

MAY 2024

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



Dayana Pfammatter – blazing a trail as Switzerland’s first-ever yodelling graduate

Switzerland – an island of prosperity where many households are buckling under the cost-of-living crisis

Football in Switzerland is a vehicle for integration, but its treatment of women still leaves a lot to be desired



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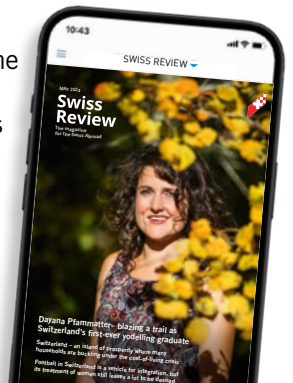
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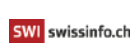
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Cover photo: yodeller Dayana Pfammatter.
Photo: Alain Amherd

The cost of living on an island of prosperity



More and more families in Switzerland are struggling to make ends meet.

Surely that’s a misprint. We are talking about families who live in Switzerland, one of the world’s richest countries, right? How can they be struggling? They should try living somewhere less prosperous.

We can react dismissively, but the simple truth is that money is too tight to mention for many families around the country. So let me spell it out again. Despite impressively high salaries and high employment levels, more and more families in Switzerland are struggling to make ends meet. And many such households are supposed to be comfortably ensconced in the middle-income bracket. What has gone wrong?

I can offer one hypothesis off the top of my head: Switzerland has very high standards in many areas of life. The prices of goods and services reflect this, to put it mildly. Unfortunately, we often have no other choice but to dig deep into our pockets. This particularly applies to tenants, for whom astronomically high rents have become a fact of life. Obviously, Swiss standards extend to housing. Bargains are few and far between.

It is a similar story with healthcare. The quality of Swiss medicine is second to none, but we pay for this through eye-watering health insurance premiums. Rents and healthcare premiums are the biggest monthly expenses for many families. Our lead article on page 4 tells you about all the other little and not-so-little factors that are fuelling a very Swiss cost-of-living crisis.

Dayana Pfammatter provides us with our feel-good story. The yodeller pictured on our front cover is the first person in Switzerland to have completed a master’s degree at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts with yodelling as the main subject (see page 10). When yodelling became an academic subject at Lucerne, there were fears it would set up an overly polished aesthetic. But Pfammatter has allayed any concerns with her love of traditional, natural arrangements.

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**

Rich Switzerland and its cost-of- living crisis

Switzerland is considered to be an island of prosperity, but life in one of the world's richest countries is more expensive than ever. Even middle-income households are buckling under the high cost of things like healthcare and housing.

THEODORA PETER

Many people imagine that Switzerland is a rich country where no one has any financial worries. After all, Swiss living standards are among the highest in Europe. Luxembourg and Norway are the only two countries on the continent with higher disposable income.

But Switzerland is a haven of prosperity for only 20 per cent of households – i.e. where monthly gross income exceeds 8,508 Swiss francs for a single person, or 17,867 francs for a family of four. All other households have to get by on less. Households in the lowest 20 per cent income bracket have to make do with under 3,970 francs (single person) or under 8,338 francs (a couple with two children un-

der 14). These latest figures from the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) relate to the year 2021. Gross income means the total income earned or received by a household, i.e. wages, pension or other sources.

According to the FSO, middle-income households account for around 60 per cent of Switzerland's resident population. But there are also huge differences between the highest and lowest middle-income earners, because the middle-income bracket refers to households with gross income of between 70 and 150 per cent of the national median: including both a single person who earns 8,500 francs a month and a pensioner with an income of just under 4,000 francs, while ranging between 8,338 and 17,867 francs for

a family of four. For an idea of how much a lower-middle-income family have to pay in living expenses, meet the fictitious Meiers on page 6.

Money is tight for families

The 2024 Family Barometer, published by the umbrella association Pro Familia Switzerland, reveals that financial pressure is increasing particularly for parents with children. In this latest survey, 52 per cent of respondents said their income was insufficient or barely sufficient. This is compared to 47 per cent last year. Most families are scarcely able, if at all, to save for a rainy day or pay voluntarily into a Pillar 3 pension scheme, with two thirds saying they

can put no money or no more than 500 francs away at the end of the month. For four out of 10 families, high living costs are even a reason not to have more children.

One or both parents in around half the families surveyed are considering working longer hours. Doing so is worth it in many cases – but not if the children need day care. This is because the high cost of preschool and child care in Switzerland compared to other countries can potentially eat up any additional earnings.

Soaring health insurance premiums, rising rents, higher energy costs, and the general increase in living expenses are placing a strain on budgets. There is growing anger about this, says Switzerland's official price watchdog Stefan Meierhans, who has received a record number of complaints in the last two years. He counted 2,775 messages in 2023 – including from people who can no longer afford to pay their bills. "There are growing fears of general financial insecurity," Meierhans said at his annual press conference this spring.

Price rises are the new normal

It is the job of the price watchdog to tackle rip-off prices, particularly in areas where there is a lack of competi-

tion. Last year, for example, Meierhans intervened on the issue of public transport ticket prices. People with a 2nd class GA Travelcard consequently ended up paying less than what the Swiss public transport sector wanted to charge. Instead of a whopping 4,080 francs, the 2nd class GA Travelcard will now "only" cost 3,995 francs – 135 francs more than before. Despite this, public transport ticket prices have still risen by around four per cent.

Price watchdog Stefan Meierhans can see that people are struggling. He is receiving more and more complaints from concerned citizens.



Cartoon: Max Spring

When prices increase for justifiable reasons like expensive electricity or necessary investment, even the watchdog has to take a step back. “We have to get used to the new normal of price rises,” he says. This year, Meierhans wants to ensure that consumers are not disproportionately affected by the increase in VAT. He will convene a purchasing power summit with representatives of the business community in the middle of the year to discuss the issue.

The biggest worry for millions of Swiss is the cost of healthcare, where Meierhans believes there are savings to be made on things like medicine and hospital and laboratory charges.

Above all, people in Switzerland are worried about the high cost of healthcare. **Health insurance premiums have more than doubled in the last 20 years.**

The problem is that healthcare expenditure is increasing by around three per cent every year. This is because Switzerland has an ageing population, with people going to the doctor more often. Health insurance premiums have more than doubled in the last 20 years as a result. A family of four now pays up to 1,250 francs a month for the minimum basic health insurance package.

Health insurance is also a long-running political issue. Until now, decision-makers have been unable to agree on reforms to reduce costs. Parliament wants to provide relief with a new funding model that incentivises outpatient treatment to prevent expensive

Living costs for a middle-income family

The Meiers are a family of four who live in a major Swiss city. Both parents work part-time, earning a combined monthly net income of 9,000 Swiss francs.

The cost of keeping a roof over their heads makes the biggest dent in their household budget. The Meiers pay 2,200 francs in rent every month, ancillary costs included, for their four-room apartment. An electricity and gas bill of 150 francs comes on top of that. Premiums for healthcare and other insurance policies amount to 1,300 francs. And the Meiers have to set aside around 1,000 francs a month for tax.

Food and household items cost 1,200 francs. Internet and mobile phone bills and the Swiss television and radio licence fee run up to 250 francs. Clothes, shoes, hairdresser/barber, and leisure activities cost the Meiers around 1,000 francs a month on average – not including the 250 francs in music tuition fees that they also pay for their eight-year-old son and ten-year-old daughter.

The parents work 80 and 60 per cent. They take turns to do the family



Cartoon: Max Spring

chores and cook for the children on three weekdays. The kids attend all-day school on the other two days, which costs 800 francs a month. Before the children reached school age,

the parents paid more than double that for day care.

The Meiers have no car. Public transport travel cards, occasional car sharing, and costs related to their bikes set them back around 750 francs every month.

They have 600 francs in reserve to cover any miscellaneous or unexpected costs – and particularly expenses over and above their basic health insurance: besides the deductible and co-payment amount, other things like optician and dentist fees can quickly add up. Dental braces for children cost several thousand francs each.

All these expenses potentially add up to 8,500 francs a month, leaving the middle-income Meier family with 500 francs to spare for holidays and to put towards retirement. Families on lower incomes often have nothing left at all. (TP)

hospital stays. Two political parties have forwarded their own solutions: the Centre would like to introduce a cost control mechanism, while the SP wants to boost state relief with a cap on health insurance premiums (more on page 7). Their respective popular initiatives will be put to voters on 9 June.

Affordable housing is rare

Rents are another big household expense. Unlike in many other countries, only a minority of the Swiss population can afford to buy a home of their own – 58 per cent live in rented accommodation. However, it is becoming increasingly hard to find affordable places to live due to a general scarcity on the housing market. The average rental price has increased by 20 per cent in the last 15 years. In major cities like Zurich and Geneva, it is no longer unusual for new tenants to have to pay well over 3,000 francs a month. Property speculators are the culprits, says the Swiss Tenants' Association. To date, politicians on the left have been unable to push through a government cap on rents, although the Federal Council recently indicated that the rules on rental prices could at least be re-examined.

Food prices have less of a significant impact. In 2021, the average Swiss household spent 6.8 per cent of its income on food. Food expenditure is almost double that in many European countries. And in Romania, it accounts for over 28 per cent of household income. Nevertheless, people in Switzerland have seen things like their weekly supermarket shopping, a coffee at a restaurant or a stamp from the post office become more expensive. This everyday inflation is a psychological hammer blow because it is much more noticeable. So much for Switzerland being an island of prosperity.

