



# SWITZERLAND – FACTS AND FIGURES



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Nestled between the Alps and the Jura mountains, Switzerland is a communications and transport center between northern and southern Europe where European cultures and languages meet. No other country offers such great variety in so small an area. The Swiss economy's high degree of development exists thanks to a liberal economic system, political stability, and close integration with the economies of other countries. The state creates the necessary framework and only intervenes when this serves the interests of society at large. The high-quality education system and outstanding infrastructure form the basis for the competitiveness of the Swiss economy.

## 1.1 GEOGRAPHY

The total area of Switzerland is 41,285 square kilometers. Characterized by mountain and hill ranges, rivers and lakes, Switzerland offers a wide variety of landscapes in a small area – 220 kilometers from north to south, and 348 kilometers from west to east. The Swiss Alps, the hilly Mittelland region, which stretches from Lake Constance to Lake Geneva, and the Swiss Jura, a long range of fold mountains, form the three main geographical areas of the country. Due to its central location, Switzerland is a place where different cultures intersect and, at the same time, a communications and transportation hub between northern and southern Europe.

6% of Europe's fresh water is stored in the Swiss Alps, which is why Switzerland is also known as the "reservoir of Europe". Switzerland has numerous rivers and over 1,500 lakes, the two largest being shared with neighboring countries: Lake Geneva (Lac Léman) in the southwest is shared with France and Lake Constance in the northeast with Germany and Austria.

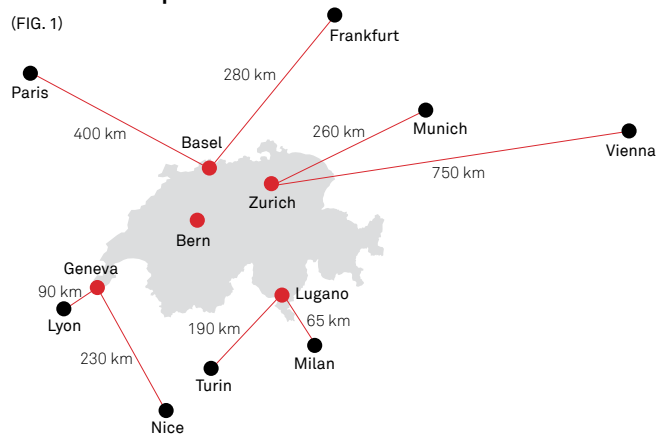
[www.swissworld.org](http://www.swissworld.org)

Switzerland – Facts and Figures

Languages: German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Japanese

### Reference Map

(FIG. 1)



Source: Compiled by the author

## 1.2 CLIMATE

Switzerland's climate is strongly influenced by the nearby Atlantic Ocean. The prevailing westerly winds bring moist, mild sea air. Cooling in the summer and warming in the winter, they also bring regular precipitation all year round in most areas. The Alps act as a clear climatic divider between northern and southern Switzerland; as its weather comes primarily from the direction of the Mediterranean, the south enjoys much milder winters than the north. Temperatures in Switzerland depend primarily on height above sea level. In the northern lowlands, the average temperature in January is around 1 °C, and in July around 17 °C, whereas on the southern plateau the corresponding average temperatures are 2 °C – 3 °C higher.

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

Weather and Climate

Languages: German, English, French, Italian

1.3 POLITICAL SYSTEM

1.3.1 Federal Structure

Switzerland is a nation created of its own will and formed from several ethnic groups with different languages and religions. The modern Swiss state was founded in 1848. Before this time, Switzerland consisted of a loose association of independent cantons. The abbreviation CH for Switzerland, as found in Internet addresses, for example, dates back to the official Latin name “Confoederatio Helvetica”.

The state has a federal structure and is divided into three political levels: municipal, cantonal and federal. The federal government is responsible for everything assigned to it under the constitution, such as foreign and security policy, customs and excise, the monetary system, national legislation, and defense. By global comparison, the 26 cantons have a high degree of control. Healthcare, education and culture are among the political areas in which they have a great deal of influence. As small and flexible political entities, the cantons also compete with each other in various areas. The proximity of politics to the business community and citizens is achieved through the federal structure, in which many public functions are executed at cantonal or municipal level. These in turn have a certain amount of autonomy and can thus implement solutions which are designed to meet local requirements.

