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The OSA and COVID-19

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) was not immune from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now we are working at full speed again towards our goals – driven by a vision for the future.

REMO GYSIN, OSA PRESIDENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused much anguish around the world. Infections, deaths, business closures, and unemployment are now part and parcel of daily news reports. Over 770,000 Swiss live abroad in all continents, calling more than 100 different countries their home. The OSA, which represents the Swiss diaspora’s interests in Switzerland, cannot say for sure how many Swiss Abroad have been affected by the pandemic in one way or another. But we know just how important the work of our support network is in the current situation.

COVID-19 also had consequences at our administrative office in Berne as well as within the OSA Executive Board and the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). We had to postpone our annual congress as well as numerous meetings. Winter and summer camps for young people were cancelled. In Berne, we introduced homeworking and then short-

time working. This helped to prevent possible contagion as well as job losses. In short, the OSA responded to the situation and addressed the in-house challenges posed by the pandemic.

We also had to improvise. For example, the first-ever virtual CSA meeting took place on 10 July, featuring participation from over 80 delegates in Asia, Europe, North and South America, and Oceania. This information and discussion platform saw Lucas Metzger (Binningen, canton of Basel-Landschaft) elected as the new treasurer, while a statement rejecting the SVP’s limitation initiative was also formulated at the meeting. Everything about the video call went to plan. Maybe this new experience will lead to a different way of doing things in future, involving less travelling but more regular interaction among delegates.

Our goals have not changed

The OSA administrative office is currently a hive of activity. Many of our annual objectives have already been met. Our major initiative aimed at merging the three existing websites (www.revue.ch, www.aso.ch, www.swisscommunity.org) into a single new website (www.swisscommunity.org) is also making good progress. This project should be completed by spring 2021.

Not all current difficulties are down to the pandemic. The sudden unavailability of e-voting and the – to put it diplomatically – lukewarm attitude of the big banks towards the Swiss Abroad are attributable to other factors. These ongoing sagas need to end. We are still doing all we can to make that happen.

Thank you, Peter!

Peter Wüthrich retired from the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) on 30 June 2020, after having fought the corner of the Swiss Abroad with great passion and energy for over 20 years.



Following his first tenure from 1988 to 2008, we were delighted when Peter took up the challenging position of treasurer for a second time in 2017. In this role, Peter provided the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the OSA Executive Board, and the OSA administrative office with expert advice on financial matters and much more besides.

His sound legal knowledge was also of great help to us. Peter’s tremendous professional expertise enabled him to act as our in-house ‘firefighter’ who was able to solve problems and provide practical tips. Famously, he even assisted us a number of times from his sailing trips in the Mediterranean – truly above and beyond the call of duty.

On behalf of the Swiss Abroad and all CSA delegates and OSA Executive Board members, I would like to thank Peter for his wonderful, unflinching service. It was a pleasure to work with him. We will always treasure fond memories of his time.

All the best on your retirement, Peter. We wish you good health, favourable winds at sea, and every happiness for the future.

Remo Gysin

President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

Visions for the future

After a difficult few months, we have formulated a mission that stakes out the direction of travel and offers impetus for the future. Here are my visions for the OSA:

- All Swiss Abroad eligible to vote will be able to participate in elections and popular votes in Switzerland. Their constitutional political rights will be protected.
- Swiss banks and insurance companies will also offer their services to the Swiss Abroad on satisfactory terms comparable to those offered to the Swiss in Switzerland.
- The CSA will finally have a representative composition, with delegates elected directly via e-voting.
- The number of Swiss expatriate associations will increase worldwide, with greater representation among all age groups.
- The OSA Executive Board and the CSA will be headed by a female president for the first time.

A story of integration

Educatiosuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad who come to Switzerland to further their education. Raquel Weidmann is one such expatriate. She talked to us about her experiences after arriving in Switzerland.

“My grandparents emigrated many years ago from the Zurich Oberland to Argentina. Consequently, my father grew up in a Swiss colony. Together with my mother, my family later settled in Puerto Rico Misiones. I was born in 1995, the youngest of two sisters. Our parents told us that going to school was very important. For my six years of secondary school education, I moved 45 kilometres away to attend the Instituto Linea Cuchilla school in my father’s home village of Ruiz de Montoya. In addition to classroom learning, we always did lots of practical work during my time there.

The opportunity to come to Switzerland presented itself after I finished school. My parents’ former neighbours, who had remigrated from Argentina to Switzerland, offered to let me live with them. I therefore decided to move to Switzerland without any knowledge of the language or culture.