Two popular initiatives to combat soaring healthcare costs

On 9 June, voters in Switzerland will decide on two popular initiatives to address the problem of soaring healthcare costs: the SP's health insurance premium cap and the Centre's cost control mechanism.

1. An initiative to boost state relief

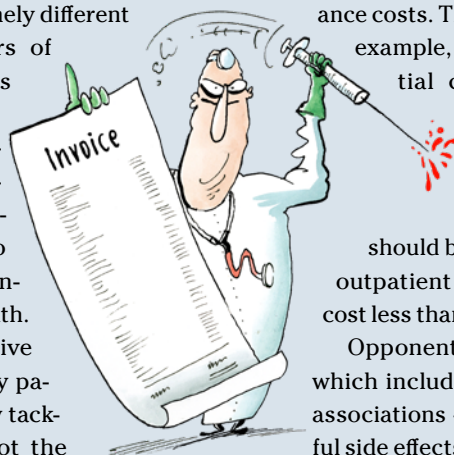
The SP wants to introduce a cap on health insurance premiums. Under its proposal, no policyholder would have to spend more than 10 per cent of their disposable income on health insurance. The state would then have to finance the difference. Premium relief is already applied at cantonal level but in extremely different ways, and the authors of the initiative believe it is insufficient. They also want relief for middle-income as well as low-income households, enabling a family of four to save up to several hundred Swiss francs a month.

This left-wing initiative goes too far and merely papers over the cracks by tackling the symptoms, not the causes, say the centre-right and right-wing parties. More importantly, it would lead to a whopping 4.2 billion francs in extra costs every year, they argue. Nevertheless, parliament has decided that the cantons should provide more money to subsidise premiums – but nowhere near the sum the campaigners want. This indirect counterproposal will be implemented if voters reject the SP proposal.

2. A cost control mechanism to save money

The Centre is proposing a different way to reduce healthcare costs, with a cost control mechanism that would oblige the Confederation and cantons to intervene if healthcare costs rise faster than wages. It hopes that this measure will put downward pressure on mandatory health insurance costs. The party believes, for example, that there are potential cost savings to be made on medicine, which is expensive to buy in Switzerland, and that more should be done to incentivise outpatient procedures, which cost less than inpatient treatment.

Opponents of the initiative – which include the Swiss medical associations – warn of the “harmful side effects” of any cost control mechanism, saying that it could, at worst, lead to long waiting lists and a two-tier health system. Both the Federal Council and parliament have dismissed the proposal as being too inflexible. But again, they have drawn up an indirect counterproposal that would see the government stipulate cost and quality targets every four years while taking account of factors such as ageing demographics and advances in medical technology. The idea is that this would increase transparency around which costs are justified on medical grounds.



Cartoon: Max Spring

Link to initiative: bezahlbare-praemien.ch

Link to initiative: die-mitte.ch/kostenbremse-initiative

Onur Boyman



Some people continue to suffer the long-term effects of Covid-19 months after they have had the infection. Symptoms include fatigue, breathlessness, and brain fog. The Federal Office of Public Health calls this “post Covid-19 condition”, also known as Long Covid. The phenomenon has left medical professionals scratching their collective heads. The symptoms are varied and hard to quantify. Doctors often do not know how to diagnose or treat it. Many with Long Covid have to take long-term leave from work. To date, over 5,000 people with Long Covid in Switzerland have claimed on their disability insurance. “Those affected are hit hard,” says Onur Boyman, professor of clinical immunology at the University of Zurich. Unfortunately, symptoms are often easily dismissed as a psychosomatic condition. A team of researchers led by Boyman has now shown in a study published in the world-renowned “Science” magazine that a part of our immune system called the complement system plays an important role in Long Covid. “In patients with Long Covid, the complement system no longer returns to the resting state as it should,” Boyman explains. The researchers were able to prove that excessive complement system activity causes damage to different cells in the body, including red blood cells, platelets and blood vessels. This discovery paves the way for diagnosis by blood test. It also opens up new avenues for the development of more targeted therapies, says Boyman. But more research is necessary, and this will take time. Nevertheless, Boyman and his Zurich colleagues have now removed some of the stigma attached to the condition.

SUSANNE WENGER

Court rules that Swiss climate policy shortcomings violate human rights

In a landmark decision that could trickle down to influence climate law around the Europe, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on 9 April in Strasbourg that the Swiss government’s alleged inaction on climate change violates human rights. This was after a group of older Swiss women (see Review 6/2023: “‘Grannies’ take Switzerland to court to demand more action on climate change”) argued that the state has a duty of care to protect the right to life, and that the Swiss government’s weak climate policies are failing them in this regard. The ECHR agrees that Switzerland has underdelivered on reducing carbon emissions and combating the existential threat of climate change. The ruling could now force Switzerland to act quicker and more decisively in cutting greenhouse gases.

(MUL)

Switzerland and the EU open talks on a new agreement

On 18 March 2024, Switzerland and the European Union (EU) began fresh talks on an agreement to govern Swiss-EU relations. There has been a protracted period of uncertainty since the Federal Council unilaterally abandoned negotiations with the EU on a new framework agreement three years ago. Following an arduous series of exploratory talks aimed at picking up the pieces, Switzerland and the EU now have a basis to resume formal negotiations. The aim is to complete these negotiations by the end of this year. The process will be anything but easy with many issues still unresolved, said President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd as the negotiations began. An agreement on relations with the neighbouring EU is of great importance to Switzerland not only regarding the free movement of people and goods, but also in terms of science and research.

(MUL)

Gantrisch Nature Park is very dark

Gantrisch Nature Park, which is roughly situated in a triangle between the cities of Berne, Fribourg and Thun, received the “Dark Sky Park” certification in March from Dark Sky International. It is now the first and only area in Switzerland to have been certified for its night-time darkness. The Gantrisch Dark Sky Zone is the protected dark heart of the nature park, covering 100 square kilometres. Gantrisch project manager Nicole Dahinden called the certification a “big deal”, while Lydia Plüss of the Gantrisch promotional association said it was a pat on the back for all those who “help to preserve our nightscape”. The Gantrisch area is a key stopping-off point for migrating birds – who also rely on night-time darkness, just like amphibians, insects and other nocturnal creatures. “Swiss Review” covered the Gantrisch project back in 2019: [revue.link/night](https://www.swissreview.ch/revue.link/night)

(MUL)

Confusion over Swiss army funding

The Swiss Armed Forces – do they or don't they have enough money?
A question on many people's lips at the beginning of 2024.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

First came the bombshell. Due to challenging financial circumstances, the army announced the cancellation of various events including a major air show in Emmen. Politicians and the media wondered what was going on. Chief of the Armed Forces Lieutenant General Thomas Süssli tried to explain. What did “liquidity bottleneck” really mean? Days passed until Defence Minister Viola Amherd intervened. The dust has now settled, but of one thing we can be sure: there is room for improvement with regard to communication at the top of the army.

Süssli would not have called off an air show and other high-profile events without good reason. Such events cost nothing compared to funding new fighter jets. But they are popular. Süssli certainly got the attention he wanted. He said that “liquidity” was one of the factors on which he had based his decision. But what did he really mean? Is the military about to run out of cash?

A one-billion black hole?

Coincidence or not, but news came out on Swiss public radio a few days later of an internal memo from the Armed Forces Staff, which stated that the army has one billion Swiss francs less than it needs in 2024 and 2025 to pay for defence purchases that have already been made. According to Radio SRF, the internal document spoke of a “liquidity bottleneck” – a bottleneck that is partially self-inflicted due to the military deviating from its budget.

Military planners have already known for years that buying new fighter jets and strengthening air defence systems would be a big challenge within existing budget constraints. Hence the decision was taken to make barely any new arms purchases, if at all, over a number of years in order to free up money. But the military veered from this plan. From 2020, the Federal Council and parliament approved new arms orders over and above what was originally earmarked. The army has been living beyond its means since then.

An unexpected solution appeared to surface in 2022, when parliament decided to boost defence spending following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The aim was to increase the country's military budget to 1 per cent of GDP by 2030, from 5.3 billion to 9.5 billion Swiss francs a year. The finance ministry put on a brave face – and the military began to prepare a new shopping list.

Plans hit the brakes

But the Federal Council pulled the emergency cord only one year later after seeing how stretched federal finances

had become. It advocated that arms expenditure now rise to 1 per cent of GDP by 2035 instead of 2030. Parliament accepted this slower timeline – a five-year delay that seems negligible on paper but has major implications. The army will have significantly less money – “only” around



5.3 billion francs – to buy new arms from now until 2035. The military has agreed purchases for which it no longer has a budget. And the top brass wanted to draw attention to this fact.

Unfortunate choice of words

The communication could nonetheless have been better. An unfortunate choice of words (“liquidity bottleneck”) gave the unwanted impression that the army would soon be bereft of funds. Amherd rowed back a few weeks later in an interview with the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”, explaining that the military interpretation of “liquidity bottleneck” differed from general usage. This is what had caused the confusion. It did not mean that the army could no longer pay its bills.

In the short term, the number crunchers can solve the issue by repeatedly postponing projects and their associated costs. But this does nothing to treat the underlying problem: the military lacks the financial means to fund all the capabilities it wants.