[www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch)  
Online information from the federal, cantonal, and municipal administrations  
Languages: German, English, French, Italian

1.3.2 Separation of Powers at Federal Level

In accordance with the federal constitution, the Swiss people are the “sovereign” of the country – in other words, the highest political body, responsible for electing parliament. Every citizen with voting rights also has the right to participate in the shaping of the constitution and the law by means of referendum or initiative.

The legislative body at federal level is the parliament, which consists of two chambers: the National Council, representing the people with 200 members, and the Council of States, representing the 26 cantons with a total of 46 members. The National Council is elected directly by the people every four years; each canton forms one constituency. Cantonal representation is based on population, although each canton is entitled to at least one representative.

The federal government is known as the Federal Council, and it operates as a collegial body. Each of its seven members, who are elected by the Federal Assembly comprising the members of both chambers, heads one of the seven departments (ministries). The presidency of the government rotates between the Federal Councillors on an annual basis.

The highest jurisdiction in Switzerland is enforced by the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne. There is also the Federal Insurance Court in Lucerne, the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona, and the Federal Administrative Court in St. Gallen.

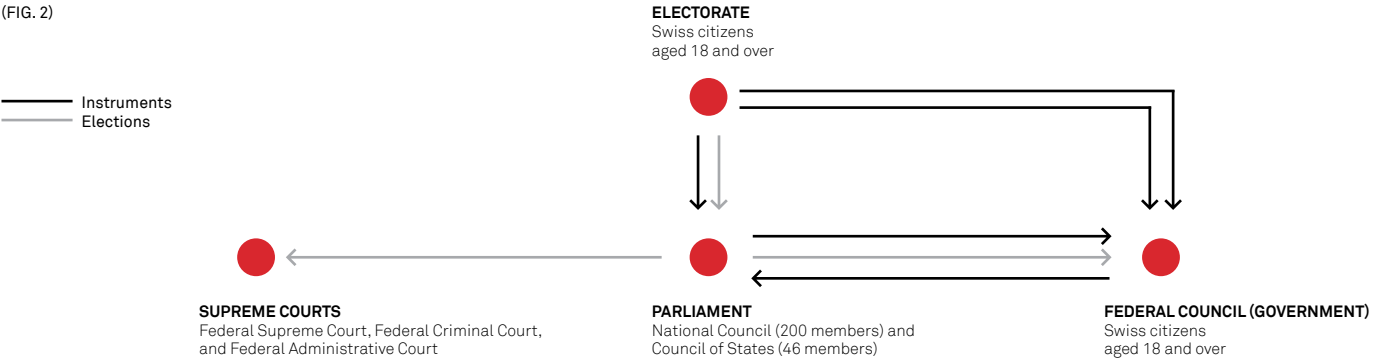
[www.bger.ch](http://www.bger.ch)  
Federal Supreme Court / Federal Insurance Court  
Languages: German, French, Italian

[www.bstger.ch](http://www.bstger.ch)  
Federal Criminal Court  
Languages: German, French, Italian

[www.bvger.ch](http://www.bvger.ch)  
Federal Administrative Court  
Languages: German, French, Italian

The Swiss Political System

(FIG. 2)



### 1.3.3 Direct Democracy and the Concordance System

There is hardly any other country where the electorate has such wide-ranging rights as it does in Switzerland. Citizens can request that a change or addition be made to the constitution by means of a popular initiative, or they may decide on parliamentary resolutions after the event by means of a referendum. Switzerland's long tradition of democracy, its relatively small size and population, high level of literacy and a wide variety of media are all factors which are key to the functioning of this special form of government. As a rule, the electorate is called upon to vote on federal bills four times a year.

A unique feature of Swiss politics is the concordance system. For decades, the most important political parties have put forward the seven Federal Councillors in a kind of coalition. Equally, not only those who win the elections have a seat in parliament; all parties are represented proportionally by number of votes. Resolutions are reached with varying majorities, depending on respective interests. Thus, as many groups as possible have the opportunity to express their opinions on a topic and contribute to achieving a broad-based compromise. This striving for consensus on the basis of the principles of collegiality and concordance contributes significantly to Switzerland's political stability.

### 1.3.4 Political Stability and Social Harmony

Studies on personal security and prosperity, social coherence and political stability have shown that Switzerland regularly leads all international comparisons in this regard (Fig. 3). The Swiss attach great importance to their independence. Despite the close proximity of different cultures and language groups, domestic stability is considerable. There is a high degree of tolerance and personal freedom. The relationship between employers and employees or their representatives is generally cooperative. Both sides are committed to resolving issues by means of negotiation. Thanks to this social harmony, the general level of prosperity in Switzerland has been rising for decades.

