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Inclusion in the electoral register is easy

You can live abroad but still vote on Swiss matters. Doing so helps strengthen the bond with your native country. But to exercise your political voice, you must be included in the electoral register.

Some 752,000 Swiss live abroad, of whom a large proportion – around 600,000 – are older than 18 and therefore entitled to vote under Swiss law. However, many do not avail themselves of the political rights that Switzerland grants to its expatriate citizens. Last year, the electoral register contained the names of 174,000 Swiss Abroad. Many who have not voted to date may well be wondering how they can get their names on this register now that the election year is under way.

How to qualify

The procedure is relatively easy and only needs to be completed once. After being entered in the register, you will always receive the necessary ballot material automatically by post. The statutory requirements for being entered in the electoral register are also quite simple: you must be at least 18 years old, your permanent residence must be abroad, you must be registered with the Swiss representation in your country of domicile, and you must not be legally incapacitated from voting. There are no further conditions. Neither will you incur any fees for this. Furthermore, you pay nothing for the privilege of voting per se – or almost nothing: if you are unable to vote electronically, there is still the small matter of covering the cost of postage when returning your ballot papers.

How to proceed

Voting in Switzerland helps you to develop an even closer connection to your native country. The fact that Swiss Abroad are always entered in the electoral register of their most recent Swiss commune of residence further accentuates this bond. If you have never lived in Switzerland, you will be registered with your Swiss commune of origin. The name of your commune is one of the items of information



that you will need when going about the simple business of getting on the register. The “Application to exercise political rights” is a straightforward form that you can download online, fill in by hand and send to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile.

Numerous opportunities to participate in Swiss democracy

Swiss who live in Switzerland can exercise their democratic voice in many ways, and are able to shape political discourse at communal, cantonal and federal level. The rights of Swiss Abroad are not quite as wide-ranging. Expatriates can vote at national level. Apart from casting their ballots, they also have the right to sign petitions calling for referendums or popular initiatives, as well as the right to run for election to the larger chamber of parliament, the National Council (see also page 18). Ten cantons – Berne, Basel-Landschaft, Fribourg, Jura, Geneva, Grisons, Neuchâtel, Solothurn, Schwyz and Ticino – also grant voting rights at cantonal level to their citizens living abroad.

As mentioned above, entries in the electoral register are permanent and do not need to be renewed. They are valid for the entire time that you are abroad. However, you can ask to have your name removed from the register, by writing to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile. Note that your name will also be deleted from the register if your voting papers cannot be delivered three times in a row. Even if this occurs, it is still possible for you to get back on the electoral register without any problem.

More often than not, people in Switzerland either submit their ballots by post or prefer the old-school method of voting at the ballot box. What electronic voting will look like in future continues to be the subject of lively debate

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