Lost in translation?
Chief of Armament
Urs Loher, Chief of
the Armed Forces
Thomas Süssli, and
Defence Minister and
President of the Swiss
Confederation Viola
Amherd speak to
the press in Berne.
Photo: Keystone

The first-ever yodelling graduate

Dayana Pfammatter Gurten from Valais is the first person in Switzerland to have earned a master's degree in yodelling. Does a university course risk turning this quintessentially Swiss singing technique into something a little too polished? Not at all, says Pfammatter, who wants to pass on her knowledge to young people.

SUSANNE WENGER

Dayana Pfammatter Gurten, 31, comes from Mund, a village perched on the mountain overlooking Brig. She embodies a new chapter in Swiss folk music, having recently completed a Master of Arts in music with a major in yodelling. Pfammatter is the first person to have graduated from a new degree pathway that was launched at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts in 2018. "Many people think I yodelled all day long," she says. But it was a very broad-based degree. In addition to vocal training and body work, she spent five-and-a-

half years studying subjects like music theory, rhythm, and music history.

Pfammatter played in a folk music ensemble with other music students and learned how to compose and arrange. "I was able to develop a strong musical acumen." She already had yodelling experience, because yodelling has been part of her life since childhood. Her family yodelled. She also learned to play the "Schwyzerörgeli", the accordion typically used in Swiss folk music, at a young age. Pfammatter did an apprenticeship as a pharmacy assistant after leaving school, but yodelling remained a passion.

Making a living from yodelling

She attended courses given by the Swiss Yodelling Association and, at the tender age of 23, became head of Safran yodelling club in Mund. While receiving further tuition, she found out about the new music degree at Lucerne offering yodelling as the main subject. No other Swiss university had ever unveiled such a degree. Pfammatter applied and was accepted. "It was a chance for me to be academically trained as a music tutor."

Pfammatter has been making a living from yodelling since completing

Yodelling is her day job, but Dayana Pfammatter also likes to spend time looking after her Valais Blacknose sheep.
Photo: Alain Amherd





her master's degree at the beginning of this year. She works as a vocal coach at a music school and teaches yodelling on a freelance basis. People also book her as a singer. She has deferred her back-up plan to help out at the pharmacy, because requests for her tuition services are coming in thick and fast. "It is great to be doing this on a full-time basis," she says.

Pfammatter teaches yodelling – requests for her services are coming in thick and fast.

Photo: Alain Amherd

From grassroots to academic

Yodelling – once used by herdsmen to communicate in the mountains – was not invented in Switzerland. Yet this haunting form of ululation that rapidly and repeatedly changes in pitch from the vocal chest register (or "chest voice") to the head register (or "head voice") has been practised here with gusto since the 19th century. There is a lively grassroots yodelling community of local choirs and clubs. Qualified choirs compete at the Federal Yodelling Festival every three years – the most recent event attracted around 10,000 singers and over 200,000 visitors.

Yodelling is a part of Swiss culture and identity, which is why people keep close track of it amid the push and pull of tradition, innovation, and popular culture. When yodelling be-

came an academic subject six years ago, there were fears that the degree course could set up an aesthetic that was too polished, blurring the regional differences in singing that have been passed down through the generations.

Preserving old arrangements

If there are still any such misgivings, Pfammatter no longer hears of them. In fact, she has done a lot to dispel the doubts. Pfammatter is deeply immersed in the Swiss yodelling scene. She says she used to perform with her sister "at the yodelling strongholds". The Swiss Yodelling Association regularly hires her as a course leader and as a judge at yodelling festivals. In autumn, she will become the main person responsible for training future choir leaders in two regions of Switzerland.



Dayana Pfammatter: "It is great to be doing this on a full-time basis."

Photo: Alain Amherd

"People know me," she says. "They know how steadfast I am." During her studies, Pfammatter focused on experimental contemporary folk music and traditional yodelling melodies. "We listened to old, crackling recordings and transcribed the songs to preserve them for posterity." Safeguarding and passing on the tradition to others is important to her, particularly with

the next generation of yodellers in mind. Pfammatter also teaches yodelling to school children, putting into practice the musical early education skills that she acquired in Lucerne.

Yodelling courses in demand

Above all, Pfammatter is a fan of natural yodelling without words – the purest, most primal form of yodelling. "Natural yodelling is dear to my heart." It moves her deeply, she says, and gives her goosebumps. Others feel the same way. After the Second World War, yodelling was long dismissed by the progressive urban set as quaint and parochial. But it has become hugely popular in recent years. Yodelling courses are booming in both rural and urban Switzerland – no surprise to Pfammatter. "Many people want to return to their roots and rediscover themselves in these stressful, fast-moving times."

Some people meditate or do yoga. Others yodel. "Yodelling is very natural and primeval. It helps people to touch base," she says. Besides teaching and practising every day, Pfammatter still runs her village yodelling club, Safran, which has the honour of hosting next year's cantonal yodelling convention. There is a lot of preparation and planning to do. She also continues to perform in small ensembles. Her master recital in Bettmeralp at the beginning of the year – featuring two female musicians from eastern Switzerland – went so well that another performance by the trio is in the offing. Pfammatter also has a passion for Valais Blacknose sheep. "They keep me close to nature and my roots," she says.

Link:
klangwaerch.ch

War in the Middle East has stirred latent antisemitism

In Switzerland, antisemitism tends to be whispered rather than shouted. However, the 7 October 2023 attacks and the war in Gaza have unleashed hate speech, sometimes leading to acts of violence. There has already been one knife attack. Jews say they are living in fear.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Ever since the shocking events of 7 October, followed by the outbreak of war in Gaza, anti-Jewish remarks and acts have been rising significantly in Switzerland. The two Jewish umbrella associations in Switzerland (one French and one German-speaking) recorded over 2,000 incidents in 2023, including assaults, insults, threats and online hate speech. In French-speaking Switzerland, the Intercommunity Coordination against Antisemitism and Defamation (CICAD) highlighted a 68 percent increase in these incidents as against 2022. Between October and the end of the year, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) reported six physical attacks on Jews, compared with only one in 2022. “Stepping out as a Jew in public often entails worry, restraint or even fear,” the federation laments. It has called on the Swiss state to commit further

Reactions in waves

Is the high number of antisemitic acts in Switzerland since 2023 unprecedented? Historian Marc Perrenoud feels we lack the necessary perspective. Antisemitic tensions come in waves. Switzerland was slow to give equal rights to Jews (in 1874). In 1893, the first popular initiative in Switzerland, which prohibited ritual slaughter, stemmed from antisemitic sentiment, he recalls. During the interwar period, Switzerland felt threatened by “Judeo-Bolshevism”. Between 1939 and 1945, antisemitism was one of the key elements of migration policy. “Authorities claimed that they were fighting to prevent the Jewification of Switzerland, although Jewish people have never made up more than one per cent of the Swiss population,” says the historian. During the Six-Day War, in 1967, public opinion tipped in Israel’s favour. “Swiss people were able to identify with such a small democracy being attacked by its neighbours,” is how Perrenoud sees it. 1995 saw the unclaimed Jewish assets scandal. This was triggered by Swiss banks dragging their feet when it came to returning bank accounts to victims of the Nazi regime. At that time, “the Swiss felt their very identity was being attacked, and some of their immediate reactions triggered an undeniable surge in antisemitism”, according to historian Brigitte Sion. Since then, she believes, “antisemitism has been expressed at every level of society... and no longer in hushed tones: it is now being expressed on the political stage, in the media and other public forums.” (SH)

to “monitoring antisemitism and racism”. CICAD has asked for regular visits by community representatives to schools to discuss the issue of not accepting other people. The association feels that this sort of action is more useful than taking security measures outside synagogues.

CICAD has reported that, in schools, the word “Jew” is sometimes used as an insult. For example, there was one incident in a gym in Geneva where a school pupil sprayed a boy with his deodorant, threatening to “gas him like all the Jews”, according to Johanne Gurfinkiel of CICAD. Words are followed by actions. The stained-glass windows of the synagogue in La Chaux-de-Fonds were smashed using large blocks of frozen snow. In Davos, the refusal of a restaurant owner to rent out sports equipment to Jews caused a scandal that went international. On Saturday, 2 March, in Zurich, a young Swiss man of Tunisian origin seriously injured an Orthodox Jew with a bladed weapon. In a video posted prior to the attack, the 15-year-old swore allegiance to the Islamic State, calling for a “global war against Jews”. He said his act was linked to the situation in the Middle East.

Inflammatory graffiti in Geneva

In her recent work on the history of Jews in French-speaking Switzerland*, historian Brigitte Sion notes that antisemitism has always existed in Switzerland, albeit rarely in a violent form. “It’s more like a dull background noise that manifests itself in things people say, discrimination in hiring or promotion, ridicule or caricatures, and anonymous written messages.” Since 7 October, people have been starting to voice their feelings against Jews. “Thanks, Hamas” was written on a wall at the University of Geneva. “Antisemitism does not need Jews to exist. It functions as a world view,” remarked sociologist Illana Weizman during a debate that took place in Geneva in February. She published a podcast titled “Qui a peur des Juifs?” (“Who’s afraid of the Jews?”). This podcast covers the whole range of antisemitic expressions, such as in connection with Covid-19, where lockdown and mandatory vaccination were compared to the persecution of the Jews. “What worries me is the ignorance about the history of the Jews and the Shoah,” bemoans historian Marc Perrenoud.