[www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch)  
Swiss Federal Authorities  
Languages: German, English, French, Italian

**“In Switzerland there is a high degree of tolerance and personal freedom.”**

#### Political Stability, 2015

Stable = 10, unstable = 0

(FIG. 3)

1	Norway	9.50
2	New Zealand	9.43
3	Canada	9.40
4	Denmark	9.37
5	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>9.16</b>
7	Singapore	8.63
8	Netherlands	8.63
9	Germany	8.53
10	USA	8.30
15	Ireland	7.51
16	Japan	7.50
18	United Kingdom	7.36
19	China	7.35
20	India	7.21
21	France	7.13
26	Belgium	6.50
34	Hong Kong SAR	5.84
41	Italy	4.83
48	Russia	4.46
54	Brazil	3.28

Source: IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook 2015

## 1.4 PUBLIC FINANCE

Switzerland lives up to its reputation as a stable country. The rate of inflation lies well below that in the EU states and the most important industrialized nations. This is also true for unemployment, with the unemployment rate regularly below 4%. Interest rates in Switzerland are also traditionally low, while the savings rate is high (national savings as a percentage of gross household income in 2012: 34.4%).

The public spending ratio measures expenditure by public administrations as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP). It includes spending by public authorities and the mandatory social insurances. In Switzerland, this ratio is at 31.4% (2012). Most European countries have a ratio of well above 50%.

The country is in a healthy financial situation. This applies to the financial budget of the central state, the federal government, and the cantons and municipalities. The average surplus ratio in the past five years (2009–2013) was 0.26% at state level.

**“National debt is far below  
that of most countries in Europe.”**

National debt is also below that of most countries in Europe. Total public sector debt amounts to 34.5% of GDP (2014). Compared to the average national debt ratio of the EU-27 (86.8%), Switzerland's ratio is relatively low. Most European countries have much higher levels (2014: Italy 132.3%, France 95.6%, Germany 74.9%).

[www.efv.admin.ch](http://www.efv.admin.ch)  
Federal Finance Administration (EFV)  
Languages: German, English, French, Italian

## 1.5 NEUTRALITY

In terms of foreign policy, Switzerland acts in accordance with the principle of neutrality. However, this does not in any way mean that it is an outsider on the world stage: Switzerland has been a member of the UN since 2002 and also plays an important role in the UN's specialized agencies. Furthermore, Switzerland has always played and still plays an active part in important economic organizations, such as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Switzerland has been neutral since 1515, which was also acknowledged by the great European powers after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. No other country in Europe can look back on such a long tradition of neutrality. Since the end of the Cold War, Switzerland has relaxed its definition of neutrality. As the role of NATO changed and it started to perform more peacekeeping missions, Switzerland signed up to the NATO Partnership for Peace in 1996. Thanks to its neutrality, Switzerland often acts as a mediator. In some cases, Swiss diplomats also represent the interests of countries which have no official contact with each other. Switzerland offers its neutral territory as a location for meetings and conferences of particular political delicacy.

[www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch)  
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA)  
Languages: German, English, French, Italian

## 1.6 POPULATION

The permanent resident population of Switzerland is around eight million. The proportion of those aged between 20 and 39 is 26.7%, with 17.8% aged 65 and over, and 20.2% aged under 20. Life expectancy is one of the highest in the world: 80.7 years for men and 85 years for women. The settlement structure is relatively decentralized and therefore not overly crowded: more than two thirds of the population lives in the five largest cities (Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Bern and Lausanne) and their greater metropolitan areas.

There are four official national languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. In northern, eastern and central Switzerland, the prevailing language is German, with the Swiss German dialect being used in everyday conversation. French is spoken in the western part of the country, as well as some parts of the Mittelland; Italian is spoken in the south (Ticino), and Romansh in certain parts of the canton of Grisons.



24.3% of the population is of foreign nationality (as of 2014). Although in the past most people who migrated to Switzerland were more socially disadvantaged, today the country increasingly attracts better educated foreign nationals, particularly highly skilled workers from Germany.

www.statistik.admin.ch  
Federal Statistical Office (BFS)  
Languages: German, English, French, Italian

## 1.7 COSMOPOLITANISM AND INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

### 1.7.1 Languages and Origins

Most Swiss nationals speak at least one foreign language, which they learn in elementary school. English is also increasingly included in the curriculum at an early stage. Due to the country's openness – including in terms of immigration – the range of languages actually spoken and used for communication is wide. In international business, English is very much in evidence alongside the national languages, and is used by many managers.

