age of 25 from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you help a farming family with their daily work. More detailed information on Agriviva can be found at www.agriviva.ch or by sending an email to info@agriviva.ch.

Teaching at a school

Young students or recent graduates from countries where English, German, French, Spanish or Italian is the official national language can gain experience in the teaching profession. As native speakers they bring added value to language lessons at upper secondary schools or vocational schools and pass on the culture of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which covers their living costs in Switzerland. The application period for the school year 2024/25 runs until the end of March 2024 or by agreement.

More detailed information on the Language Assistants Programme can be found at revue.link/movetiae or by sending an email to edith.funicello@movetia.ch.

Au-pair

Looking after children and helping out in the host family's household are part of everyday life as an au pair. In addition to board and lodging, there is pocket money and usually enough free time to attend a language course.

Internship

It is not easy to find an internship from abroad, but it is possible. There are various ways to gain initial work experience in Switzerland. It takes personal initiative: numerous internet portals publish vacancies that you can apply for online.

Address lists and further information on your stay in Switzerland can be obtained from *educationsuisse*.

RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE



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Elias, a Swiss Abroad from Australia, was drawn to the Swiss mountains. He did his Agriviva assignment in Maloja, in the canton of Grisons. Photo provided



Claire Spielmann, a Swiss Abroad from the USA, works as a language assistant at a cantonal school in Zurich. Under revue.link/claire you can read an interview with her. Photo provided

Discussion

Catholic priests, who are supposed to represent faith and morality, have sexually abused minors: this fact – incidentally disclosed by the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland itself – has shocked many “Swiss Review” readers. Read some of their responses below.



EUGENIO WETTER NAVARRO, SANTIAGO, CHILE

I suspect and hope that the Swiss Catholic Church has dismissed all the priests who sexually abused children and reported them to the authorities and that they are now in prison like any other criminal deserves. If this is not the case, the Swiss government should act.

ADNANE BEN CHAABANE, TUNIS, TUNISIA

Two points stand out to me. First, there is the source of this information. I am even

more shocked to learn that these findings came from combing through the archives. That means people knew what was happening and saw fit to document it without sounding the alarm. That makes it three times as bad. The second point is about how human instinct is always the same. Whether within or outside the church, whatever the religion, it isn't that different to animal instinct.

ANTON MOOS, KHON KAEN, THAILAND

I am particularly unimpressed by the light tone of the editorial on this subject. I can say from personal experience, even though I have not suffered abuse myself, that suggestive behaviour by a priest harms religious feeling. Granted, abuse exists in all religious communities. I think perversion and instinctual aberrations can never be eliminated.

However, child abuse is a much bigger issue outside the church. In my view, the modern absence of religion in the lives of many people is not so much due to the abuse as to the growth over the years of “superficial” lifestyles. People are more interested in consumption, material thoughts, excessive individualism and the fun culture. It's too easy to just take it out on the church. But that also hurts those people who are sincere about living a moral life and, for example, following the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount in their everyday lives.

RICHARD TISSOT, USA

Religion is not a path to God; faith and love are. Losing one's faith over a human's bid for power over another is the true crime here.

BEULAH DALE FISCHER, GREAT BRITAIN

I am pleased that finally everyone is reacting to an event that we've suppressed for so long. I am a Catholic and have always had a good experience with the church. Now I see that I was just lucky.

The 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad – Lucerne set for a historic celebration

Lucerne is getting ready to host the Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 11 to 13 July 2024. This, the 100th staging of the event, will go down as an extraordinary milestone in the storied history of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

The 100th Congress is sure to be an unforgettable event in Lucerne. “Together across borders” is the slogan of this year's event, drilling down in particular on the theme of Swiss emigration. The Congress will not only examine why and how people emigrate from Switzerland, but also consider the attachment that expatriates feel to Switzerland and to family who still live there. It will also discuss technological advances in information provision and the opportunities they provide for the “Fifth Switzerland”.