Antisemitism comes to the fore in times of crisis. In Lausanne, editor and left-wing militant E. G. (name redacted) expresses her bitterness: “My daughter got married and I’m delighted that she changed her name,” she says. She herself feels wounded by the antisemitic comments on social media: “There was very little empathy for the victims of 7 October.”



“Antisemitism is a series of small wounds,” argues Félix, a Geneva-based specialist in social affairs who discovered some antisemitic graffiti at the entrance to his block of flats one morning in November. It showed a swastika combined with a Star of David. That same day, Félix posted a request on his Facebook page. “If you did this, come and talk to me about it. I will receive you as one human to another,” said the post, whose author is the sole Jew in the building. “I was afraid for my 15-year-old daughter, who lives with me,” says Félix, although his daughter is not Jewish. “People think it’s my entire identity, even though I’m not a member of any community,” the Geneva resident says. His first exposure to antisemitic comments dates back to his school days. The council acted quickly and removed the graffiti.

The new rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Community of Geneva, Nathan Alfred, compares antisemitism to an illness, like racism or sexism. “Misogyny does not come from women. The victims are not the problem. Society as a whole is responsible for resolving these issues,” he says. Members of his congregation have been sharing their concerns with him. Is it safe to hang a mezuzah – a Jewish religious item – on the door? The rabbi himself took the decision to hang his mezuzah inside his home. “Six months ago, I would have hung it outside,” he says.

Several hundred people gathered in Zurich to show solidarity with the Jewish victim of a knife attack on 2 March. The rally was organised by Gemein-sam Einsam, a group promoting dialogue between Muslims and Jews.

Photo: Keystone

* “Albert, Esther, Liebmann, Ruth et al. – Présences juives en Suisse romande”. Francine Brunshwig, Marc Perrenoud, Laurence Leitenberg, Jacques Ehrenfreund, Ed. Livreo-Alphil, 2023

Excitement ahead of Euro 2024 (and Euro 2025?)

June will see the Swiss men's national football team competing again in the finals of a major tournament. The multicultural squad has been hailed as a success for integration – overshadowing their female counterparts who still struggle for recognition.



Granit Xhaka



Xherdan Shaqiri



Murat Yakin



Breel Embolo



Milaim Rama

BENJAMIN STEFFEN*

Another Swiss men's international football match. Many of us know the routine. Busy restaurants and bars. A cacophony of chanting and cheering. A red sea of Swiss flags and shirts.

September 2023 in the Kosovan capital Pristina. Another Swiss men's international football match.

Granit Xhaka and Xherdan Shaqiri, the most famous Swiss footballers of their generation, are sons of Kosovan immigrants. "Xhaka, you're in the heart of Kosovo," says a placard held by a child in the crowd. Xhaka has told the media that Pristina feels like home from home. His parents moved to Switzerland to give him and his brother a better life.

Younger sibling Taulant plays football for Albania. He and Granit met on opposing sides of the pitch at Euro 2016. Then you have Breel Embolo, who was born in Cameroon but grew up in Basel just like the Xhaka brothers. Embolo played against his country of birth at the 2022 World Cup. He even scored the winning goal. "Breel is like

a little brother to me," said the Cameroon coach after the match.

Football is a vehicle for integration, uniting people and countries. Switzerland jumped on the integration train earlier than other nations.

It started with players like Severino Minelli, who was born in 1909 and whose father had arrived in Switzerland with the first wave of Italian immigrants. Minelli made his debut for Switzerland in 1930 and went on to



Severino Minelli

make 80 international appearances – a national record at the time. Swiss-Kosovan hero Granit Xhaka is now the most capped Swiss player in history.

The first player with Kosovan roots to pull on the Switzerland shirt was Milaim Rama back in 2003. Members of the Kosovan diaspora in other countries received their first caps later.

Kubilay Türkyilmaz was the first Swiss international of Turkish descent, making his debut for the national side in 1988. It was not until over ten years later that Mustafa Dogan became the first player with two Turkish parents to play for Germany. After Türkyilmaz came the Yakin brothers, Hakan and Murat, the latter now being the national coach. Murat was born in Basel in 1974, but it took almost 20 years for him to obtain Swiss citizenship. The then Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi, no less, called Yakin's naturalisation a matter of "considerable national importance". At least that is how the story went. Admittedly, it was a good story. Ogi



liked his football. But this is not actually what happened. Ogi, on behalf of the Federal Council, was merely quoted as saying that citizenship applications could be “accelerated” in “exceptional circumstances”, primarily if there was “significant public interest” in doing so. But no efforts were made to expedite the naturalisation process in Yakin’s case.

Swiss football’s role as a vehicle for integration is exaggerated at times. Türkyilmaz played for Switzerland but experienced racist verbal abuse. He retired briefly from international duty, although his teammates probably could not have cared less about his Turkish heritage. “Essentially, everyone has the same goal. It makes no difference whether your parents come from Switzerland or not,” Hakan Yakin told the “NZZ am Sonntag” in 2016 after being asked whether things like that were an issue inside the dressing room. “You just focus on the next game when you are with the national team,” he replied. “Or do you get the impression that the players want to sit around a table and talk about it?”

Players like Minelli, Türkyilmaz and Xhaka remind us how much the identity of the national football team is intertwined with real life. War and politics trigger immigration – and Swiss football has been the beneficiary.

Immigration from Eastern Europe, as a consequence of the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, has had the most recent lasting impact on the fortunes of the national team. Nowadays, Switzerland regularly qualifies for the World Cup and the Euros. Yakin’s men will also be at this year’s Euro 2024 in Germany, which starts in mid-June. Euro 2012 is the only major tournament that they have missed in the last 20 years. And unlike Spain, Germany, England, Portugal, Belgium and Croatia, the Swiss have survived the group stage at every finals since 2014: the 2014, 2018 and 2022 World Cups; and Euros 2016 and 2020.

Our footballers can more than hold their own in elite company. Take Granit Xhaka, who plays at Bayer Leverkusen, a top team in the German Bundesliga. Or Yann Sommer at Italian Serie A giants Internazionale.

Or Manuel Akanji at 2023 Champions League winners Manchester City in the English Premier League.

Football in Switzerland has been booming in recent years. Junior teams at many amateur clubs now have waiting lists to join. Pitches around the country are booked out most weekends during the football season – shared by young and old with family backgrounds from near and far.

The numbers are impressive on the face of it. Around 300,000 footballers representing 179 different nationalities were registered with the Swiss Football Association (SFA) in August 2022. Some 34 per cent had foreign passports, a proportion of whom were dual citizens. At around the same time, the SFA published the results of a comprehensive study on social integration in Swiss football clubs. Despite the tangible progress that had been made, the study also found that discrimination within football clubs was “much more common” against members from immigrant backgrounds than against those from



non-immigrant backgrounds. Ten per cent of the former had reported it.

Women's football is another issue. Switzerland's female players are not only starved of the limelight but also discriminated against. Gender equality is lacking. But at least the SFA are aware of this. Ahead of the Women's World Cup in summer 2023, they published a promotional video featuring a family at the dinner table. The daughter asks her dad whether they are going to watch the World Cup together. "There is no World Cup this summer." Yes, there is one, says the daughter. Ah, you mean the women's national team. Does anyone even know them?

Does anyone even know them?!

Until recently, Ramona Bachmann scored for Paris Saint-Germain, one of the top teams in the French Division 1 Féminine. She now plays for the Houston Dash (USA) in the National Women's Soccer League. Lia Wälti stars for Arsenal in the English FA Women's Super League. Riola Xhe-

maili signed for serial German Bundesliga winners VfL Wolfsburg in 2023.

Like Murat Yakin's citizenship application, women's football in Switzerland is stuck in the slow lane. No "significant public interest"? Professionalism remains a distant goal for the Swiss Women's Super League. Those in the know say that equal opportunities for girls in terms of access to good-quality coaching and school-and-sports environments are virtually non-existent.

There have been stories of women setting up all-girl teams, only for the male club members to dismiss the idea. Men still get the best training slots, the newest kit and the best pitches at some clubs. Female coaches are still a rarity, because there were far fewer female players 20 years ago than there are today. And there are barely any female coaching courses, despite women stressing repeatedly that a coaching course is not always the most pleasant of experiences if every other attendee is male.

This is the status quo.

And this is where we lag behind other European countries. Switzerland will host the Women's European Championship in summer 2025. It promises to be a celebration of football featuring all the sights and sounds of a major tournament. Euro 2025 will be a litmus test of whether successful integration in Swiss football also applies to the women.

*The author reported on the men's national team as a journalist from 2004 to 2024.

Photos Pages 14 to 16: Alamy, Players Forumfree, Schweizerischer Fussballverband/football.ch



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The Wengernalp Railway in front of the Staubbach Falls in Lauterbrunnen, Berner Oberland

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Green light for the 13th state pension payment

The Swiss want bigger state pensions. In a historic result on 3 March, voters emphatically approved a trade union initiative calling for an additional 13th pension payment.

THEODORA PETER

The electorate has never backed a left-wing initiative to expand the welfare state. Until now. Over 58 per cent of voters – as well as 15 out of 23 cantons (see map) – approved the proposal for an additional monthly old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) state pension payment. There was jubilation among the authors of the initiative and their allies, the SP and the Greens. "This is historic," said Pierre-Yves Maillard, head of the Swiss Trade Union Federation.