The co-existence of various language groups and different religions, and the large proportion of foreign residents result in a high degree of openness and tolerance. The Ernst & Young Globalization Index places Switzerland in the top five most cosmopolitan economies (Fig. 4). This makes it easier for foreign companies to conduct business from Switzerland. Although Europe is Switzerland's most important business partner, it also has very close relationships with other markets, particularly the U.S. and Asia. The financial centers of Zurich and Geneva in particular are melting pots of diverse cultures. In terms of culture, too, Switzerland has a tradition of tolerance and openness. Its neutrality means it has access to all countries, and it also welcomes reciprocal contact. This diversity has made it easy for both global companies and numerous international organizations to settle in Switzerland.

### 1.7.2 International Organizations

Because of its political independence and conscious commitment, also to international understanding, Switzerland serves as a platform for many international organizations including the UN with its headquarters in Geneva. Around 250 NGOs in consultative status with the UN also have their headquarters in Switzerland.

## Most Cosmopolitan Economies, 2012

(FIG. 4)

INDIVIDUAL RANKINGS					
Overall Rank		Capital	Labor	Technology	Culture Trade
1	Hong Kong SAR	1	18	1	1 2
2	Singapore	3	19	2	3 1
3	Ireland	4	2	22	2 6
4	Belgium	2	3	5	7 5
<b>5</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4 33</b>
6	Netherlands	6	10	3	9 10
8	Denmark	7	14	6	11 16
10	United Kingdom	12	15	13	13 14
11	Germany	15	35	14	16 4
14	France	17	21	11	12 29
25	USA	16	40	23	22 34
30	Italy	36	22	31	15 27
43	Japan	34	59	24	56 40
44	China	44	53	34	51 36
45	Brazil	30	57	49	39 47
48	Russia	52	50	38	57 38
54	India	48	42	60	52 50

Source: Ernst & Young, Globalization Index 2012

## International Organizations and Major Non-Governmental Organizations Based in Switzerland

(FIG. 5)

TRADE AND COMMERCE			
<b>AITIC</b>	Agency For International Trade, Information and Cooperation	Geneva	<a href="http://www.acici.org">www.acici.org</a>
<b>BITH</b>	International Office for Textiles and Clothing	Geneva	-
<b>BIS</b>	Bank for International Settlements	Basel	<a href="http://www.bis.org">www.bis.org</a>
<b>EFTA</b>	European Free Trade Association	Geneva	<a href="http://www.efta.int">www.efta.int</a>
<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum	Geneva	<a href="http://www.weforum.org">www.weforum.org</a>
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.wto.org">www.wto.org</a>
LAW			
<b>ACWL</b>	Advisory Centre on WTO Law	Geneva	<a href="http://www.acwl.ch">www.acwl.ch</a>
<b>Court OSCE</b>	OSCE Court of Conciliation and Arbitration	Geneva	<a href="http://www.osce.org/cca">www.osce.org/cca</a>
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for Standardization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.iso.org">www.iso.org</a>
<b>WIPO</b>	World Intellectual Property Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.wipo.int">www.wipo.int</a>
EDUCATION AND RESEARCH			
<b>CERN</b>	European Organization for Nuclear Research	Geneva	<a href="http://www.cern.ch">www.cern.ch</a>
<b>ISSI</b>	International Space Science Institute	Bern	<a href="http://www.issibern.ch">www.issibern.ch</a>
<b>WMO</b>	World Meteorological Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.wmo.int">www.wmo.int</a>
SOCIETY AND CULTURE			
<b>IBE/UNESCO</b>	International Bureau of Education / United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.ibe.unesco.org">www.ibe.unesco.org</a>
<b>EBU</b>	European Broadcasting Union	Geneva	<a href="http://www.ebu.ch">www.ebu.ch</a>
<b>GFATM</b>	The Global Fund To Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Geneva	<a href="http://www.theglobalfund.org">www.theglobalfund.org</a>
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	Geneva	<a href="http://www.ifrc.org">www.ifrc.org</a>
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross	Geneva	<a href="http://www.icrc.org">www.icrc.org</a>
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.ilo.org">www.ilo.org</a>
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration	Geneva	<a href="http://www.iom.int">www.iom.int</a>
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union	Geneva	<a href="http://www.ipu.org">www.ipu.org</a>
<b>IRU</b>	International Road Transport Union	Geneva	<a href="http://www.iru.org">www.iru.org</a>
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union	Geneva	<a href="http://www.itu.int">www.itu.int</a>
<b>OTIF</b>	Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail	Bern	<a href="http://www.otif.org">www.otif.org</a>
<b>UNHCR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Geneva	<a href="http://www.unhcr.org">www.unhcr.org</a>
<b>UNOG</b>	The United Nations Office at Geneva	Geneva	<a href="http://www.unog.ch">www.unog.ch</a>
<b>UPOV</b>	International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants	Geneva	<a href="http://www.upov.int">www.upov.int</a>
<b>UPU</b>	Universal Postal Union	Bern	<a href="http://www.upu.int">www.upu.int</a>
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization	Geneva	<a href="http://www.who.int">www.who.int</a>
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature	Gland	<a href="http://www.wwf.org">www.wwf.org</a>
SPORTS			
<b>FIFA</b>	Fédération Internationale de Football Association	Zurich	<a href="http://www.fifa.com">www.fifa.com</a>
<b>FIS</b>	International Ski Federation	Thun	<a href="http://www.fis-ski.com">www.fis-ski.com</a>
<b>IIHF</b>	International Ice Hockey Federation	Zurich	<a href="http://www.iihf.com">www.iihf.com</a>
<b>IOC</b>	International Olympic Committee	Lausanne	<a href="http://www.olympic.org">www.olympic.org</a>
<b>UCI</b>	Union Cycliste Internationale	Aigle	<a href="http://www.uci.ch">www.uci.ch</a>
<b>UEFA</b>	Union of European Football Associations	Nyon	<a href="http://www.uefa.com">www.uefa.com</a>
<b>WADA</b>	World Anti-Doping Agency	Lausanne	<a href="http://www.wada-ama.org">www.wada-ama.org</a>