It was no coincidence that the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity,

chose the Lucerne Culture and Congress Centre (KKL Luzern) as the venue for its 100th Congress. KKL Luzern is more than just a building – it is an iconic cultural hub marrying contemporary architecture and Swiss tradition. It was designed by renowned architect Jean Nouvel, whose work embodies the innovative spirit and cosmopolitan values that characterise Switzerland.



Photo: Urs Wyss, Lucerne Tourism

Brief schedule: Friday, 12 July, promises to be an extraordinary day, featuring an address from a federal government representative as well as speeches by other high-calibre speakers. It will be a time for enriching reunions and conversation among old friends. Alpine horns will reverberate on Saturday, 13 July, the day of the traditional Congress excursion. This year's destination is the Square of the Swiss Abroad in Brunnen (canton of Schwyz). Various surprises await as we celebrate the 100th staging of the Congress at this poignant landmark. Sign up for the event and read more about the schedule, the city of Lucerne and the venue KKL Luzern by scanning the QR code or visiting our website at revue.link/congress24.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD, SWISSCOMMUNITY



Your donation goes a long way

Many of the things that the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Swiss-Community, offers are very reasonably priced or even free of charge. Donations make this possible. Those who donate appreciate the fact that they can give money for specific purposes. Here are three examples.

MANUEL BARRIONUEVO HAFNER, SPAIN

Of course, child abuse by members of the clergy in Switzerland is unacceptable, and not only in Switzerland. At the same time, let's not forget that the Catholic Church has done a lot of good for the community and for the culture of the country.

YVAN COCHARD, FRANCE

The Catholic Church has turned away from Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. It is riddled with false doctrines. Tradition is placed above everything else. Unfortunately, it is not the only church to have abandoned the gospel, the good news.

GÉRARD SAUTEBIN, FRANCE

Some representatives of the Church scorn the good word that Jesus Christ imparted and taught us. They behave like the Pharisees during the lifetime of Jesus. Throughout the history of Christianity, people from the church have tarnished the image of our Christian religion in the pursuit of their personal interests, whether material, fleeting or carnal.

MARGARITHA LEIJTEN, BREDA, NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, the issue of sexual misconduct by Catholic priests and chaplains has been out in the open for a long time. This is the first time I have read that Switzerland had covered up the issue until now and that the clergy had been sexually abusing children for years. I'm glad it's finally come to light!

SASCHA LÜTHI, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

For as long as celibacy remains mandatory, the situation will not improve. And even if the celibacy requirement is lifted, it still won't change things...

Ensuring the future of "Swiss Review"

The experienced editorial team at "Swiss Review" is well-versed in giving their independent journalistic take on the latest burning issues in Switzerland and making this content relatable to readers in the "Fifth Switzerland". Through your donation, you can support independent, quality journalism directly. Given that printing and mailing costs are so prohibitively high at the moment, we are particularly grateful for donations from readers of the print edition.

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Giving young people the chance to make memories

Our Youth Service offers a range of fun-packed summer and winter camps that allow 15 to 18 year olds to deepen their connection to Switzerland. These camps also enable young Swiss Abroad to come together from all corners of the world and spend an enriching time in each other's company. The Youth Service keeps participation costs intentionally low and provides discounts to financially less advantaged recipients. It can do this thanks to the donations it receives.

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Leaving your home country and making a new life in a different country is no easy matter. Our Legal Department offers free advice to Swiss Abroad. We also represent the interests of the "Fifth Switzerland" at a political level in Switzerland. This is in keeping with our commitment as a recognised non-profit organisation – for which we rely on funding. You can support us through a donation or a bequest (click on the following link for more information on bequests: [revue.link/bequests](https://www.revue.ch/bequests)).

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The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is a recognised non-profit organisation and therefore tax-exempt. We will be happy to issue you with a donation receipt on request. Donations from Swiss Abroad are tax-deductible in several countries. Thanks to our partnership with Swiss Philanthropy, tax deductions are currently possible in France, Italy, Spain and the UK via the Transnational Giving Europe network.

Florian Baccaunaud is the person to contact for general questions about sponsorship, donations and bequests.

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