Only a decade ago, a similar initiative calling for a 10 per cent increase in the state pension failed resoundingly at the ballot box. But the balance has shifted. More and more people do not have adequate pension income – state, occupational and private – to maintain their standard of living in retirement. The rising cost of rents, electricity, and health insurance are also making pensioners worse off. The additional OASI pension payment, which equates to a pension increase of 8.3 per cent, offsets this drip-drip loss of purchasing power, say the authors of the initiative.

It was a sobering referendum result for the political right, which had massively underestimated the depth of feeling on the issue. The SVP, normally good at reading the room, was blindsided by its rank-and-file voters. Representatives of business argued that the pension boost was too expensive and would lead to higher social security contributions and higher taxes. But that didn't sway the voters this time.

SP politician and head of the Swiss Trade Union Federation Pierre-Yves Maillard was elated at the result.
Photo: Keystone



The Swiss Abroad and their pensions

With 65 per cent voting yes, the Swiss Abroad approved the initiative even more emphatically than their domestic counterparts. This was after the No campaign had focused attention on the "Fifth Switzerland" (and on foreign workers who return to their home country after retirement). The SVP warned of the "luxury pensions" that retirees abroad would supposedly rake in, or were already raking in, due to the strong Swiss franc and a lower cost of living. This provoked a strong reaction from expatriates – retiring on a tight budget is motivation for many to move to a different country in the first place. Our magazine received numerous messages from expats saying they would struggle to make ends meet in Switzerland – even though they could have been claiming supplementary benefits had they not emigrated (which, ironically, would have cost the taxpayer even more).

Effective from 2026

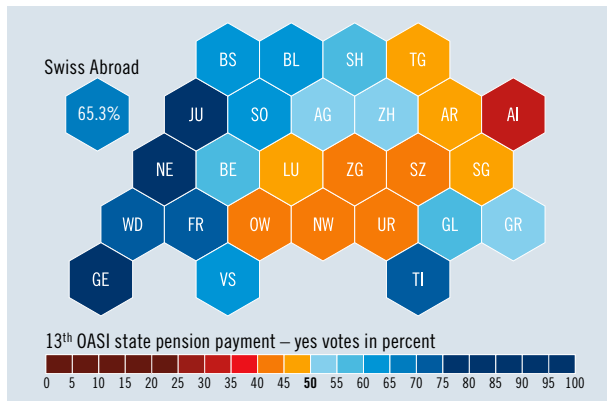
The additional pension payment would be paid out from 2026 in accordance with the Yes campaign's wishes, the Federal Council assured the country after the vote. At the time of our editorial deadline, there was still uncertainty on how to backstop the state pension increase. Higher salary deductions or a further increase in VAT are two possible options. The Centre has also broached the idea of a

tax on financial transactions. According to government estimates, the 13th OASI pension payment will cost around four to five billion Swiss francs every year. The annual state pension bill currently amounts to some 50 billion.

No increase in the retirement age

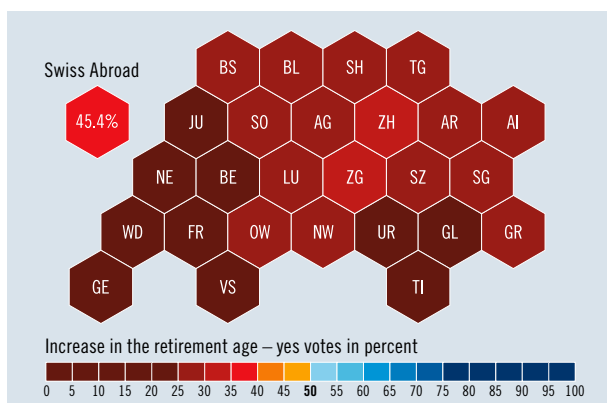
Raising the retirement age is now off the agenda after a proposal from the Young Liberals was rejected on 3 March when a whopping 75 per cent voted against it. The authors of the initiative wanted to initially increase the male and female retirement age from 65 to 66 and then peg it to average life expectancy. However, the idea failed to find support among the electorate.

13th OASI pension payment



A majority of 58.3 per cent voted for the initiative. The Swiss Abroad were even more in favour, with 65.3 per cent saying yes. The 13th OASI pension payment also received the thumbs up in 15 out of 23 cantons, with the level of approval highest in French-speaking Switzerland. The No votes came from central and eastern cantons.

Increase in the retirement age



Only a small minority of 25.2 per cent voted yes. Approval among the Swiss Abroad was slightly higher, at 34.2 per cent. Not a single canton endorsed the proposal.

Overview of the federal votes on 9 June 2024

Initiative to cap health insurance premiums

The SP wants to boost state relief and place a cap on health insurance premiums. Under its proposal, no policyholder would pay more than 10% of their income on health insurance premiums. This would mainly ease the financial burden on families while protecting purchasing power. Opponents of the initiative warned of prohibitive costs for the government. Parliament is in favour of moderate premium reductions via cantonal subsidies. More on pages 4–7.

Cost brake initiative

The Centre is trying to reduce health insurance premiums by putting a brake on healthcare costs. The aim of its initiative is to force policymakers to intervene if healthcare costs rise excessively relative to general wages. Opponents fear this would lead to a reduction in policyholder benefits. Instead of a cost brake set in stone, parliament wants the Federal Council to stipulate cost and quality targets every four years. More on pages 4–7.

Initiative against mandatory vaccination

Critics of Covid restrictions during the pandemic have tabled an initiative calling for an end to mandatory vaccination. Their proposal goes too far, say opponents. It is already the case that no one can be vaccinated against their will. In an epidemic, vaccination can be made mandatory for certain types of groups at increased risk of exposure and/or hospitalisation. People in these groups who subsequently fail to get vaccinated can be excluded from certain types of work, e.g. at hospitals.

Federal Act on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources

Parliament has approved a law that lays the foundation for the rapid expansion of Switzerland's energy production from renewable sources such as hydropower, solar and wind. The Franz Weber Foundation has called a referendum to contest the bill, arguing that the construction of solar farms and wind turbines has a detrimental effect on flora, fauna and the natural landscape. Supporters of the measure include most of the political parties as well as major environmental organisations like the WWF and Greenpeace.

A moving childhood story and an impressive body of work

Suzanne Derieux, aged 98, is one of the great exponents of French-speaking Swiss literature.



Suzanne Derieux
(*1926)

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“Are you going to die at the same time as Daddy?” asks seven-year-old Jeanne, putting her mother on the spot just like the other adults whom she has been bombarding with questions. The little girl even has something to say about religion, cornering the Catholic chaplain about the wealth of imagery in his church. Jeanne is Protestant. She thinks it is the most natural thing in the world for her grandmother to pass away. “She was old, ill and widowed.” But when Michou, as she calls her mother, contracts blood poisoning, Jeanne’s harmless questions take on a tragic significance. Michou then dies, casting an indelible shadow on her daughter’s hitherto innocent, sheltered childhood. The last sentence in the novel has wise words on death: “We always arrive too early if no one is expecting us.”

Deep but light-hearted

“L’enfant et la mort”, a dialogue-dominated narrative about childhood, has a light-hearted delivery despite its difficult storyline. Published in 1968, it was the third novel to appear under the Suzanne Derieux pseudonym. The first was “Corinne” (1961), the story of a teacher who falls in love with a student. The second almost reads like a thriller: “San Domenico” (1964) is about a young woman who falls for the charms of an Italian spy. The author behind the Derieux pseudonym was Suzanne Piguet-Cuendet, who was born on 26 April 1926 in Yverdon to a physician father, married a lawyer, and had three sons.

She is now almost blind and will have just turned 98 by the time this article goes to print. Nevertheless, she continues to produce literature from her home in Cully on the shores

of Lake Geneva. Derieux worked on her magnum opus until 2019 (when its fourth volume “S’il plaît à Dieu” was published). The work is a series of historical and biographical novels totalling 1,756 pages (volume 1 “Un arbre de vie” was published in 1995, volume 2 “Exils” in 1997, and volume 3 “La tourmente” in 2001). The books

“Why oh why did it have to happen to her?” Aunt Ida and cousin Odile cried. “She was so young.” Jeanne knew why. Michou had a mark on her forehead. No one could see it. Gérard said the war in Vietnam will get worse, and the yellows are going to conquer Europe. God takes those He needs when it is time. The black horse of the apocalypse can now rise from the sea.”

(Excerpt from Suzanne Derieux, “L’enfant et la mort”, Th. Gut Verlag, Zurich 2006)

centre around one of the author’s ancestors, Elisabeth Antoinette, who belonged to the famous Gonzenbach family in Hauptwil, Thurgau, for whom Hölderlin once worked as a tutor. They cover an entire era in the family’s history, starting in 1763 in Hauptwil with the death of Elisabeth’s mother, who leaves behind a husband and three daughters, including Elisabeth.

“Elsette”, as she was better known, would later get to know the greatest minds of her time – from Pestalozzi and Lavater, to Albrecht von Haller and Voltaire. Back in 1968, Derieux also wrote a literary account of her grandmother’s life, called “Les sept vies de Louise Croisier née Moraz”.