Source: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), own research

## 1.8 SWITZERLAND IN FIGURES

### Switzerland in Figures

(FIG. 6)

GENERAL	
Currency	Swiss franc
Time zone	CET = UTC + 1
International country code	+41
National Day	August 1
ECONOMY	
Gross domestic product (nominal) (billions CHF)	642.3
National income per capita (CHF)	61,469
GDP growth	1.2%
Inflation rate	0.0%
Unemployment rate	3.2%
Imports (billions CHF) (goods and services)	252.5
Exports (billions CHF) (goods and services)	285.2
Deficit/surplus ratio as % of GDP+	-0.1
Debt ratio as % of GDP	34.5
Fiscal ratio as % of GDP	26.9
Direct investments (millions CHF)	
Capital stock in other countries	1,072,809
Capital stock in Switzerland	688,084
Capital exports to other countries	31,508
Capital imports into Switzerland	610
POPULATION	
Permanent resident population (1,000)	8,237.7
Inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup>	206
Age groups (%)	
0 – 19 years	20.2
20 – 39 years	26.7
40 – 64 years	35.3
65 – 79 years	12.8
80 years and over	5.0
Proportion of foreign nationals	24.3
Average number of children per woman	1.54

Life expectancy at birth (years)	
Men	80.7
Women	85
Religion	
Roman Catholic	38.0%
Evangelical Reformed	26.1%
Other	35.9%
Languages	
German	64.5%
French	22.6%
Italian	8.3%
Romansh	0.5%
Other	4.1%
GEOGRAPHY	
Area (in km <sup>2</sup> )	41,285
Border (km)	1,881
Number of lakes	1,484
Highest mountain (m): Dufourspitze, Valais	4,634
Largest glacier: Aletsch, Valais	117 km <sup>2</sup> /24 km
Largest lake (km <sup>2</sup> ): Lake Geneva	582
Second largest lake (km <sup>2</sup> ): Lake Constance	539
Capital:	Bern
Largest metropolitan areas (1,000s of inhabitants)	
Zurich	1,315.7
Geneva	570.2
Basel	537.1
Bern	406.9
Lausanne	402.9
POLITICS	
Form of government	Parliamentary federal state since 1848, direct democracy
Cantons	26 (20 full cantons, 6 half-cantons)
Municipalities	2,397

Sources: Federal Statistical Office (BFS); Swiss National Bank (SNB); Federal Finance Administration (EFV); State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO); BAKBASEL