I had great expectations of what awaited me, but quickly realised that things would not necessarily be so easy. At the beginning I found it hard to accept that my good school qualifications counted for little in Switzerland. The culture and the language were new to me, the world of work even more so. My parents had always impressed on us the importance of getting a university degree that would

stand us in good stead for the future. It was in Switzerland that I learned that doing an apprenticeship was a viable alternative. Starting from square one was not what I had planned, but that is exactly what I did. During my integration year, I picked up the language and learned a lot about Swiss culture and the work environment. My teachers were very helpful and committed to each and every student. Time in the classroom was supplemented by weekly one-day work placements in various professional settings. The integration year was very useful, and I am grateful that Switzerland offers it as an option.

I got to know my current employer during a trial traineeship. I did an internship in my first year, followed by a three-year apprenticeship as a childcare specialist – which I finished in summer 2019. Not only do I still work as a childcare specialist at the nursery school that took me on as an intern, but I am also preparing to study as a social education worker. This two-year course will take place at the Agogis training centre in Olten, culminating in a Federal Diploma HF (College of Higher Education).

I would not have been able to do vocational training without the support of educatiosuisse and a scholarship from my home canton of Zurich.



I very much appreciated the individual advice and assistance that I received from educatiosuisse.” (RG)

Raquel Weidmann
Photo provided

Testimonies from young Swiss Abroad are regularly published on the educatiosuisse Facebook page and at www.educatiosuisse.ch.

educatiosuisse, Ausbildung in der Schweiz,
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, SCHWEIZ
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04; info@educatiosuisse.ch;
www.educatiosuisse.ch

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

Alpenstrasse 26
CH-3006 Berne
Tel. +41 31 356 61 00
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@aso.ch
www.aso.ch
www.revue.ch
www.swisscommunity.org

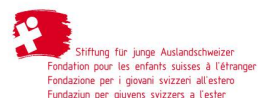


Our partners:

educatiosuisse
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@educatiosuisse.ch
www.educatiosuisse.ch



Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad
Tel. +41 31 356 61 16
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@sjas.ch
www.sjas.ch



Can I make retroactive OASI payments after returning to Switzerland?

Question: "I have been living in Japan over the last few years and have not made any payments into the old-age and survivors' insurance scheme (OASI) during this time. Is it possible to make retroactive payments for these missing years once I return to Switzerland?"

Answer: Unfortunately, you cannot make retroactive payments for the years you missed while you were abroad. You have the option of making retroactive payments dating back up to five years, but only if you were subject to OASI contributions (i.e. essentially domiciled in Switzerland) during that period.

Barring certain exceptions, people living abroad are not subject to OASI contributions and therefore cannot make retroactive payments for the years that they miss. We therefore recommend that you contact your cantonal compensation office for further details before leaving Switzerland. It is also worth making prior arrangements to accrue pension assets – either by taking out voluntary OASI with the Swiss Compensation Office in Geneva (see www.zas.admin.ch > Swiss Compensation Office SCO) or by taking out private insurance.

This information does not apply to people who return to Switzerland after being domiciled in an EU/EFTA country. Anyone living in the EU/EFTA will have been covered by social security in their host country and therefore cannot make any retroactive OASI payments.

OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The OSA's Legal Service provides general legal information on Swiss law, particularly in areas which concern the Swiss Abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law or intervene in disputes between private parties.

Gerda Brunner and a group of other children from the "Fifth Switzerland" on holiday in Switzerland in July 1937
Photo: FYSA archive



Memories of the 1942 camp – young Swiss Abroad trying their hand at winter sports in Engelberg
Photo: newspaper cutting

Lasting memories

Have you ever been at a camp for young Swiss Abroad? If so, we invite you to share your fondest memories with us.

Unfortunately, all the camps for young Swiss Abroad have had to be postponed this year. We have therefore decided to take a trip down memory lane before welcoming young people from the "Fifth Switzerland" to their native country for more unforgettable experiences in 2021. We are currently sifting through the archive and choosing the best images from our photo collection – as we look forward to many more great camps in future.

Pictures and memories have enduring value. If you or a member of your family have already been on a camp run by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) or the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), then you will probably have your own photos and reminiscences. We invite you to share with us your memories of the

best, funniest and most moving moments. Maybe there are anecdotes and experiences that you particularly remember from your time at one of our camps. And if you have any good photos, please share them with us too. We hope to post a selection of photos from past camps on social media (our camps date back as far as the 1930s). In addition, we intend to publish the best camp-related stories in anonymised form as part of a dedicated series in the OSA newsletter and on the www.aso.ch and www.sjas.ch websites.

Please send your photos and anecdotes to memories@aso.ch or memories@sjas.ch. If you would also kindly indicate the year and location to which they refer, it will help us to place them in context. (MB/LR)

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