For delinquents and misfits

Besides these novels, which put her family’s past into historical context, Derieux always put a lot of time and effort into highlighting social issues. “Pour dormir sans rêves” (1980), her impassioned plea for a better way of dealing with young delinquents, is authentic because Derieux’s oldest son ended up in prison for his affiliation to a 1968 movement of young radicals called the Blousons dorés (golden jackets).

Derieux, a deeply religious person who studied theology after meeting Karl Barth in Basel, also wrote “L’homme n’est jamais seul” – a 1983 novel about assorted misfits who escape their lonely existence through the help of kind people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Das Kind und der Tod” – Irma Wehrli’s German translation of “L’enfant et la mort” – is available from Verlag Th. Gut, Zurich (volume 23 of the “Reprinted by Huber” series).

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH

Growing older means redefining yourself



PASQUALINA PERRIG-CHIELLO:
 “Own your Age. Stark und selbstbestimmt in der zweiten Lebenshälfte”, Beltz Verlag, 2024, 285 pages, CHF 32.50

In a society that prizes youth and dynamism, attitudes towards ageing often tend to be negative. This is mainly down to ignorance and fear, says developmental psychologist Pasqualina Perrig-Chiello in her new book. Perrig-Chiello, a professor emeritus at the University of Bern, tells us how getting old certainly has drawbacks but also advantages. And how it allows space for personal growth. At no other time in history have people had the tools to grow old gracefully as they do today, she argues. With higher life expectancy, we have more years of good health ahead of us and greater opportunity to enjoy our hard-fought freedoms.

The author offers an interesting take on the three major transitions in life that begin from middle age. We enter the second half of our lives at around the age of 40. The second transition is when we retire, which in Switzerland is at the statutory age of 65. Finally, the transition to advanced old age begins around 80. Perrig-Chiello: “These phases are times of uncertainty, during which we search for direction and feel more vulnerable as we come to terms with shedding our old identity and redefining ourselves.” How will I cope with physically growing old? What happened to the dreams I had? Who am I without my job? How will I cope with having to rely on other people for support? How do I look back on my life?

Perrig-Chiello encourages us to own our age and embrace the change. She offers specific ways to deal with the three transitions, basing her advice on scientific findings to which she herself has contributed over the years. She gives examples of how men and women find their compass – and how this not only benefits them but often the people around them too.

In this extensive guide, Perrig-Chiello puts our personal development into a social context. Her book has notable depth but is easy to read. For one thing, it counters the pernicious tone of the “OK boomer” brigade that have called time on an older generation who, through no fault of their own, are being blamed for things like the demographic crisis. According to the author, research has proven that a negative attitude towards ageing is bad for your health. In other words, freeing yourself from stereotypes can only be good.

SUSANNE WENGER

Spa music



BORIS BLANK:
 “Resonance”
 (Universal, 2024)

When news dropped of Boris Blank’s third solo record, the details sounded anything but promising. The synth wizard from Yello, regarded for decades as one of the key pioneers of electronic music, had composed an album for spas – music to accompany eucalyptus steam in the mixed sauna, interspersed by the chirping of exotic birds on the loudspeaker.

No joke. This new LP, called “Resonance”, contains 12 tracks produced as part of a project commissioned by Fortyseven, a thermal spa based in Baden in the canton of Aargau. Blank has stuck closely to his brief. Instead of the unmistakable percussive rhythms and synthesizers of Yello to which we have grown accustomed, Dieter Meier’s sidekick arranger

is now venturing into the ethereal world of ambient. According to the record company, the 12 pieces are “meditative sounds for wellness and relaxation”. Blank says that his “affinity to wide-open spaces like factory floors, underground garages and mountain landscapes, and to the acoustic resonance within these spaces” inspired him to make the album.

The result? “Resonance” is indeed much more ambient than anything you will have heard from Boris Blank or Yello. Only rarely do the usual pumping beats come to the fore (see opener “Vertigo Heroes”). The title track has a pleasing retro vibe but falls down slightly on account of its kitschy piano melody. Compositions like “Ninive”, “Najade”, “Mirage” and “Time Bridges” meander for minutes on end but suggest a certain esoteric indulgence. Infinite soundscapes evoking fluffy white clouds and a bright blue sky, on the other hand, have the desired meditative effect. Perfect for any spa.

“North of Eden” finally gives us the exotic birds and babbling brook – the soundtrack to any self-respecting spa. But this really is overly ambient for one day. Press the stop button and play good old “Bostich” instead – Yello’s bright-eyed and bushy-tailed antidote.

MARKO LEHTINEN

NIGHTS NOTHING RIENS



Something out of nothing

The “Nothing” exhibition at the Museum of Communication in Berne shows that nothing is not nothing after all.

“Please move along, nothing to see here,” it says at the bottom of the ramp leading to the small space housing the “Nothing” exhibition curated by Kurt Stadelmann and his team. The entire display is steeped in irony. Or should that be “non-display”? Yet there is nothing pretentious about “Nothing”. It was German author Kurt Tucholsky who once wrote that a hole – the epitome of nothing – can only be a hole where something is not. It cannot exist in isolation. Take away the something, and the hole goes too.

To put it another way: the holes in a piece of Emmental only exist if they are surrounded by cheese.

The innovative Museum of Communication has rigorously applied this principle. There is a sign positioned next to a worthless 500-franc share of the now-defunct Credit Suisse. “Nothing but empty promises,” it reads. “Basically, nothing came of it” next to an origami paper boat made by someone who was bored in a meeting. “Nothing lasts forever” next to a wedding ring.

A map of the world shows the location of Point Nemo in the middle of the South Pacific. Point Nemo is the place in the ocean that is furthest from land. Nemo is Latin for “no one”.

You can put one of the listening cups hanging from the ceiling to your ear. A warm, resonant voice will explain that there is no place in the entire universe in which there is absolutely nothing. Not even in a vacuum. Nothing is never nothing.

It is always something, provided we want to see it. Be it joy, hope, a memory, an idea – or anything else. This is the message that visitors to the exhibition can take home with them. You can make quite a lot out of nothing.

JÜRIG STEINER

Museum of Communication, Berne: “Nothing”. Until 21 July 2024. There is an online game accompanying the exhibition called The Void. It can be played anywhere. Website: mfk.ch/nothing

E-government offers easy digital interaction with public services

Digital is increasingly the medium of choice for Switzerland's public services. This is good news for people in Switzerland and for the Swiss Abroad in particular. This year, the Confederation, cantons, cities and municipalities began implementing their Digital Public Services Switzerland (DPSS) joint strategy for 2024 to 2027, which lays out the roadmap for driving the digital transformation of public services within the federal system.



Photo: iStock

Peppino Giarritta, who has been entrusted by the Confederation and cantons with delivering DPSS, tells us about the milestones that await.

According to the strategy, fully digital public services at all levels of government are to be brought under one integrated system, enabling effective, transparent and secure digital interaction with public services for all users. But what exactly is your vision?

I want people in Switzerland to benefit from end-to-end digital services, which means us-

I want people in Switzerland to benefit from end-to-end digital services.

Peppino Giarritta

ing online government services without necessarily noticing which government level – government, canton or municipality – you are dealing with.

Government services should be tailored to your personal circumstances and requirements, making life easier for you. And they should be easy to access and navigate wherever you are. Who precisely is responsible for the content need not be the primary concern. At the same time, transparency and trust matter. It should always be clear and obvious who is in charge and

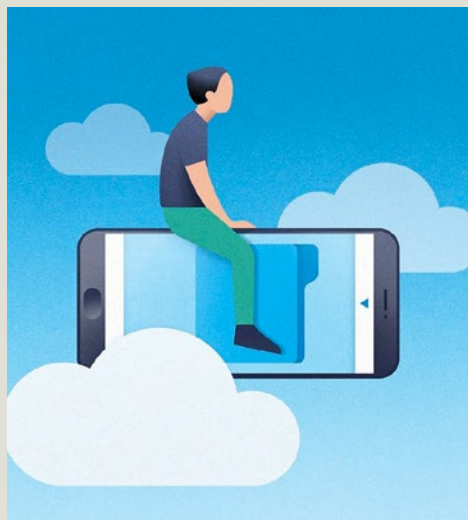
where you stand in the process. That creates trust.

DPSS was launched to strengthen cooperation between the Confederation, cantons and municipalities. What have you been able to achieve in the last two years?

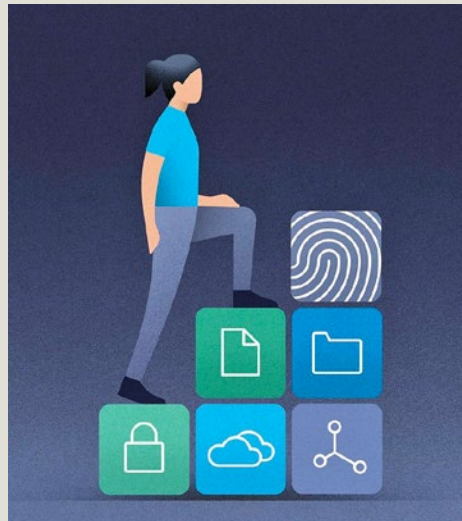
On 11 January 2024, we launched our first service as part of a DPSS project. AGOV, the authentication service of the Swiss authorities, is being piloted by the cantons of Zurich and Appenzell-Ausserrhoden as a nationwide public service login. It will soon be available in other cantons. The idea behind having a single login for government services is to simplify the user experience.

