

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 25 (1998)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Reform of the optional AHV/IV : the consultation process is taking place
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907527>

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Reform of the optional AHV/IV

The consultation process is taking place

The Federal Council would like to limit entry to the optional AHV/IV and raise the contribution rate. Its proposal is now going through the consultation process.

The discussion about the possibility of Swiss Abroad joining the Swiss Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance scheme has now been under way for several years. In 1992 and 1993 plans to abolish this option were rejected by Parliament, and since then there has been work on a reform. A first reform project, which would have drastically reduced the number of those entitled to join (see Swiss Review 3/97) was rejected by the whole Federal Council. It has now sent a revised proposal for consultation, which will last until the end of September. The proposal is less radical but maintains the corner stones of the original project.

- As before, no new entries will be possible from those countries with which Switzerland has signed a social security agreement. Those already insured will be able to continue paying premiums for six more years. If they are over 50, they may continue the insurance until retirement age. About 70% of today's 55,000 premium payers live in these countries.

- The only new members admissible are people who were in the mandatory scheme for at least five years immediately before going abroad. This regulation excludes compatriots who emigrated in their youth or were born abroad.
- The contribution rate increases from today's 9.2% to 9.8%. At the same time the falling contribution range for incomes under SFr. 47,800 per year is cancelled.

In its notes the Federal Council counters these limitations with the following improvements:

- Foreign nationals will also be able to join the optional AHV/IV if they live in a non-agreement state and if they have

been insured under the mandatory scheme for at least five years.

- Those who paid contributions to the AHV/IV but were no longer insured at the time when disability occurred will be entitled to a disability pension.
- Non-wage-earning students under 30 and spouses and partners of those insured under the mandatory scheme will continue as members of the mandatory AHV/IV.

The Federal Council points out that of the present cost of the optional AHV/IV of about SFr. 214 million, only SFr. 59 million are covered by the contributions of those insured. The reform would not lead to savings in the short and medium terms, but in the long term expenditure would fall by about SFr. 130 million.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad not only expresses doubts about these figures, but is also against substantial points of this reform project (see also page 19).

René Lenzin

Swiss Radio International

New programme directions

Exclusive radio programmes in the Swiss national languages, English and other foreign languages, an Internet service for the Swiss Abroad, and a more extensive television service for the rest of the world: those are the core elements of the new programme strategy which Swiss Radio International (SRI) intends to develop to become gradually a multimedia undertaking (see also Swiss Review 1/98).

For this year three priorities stand at the centre. The radio programmes are to be optimized. They will be designed in a way complementary to the linguistic regional programmes and SBC's branch programmes. That means an independent music profile for each of the four

continuous European programmes (E, G, F, I). The first new programme (from June 1st) is "World Radio Switzerland" On the Air, SRI's English-speaking programme.

Content-wise the programmes will be treating Switzerland as a whole (in the sense of the "Idée suisse") and will concentrate specially on economics, science, culture and tourism. The European programmes form the basis of the programmes which are broadcast outside Europe. Priority is laid on the Swiss languages for the Swiss Abroad, English for North America, Asia and Australia, French for Africa, Spanish for Latin America, and Arabic for the Middle-East.

To cater for these priorities, the Portuguese service will be closed at the end of 1998: but SRI will continue to offer correspondence services in Portuguese for the Brazilian media.

In the course of the year, SRI will build up additional multimedia services. These will form the link between the TV and radio fields. The new appearance on the Internet (from autumn of this year) will create dialogue with the public. Apart from the possibility of hearing SRI programmes via Real Audio, this will offer a whole range of services. The aim is to establish the SRI site in the medium term as an information platform about Switzerland.

In television programmes the cooperation with SBC's three channels is not yet ripe. The following considerations stand at the centre of attention. On the one hand, in Europe mainly English programmes are planned (adapted SBC contributions) to be broadcast directly by satellite. On the other hand previous programmes, such as the magazine "Swiss World" will be transmitted indirectly throughout the world over third stations. Specially mandated productions for foreign-oriented organizations are also possible.

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