DPSS now has an additional source of funding to expand other government services and the underpinning framework, with the Confederation and cantons having agreed to underwrite much-needed digital infrastructure and basic services from 2024 to 2027. One of the key projects of the DPSS agenda is to develop the necessary security infrastructure for the government e-ID scheme. Then we have our efforts to enable e-voting. Pilots resumed in some cantons in 2023. These were a success.

The Digital Public Services Switzerland joint strategy for 2024 to 2027 is another milestone that I wish to mention. It was ap-



Effective data sharing also benefits the Swiss Abroad.
DPSS illustration



The DPSS agenda will help to accelerate the provision of much-needed infrastructure and basic services while significantly driving the development of digital public services in Switzerland. DPSS illustration

proved at the end of 2023 by the Federal Council, the cantons, the Association of Swiss Communes, and the Swiss Association of Cities. The strategy came into force on 1 January 2024, providing authorities at all federal levels with a roadmap to drive the development of digital public services in a coordinated, targeted manner.

What progress can we expect in the next four years with regard to digital public services in Switzerland?

We want to introduce e-ID. Furthermore, we want to enable interoperability between government portals, i.e. ensure that they are interlinked and easily accessible. The digital identity e-ID will enable secure access to these portals in future. Making services easier to locate is another objective. Users should be able to find the online services that they need without having to search for too long. We are also laying the groundwork for secure, value-added data usage across all levels of government. Our public service culture must and will change into a connected infrastructure that offers accessibility and proximity by putting user requirements front and centre.

Which prerequisites need to be fulfilled to facilitate access for the Swiss Abroad to government services?

Effective cooperation and data sharing within the federal system also benefit the Swiss Abroad and are important prerequisites for end-to-end digital government services. Interfaces to Switzerland's consular services are necessary for us to grow our online services for the Swiss Abroad. By enabling the "Fifth Switzerland" to use government services online, we can facilitate the link between expats and their local consulates and home municipalities.



Photo: DPSS

Peppino Giarritta is Digital Public Services Officer for the Confederation and Cantons. Giarritta, who has a doctorate in physics and a degree in industrial engineering, is responsible for the digital transformation of public services at the various federal levels. Digital Public Services Switzerland (DPSS) is a coordinating organisation that started work in 2022. Its objective is to ensure effective strategic management and coordination of digital transformation activities at federal, cantonal and municipal level.

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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 Federal Council decided at its session on 31 January 2024 to submit the following proposals to the people on 9 June 2024:

- Federal Popular Initiative of 23 January 2020 “Keep health insurance premiums to no more than 10% of income (Premium Relief Initiative)”
- Federal Popular Initiative of 10 March 2020 “For lower premiums – a cost brake in the healthcare system”
- Federal Popular Initiative of 16 December 2021 “For freedom and physical integrity”
- Federal Act of 29 September 2023 on a Secure Electricity Supply from Renewable Energy Sources

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



Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative “For effective regulatory measures against the uncontrolled proliferation of wolves, lynx, bears and birds of prey of all species” (30 July 2025)
- Federal Popular Initiative “Against the destruction of our forests by wind turbines (Forest Protection Initiative)” (30 July 2025)
- Federal Popular Initiative “Protect direct democracy in relation to wind farms (Commune Protection Initiative)” (30 July 2025)

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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CSA Election: Insights from the Pilot Project in Australia

Last year, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) established a working group to develop guidelines for democratic digital elections, aiming to enhance the representativeness of the CSA. The group can draw on the experience of countries where direct elections have been conducted previously. This article provides an overview of the changes and experiences made during the OSA pilot project in Australia in 2017.

Australia holds the third-largest Swiss expatriate community outside Europe and is allocated four seats in the CSA. Before 2017, the nomination and election of delegates were primarily internal matters, decided by committees or presidents of a few clubs.

The 2017 elections revolutionised this process on three fronts. Firstly, the call for nominations reached all Swiss whose email address was registered with the Consulate General, as well as readers of the “Swiss Review” and relevant Swiss online channels. Secondly, all Swiss citizens above 18, registered with an email at the Consulate, were eligible to vote, totalling 14,800 people. Thirdly, the elections were carried out electronically, through the then-still-existing e-voting platform of the canton of Geneva.

The campaign utilised a variety of local communication platforms and the “Swiss Review”. However crucial in achieving the wide reach was the Consulate General. They sent out two emails to all registered Swiss over 18: the call for nominations and later the call to vote.

The outcome was remarkable, as for the first time the number of candidates exceeded available seats - twice over. In the elections, 1,100 Swiss seized the opportunity to vote, resulting in a 7.4% participation rate. While this number may still appear modest, it is a big increase from the estimated 0.05% - 0.3% achieved previously.

Having more candidates than available seats in openly conducted elections implies a competition for votes. To get a vote, people must know who we are and what we stand for and have confidence in our ability to fulfil this role well. While this places pressure on the candidates, it provides voters with a genuine choice. Additionally, the opportunity to vote was extended to 14,800 people, not just a handful of club committees.

Overall, the pilot project in 2017 was a great opportunity for Swiss in Australia to democratically choose their delegates and for us to gain legiti-



In Australia the pilot project revolutionised the election process for the Council of the Swiss Abroad: All of a sudden, 14,800 Swiss had the opportunity to vote – and no longer just a handful of club representatives.

Photo: iStock

macy as the representatives of the Swiss community in Australia.

Based on its experience, Australia continued with direct elections in 2021 and is planning to offer a digital and democratic election process again in 2025.

CARMEN TROCHSLER, CSA DELEGATE, AUSTRALIA

For questions and feedback on the topic, please contact:
workgroup.osa@outlook.com

E-voting for elections to the CSA

An e-voting system developed and tested numerous times by Berne University of Applied Sciences (BFH) is ready to be used for digital elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). The CSA's dedicated working group announced this news on 14 March 2024 at an information event at the Federal Palace in Berne. Eric Dubuis, a professor at BFH who specialises in e-voting, told everyone present that the system would be made available for the CSA elections, at virtually no cost. Speaking in Berne on behalf of the working group, Noel Frei said that he now hoped as many regions as possible would express interest in using the system.

Photos of the meeting are available in the online edition of “Swiss Review” at www.revue.ch. (MUL)

New Swiss postage stamps – inspiration from young Swiss Abroad

In summer 2023, 124 young Swiss Abroad from 33 different countries had the rare honour of helping to create new Swiss postage stamp designs during holiday camps run by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity.

It was certainly a great experience for the 15 to 18 year olds to be able to contribute to creating the new stamps, which have now been unveiled by Swiss Post. The designs symbolise 2024, which as the “Fifth Switzerland” will know, is the year of the 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad, the 90th anniversary of our youth camps, and the 50th anniversary of “Swiss Review”.

The teenagers drew up ideas for the new stamps during their stay in Switzerland. These were then forwarded as sketches or videos to three Swiss graphic designers living abroad, who were specially invited by Swiss Post to participate in a competition to design the stamps. The process of creating what would be the 2024 Pro Patria stamp issue, dedicated to Switzerland’s expatriate community, therefore began at last summer’s holiday camps.

This process involved three stages of preparation. Firstly, the teenagers considered what stamps and written mail mean to them. Next, they thought of the elements that they would use to portray Switzerland. And finally, they sketched mountains, cows, chocolate and other things that symbolise Switzerland.

They then worked on the style, colour, typography and overall design of the stamps in greater detail. When the first confidential drafts were completed, the camp participants were able to give their opinion of them.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity, is proud to have been a part of this collaboration involving young Swiss Abroad, Pro Patria, Swiss Post, and London-based Swiss designer Sandra Liscio who won the competition.

Projects of this nature fulfil one of the fundamental aims of our organisation, namely to facilitate interaction



The two new postage stamps designed by Sandra Liscio, who was inspired by the ideas of our young holiday camp participants.

Photo: Swiss Post

Designer and Swiss citizen resident abroad



Sandra Liscio grew up in Lugano. She moved to London eight years ago for a three-month internship at a creative agency – and stayed. Today, she works as a design director in the film and entertainment industry and visits Switzerland at least twice a year. “A part of my heart is always in Switzerland. I think that many Swiss people abroad can relate to this bittersweet homesickness. So it was important to me to illustrate this feeling, which connects us all, in the stamps,” says the stamp designer.

EXTRACT FROM THE SWISS STAMP MAGAZINE “DIE LUPE”

between the Swiss Abroad and their compatriots in Switzerland. We are also delighted that the new stamps represent Swiss Abroad and look forward to these symbols of the “Fifth Switzerland” travelling far and wide.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD, SWISSCOMMUNITY

Video of the participating teenagers:
revue.link/propatria

Further information: revue.link/stamps
Sandra Liscio: sandralliscio.ch
Buy the new stamps: postshop.ch



Photo: Melanie Kaye

Nat Cartier is the “Artist in Residence”

Edinburgh-based Swiss musician Nathaniel “Nat” Cartier will relocate to Brunnen on the shores of Lake Lucerne for a few weeks this summer, courtesy of the Area for the Swiss Abroad Foundation, which has appointed Cartier as its “Artist in Residence” for 2024. After previous residencies in 2016 and 2017, this will be the third time that the Area for the Swiss Abroad Foundation hosts an artist. Cartier’s residency begins on 13 July, coinciding with the

100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne and the day on which the Congress participants go on an organised excursion to Brunnen to visit the Area for the Swiss Abroad. It will provide him with an opportunity to rediscover Switzerland, work with local artists and pick up new sources of inspiration. (PD)

www.auslandschweizerplatz.ch

In Switzerland for university studies or an apprenticeship

Young Swiss Abroad receive personal counselling on the topic of education in Switzerland.

Switzerland has an excellent and diverse education system. The vocational education and training system based on apprenticeships is well established in society and the economy. The universities enjoy a good international reputation.

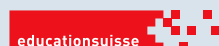
For young Swiss Abroad, post-compulsory education in Switzerland offers the opportunity of a very good education or training and at the same time the chance to get to know their family's homeland.

Such a step needs to be well prepared. It is important to obtain information at an early stage. The *educationsuisse* specialist service offers free advice and support on all questions relating to education in Switzerland:

- Information relating to different educational options such as university studies and vocational training
- Information relating to specific questions regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.
- Individual counselling onsite in Berne or online regarding education in Switzerland
- Vocational and study counselling in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider (fee-based)
- Assistance in applying for cantonal scholarship and administrative support
- Financial help (grants/loans) from *educationsuisse* and private foundations

The *educationsuisse* staff speak English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. They will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, by telephone or Skype or onsite in Berne.

RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE



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Youth+Sport courses – a springboard for prospective camp leaders



Problem solved – even a simple tent needs a bit of planning.

Photo provided

Oberrau in the canton of Lucerne served as the picturesque setting for an eventful week in which 15 prospective camp leaders cemented their knowledge and expertise in dealing with children and teenagers. With the Youth+Sport (J+S) course being conducted in both French and German, participants were able to brush up on their language skills at the same time. English was also occasionally spoken. Hidden away in the countryside, the local scouts and guide camp provided the ideal venue for intense training and a range of thought-provoking workshops and discussions on culture, education, safety and teamwork. The participants were also able to put what they had learned into practice – organising various sports activities, embarking on a two-day hike around Rigi and Pilatus, and going through many of the situations that you would typically encounter at a holiday camp.

The course was geared to young Swiss who wish to prepare for the responsibility of being a holiday camp leader. Training on safety, risk prevention, care, and activity coordination, as well as input on outdoor techniques, also proved particularly valuable. The course brought together Swiss Abroad, people doing civilian service, and Swiss residents without any experience of youth organisations – an exciting mix that provided lots of opportunities for participants to en-

gage and interact. After an intense week, everyone returned home with bags of knowledge and new perspectives. The J+S course is not only a milestone in personal development but also helps to promote diversity and togetherness among Swiss youth workers.

National scheme to promote sport

J+S assists sports organisers by providing them with funding as well as subsidised training and further education opportunities. It also supports courses and camps for children and teenagers in around 85 different sports. Some 80,000 sports courses and dedicated camps take place every year, attended by about 640,000 children. The holiday camps and training courses of the FYSA and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad are also supported by J+S and available in the camp sports/trekking and ski/snowboard categories.

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA

Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
The foundation for young swiss abroad
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

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Swiss politics – an easy navigation guide

We aim to bring the latest issues in Swiss politics closer to home through a new series of easy-to-understand webinars geared to Swiss Abroad of all ages.

The issues at stake in federal votes sometimes seem quite complex. In partnership with easyvote, we are running a new series of webinars that explain everything you need to know in a simple, straightforward, neutral manner. The aim of these webinars is to make Swiss politics easier to understand for everyone, regardless of age or existing political knowledge.



Easyvote was originally geared to 18 to 25 year olds, but its accessible educational approach allows everyone to familiarise themselves with current issues without wading through complicated terminology or party-political arguments. This makes our webinars suitable for everyone, regardless of age.

Would you like to learn more? Do you have questions about the upcoming federal votes? We and our friends at easyvote will provide you with reliable, unbiased information. Participation in the webinars is free of charge and available via a direct link on our website: revue.link/voting. In just a few clicks, you can access the webinar as well as relevant information on the latest voting proposals.

Don't miss this chance – visit us online on 14 May, 27 August and 29 October 2024.

MARIE BLOCH, YOUTH SERVICE



At the epicentre of Swiss politics – young people from the “Fifth Switzerland” sitting in the National Council chamber. Photo: Jugenddienst

revue.link/easy



How to avoid an unexpected problem with your driving licence when you return to Switzerland

Question: I am 75 years old and have been living in Australia for many years. I still own a Swiss driving licence. When entering Switzerland recently, I received a warning saying that I had failed to comply with a request from the driver and vehicle licensing office to undergo a medical fitness-to-drive test. What's this all about?

Answer: If you own a Swiss driving licence and move abroad, you must deregister from your local cantonal driver and vehicle licensing office. Furthermore, driving licence holders in Switzerland who turn 75 must undergo a medical fitness-to-drive test. From this age, drivers have to be checked by a doctor every two years.

Fail to deregister and you may be in for an unpleasant surprise. If the driver and vehicle licensing office is not notified about your residence abroad, your residential address will be deemed as unknown in Switzerland. A notice instructing you to undergo the medical test will then be published in the official cantonal gazette. If this request

is not received in Switzerland but you still be in possession of a Swiss driving licence. And when you next enter Switzerland, you may be pulled aside by a border official – not necessarily the nicest welcome.

If you are a Swiss domiciled abroad who continues to own a Swiss driving licence, you can contact the relevant driver and vehicle licensing office and request the suspension of your licence. There are normally no fees or costs associated with doing so. For the contact details of the cantonal driver and vehicle licensing offices as well as further information, visit revue.link/asa (website shown in German, French and Italian).

You will normally be obliged in your new country of residence to swap your Swiss driving licence for a local driving licence within a specific time frame. An International Driving Permit (IDP) will also lose its validity and needs to be renewed after a certain period of time. The time limit within which you must renew your IDP will vary depending on the country you are in (e.g. within one year of arrival). If you fail to renew your IDP in time, you may have to take your driving test again in your new country of residence after doing the full complement of theory and driving lessons. For authoritative information on time limits and on how to swap your driving licence, you should always contact the responsible authority in your country of residence.



Motorists in Switzerland who reach the age of 75 must go to a doctor every two years for a medical fitness-to-drive test. Photo: iStock

remains unanswered and no all-clear from the doctor has been provided in time, the driver and vehicle licensing office will order the withdrawal of your driving licence. A notice to this effect will subsequently appear in the cantonal gazette, and a relevant alert will be issued in the federal government's computerised police search system, RIPOL. This is because you will no longer be regis-

STEPHANIE LEBER, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

revue.link/asa



Statistics reveal sense of financial insecurity among over-65s

The “Fifth Switzerland” continues to grow. Last year, the biggest percentage increase in Swiss Abroad was among the over-65s. This is partly because financial insecurity has become more of an issue for people in this age group.

Some 813,400 Swiss nationals were living abroad at the end of 2023. This is an increase of 1.7 per cent on the previous year. The Federal Statistical Office published these new figures at the end of March. It is still the case that easily the biggest proportion of Swiss Abroad – around 64 per cent – live in Europe. France and Germany were again home to the largest Swiss expatriate populations in 2023. And the majority of Swiss Abroad – 56 per cent – are between 18 and 65, i.e. of employable age.

As in recent years, the over-65 age group grew faster than all the other expatriate age groups in 2023 – by almost four per cent. This is partly down to an ageing expatriate population, but emigration also plays a key role. Evidence suggests that financial insecurity is another reason why more Swiss are deciding to move abroad. In a survey conducted as part of the nccr – on the move research project at the University of Neuchâtel, respondents most frequently said that they had moved abroad because the cost of living in Switzerland was too high or because they wanted to maintain or improve their standard of living. State pension figures support this argument. In 2022, Swiss living in Switzerland received an average monthly OASI state pension of 1,919 Swiss francs. The average state pension payment for Swiss Abroad was much lower: 1,209 francs.

Retired Swiss Abroad now see political and media sentiment swinging against them. The National Council recently voted in favour of a motion to abolish child pensions.

To compensate for the loss of child pensions, the motion proposed that individual supplementary benefits should increase if necessary. Given that residence abroad precludes you from receiving supplementary benefits, Swiss Abroad on low incomes would have their child pensions cancelled and not receive any benefits to offset this loss in income.

“Misguided and wrong”

Anyone following the debate surrounding state pensions for the Swiss Abroad may be forgiven for thinking that retired expats live a life of luxury. For most, the reality is different. Many Swiss Abroad would have needed supplementary benefits if they had stayed in Switzerland. “Swiss who emigrate after retirement are normally less of a burden on the Swiss welfare state,” says Filippo Lombardi, president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, “which is why it is misguided and wrong to be chipping away at their pensions”.

SMILLA SCHÄR, SWISSCOMMUNITY MEDIA OFFICER

The next edition of “Swiss Review” will contain a detailed overview of the latest statistics on the Swiss Abroad (for 2023).

Our “Discussion” page containing reader comments is taking a break. It will appear again in the next issue.

Ensuring the future of “Swiss Review”

“Swiss Review” is blessed with an experienced editorial team 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 towards our print edition.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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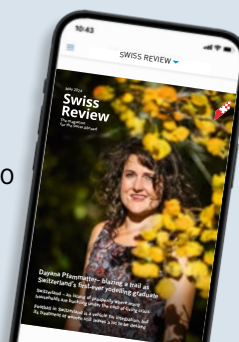
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