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Aid associations for the Swiss Abroad

Did you know that Swiss solidarity functions through approximately 60 aid organisations around the world? The Société Helvétique de Bienfaisance in France celebrated its bicentenary in 2021. This humanitarian tradition can also be seen further afield, for example in the Philippines, where Switzerland supports the Swiss Benevolent Foundation.

According to the Swiss Federal Constitution, the Confederation must contribute to strengthening relationships uniting the Swiss Abroad amongst themselves and with Switzerland, and it must support institutions that act with this aim. The same goes for the federal law concerning Swiss people and institutions abroad, better known under the name of the “Swiss Abroad Act” (LSEtr). The relevant ordinance, which takes up this principle, states that the Confederation can support institutions which allocate aid to the Swiss Abroad in specific domains, which are active throughout the entire world and which provide assistance to the Swiss Abroad.

To this end, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) receives an annual federal grant for which Swiss aid organisations can apply. This funding is augmented by contributions from certain cantons wishing to support their citizens living abroad who are registered with their relevant Swiss representation abroad. This financial aid is allocated primarily to Swiss associations and institutions, which provide support to the Swiss Abroad who find themselves in difficult social situations due to illness, age or solitude.

This type of aid is intended to cover living or accommodation costs or to make a contribution towards household expenses, or the costs of medical care and equipment, for example. In addition, aid services can be allocated in the form of training projects, like study grants, the partial payment of school fees or a contribution to homes for elderly or indigent individuals. Those who are unable to provide for themselves and who already benefit from social service assistance from the Confederation do not have this right.

The request for financial assistance is sent by the aid association directly to the relevant representation, where the request is considered and the requirements are

evaluated based on the explanation provided and the financial documentation. The Consular Directorate of the FDFA then examines all of the files.

The decisions will take into account the available resources. Our general consulates and embassies, which have established direct local collaboration relationships with these institutions, ensure the provision of the aid services potentially available to the Swiss Abroad. Although the number of

cases of this kind of support remains low, this tool enables support to be provided to our fellow citizens who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

¹ Art. 40, para. 1 Cst (RS 101)

² Arts. 34, 38 and 58, let. C LSEtr (RS 195. 1); Arts. 40 and 46 OSEtr (RS 195.11)



A historical document from a turbulent era: the Federal Council expresses its thanks to the Société Helvétique de Bienfaisance de Paris (SHB) in 1936 for underwriting a bond to fund Switzerland's national defence, assuring it of "the country's gratitude for this patriotic gesture".

Photo: SHB archive, Paris

The example of the Société Helvétique de Bienfaisance



The Société Helvétique de Bienfaisance (SHB) has just celebrated its bicentenary. It was created in 1821 by four young Swiss citizens, newly arrived in Paris. Its goal, then and now, was to help underprivileged Swiss citizens living in France.

The first few years were tumultuous: in just 50 years, the young organisation was faced with the Revolution of 1830, followed by cholera, the insurrection of 1848, and finally the war of 1870 and the siege of Paris. The organisation was able to survive these events thanks to federal assistance and the exemplary dedication and generosity of the Swiss in Paris. The organisation was no more spared by the following centuries, which saw two world wars, the Spanish flu and the current pandemic. Through all these painful periods, the SHB has proven its efficiency and continues to act as a vital support for Swiss in difficulty in France.

On a daily basis, an assistant manages the aid requests that arrive at the embassy or on its website, whilst a dozen volunteers visit elderly and isolated individuals. The Swiss who receive this assistance suffer from all kinds of difficulties: trouble making ends meet, unpaid bills, a need for medical or dental care, and administrative or psychological support.

The SHB analyses each case, takes action and pays the bills. Twice per year, it provides financial support for the most underprivileged individuals. The organisation also supports young people and allocates two study grants per year to Swiss students at the Cité Universitaire and three grants for trainees participating in apprenticeships at the École Suisse de Paris. The organisation is today able to manage all of these costs thanks to the generosity of a Swiss foundation, with the help of a federal subsidy and the legacies and donations of its members. It also organises charity concerts and a tombola during our General Assembly.

A huge thank you to everyone!

But maintaining this support is a challenge and the SHB hopes to have convinced readers to join them. SHB

Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.



Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative 'For good and affordable supplementary childcare services for all' (08.09.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'For regulated financial support in the event of epidemics' (Financial Support Initiative) (29.09.2023)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German, French and Italian at www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



Swiss Benevolent Foundation in Manila



In 1925, members of the Swiss Club Philippines set up the Swiss Benevolent Foundation (SBF). The objective was to relieve the urgent needs of deserving Swiss citizens.

The SBF is managed by a board of trustees composed of members of the Swiss Club Philippines. It mainly relies on voluntary donations from members of the Swiss Club. The board of trustees decides which Swiss citizens and other people with close con-

nections to Switzerland are deserving of help. SBF services include one-off financial support, loans, donations, and assistance in the event of illness or loss of livelihood. Giving Christmas donations to destitute and imprisoned Swiss citizens, covering medical and hospital expenses, and subsidising school fees for the orphaned dependants of Swiss citizens are just some of the successful projects supported by the SBF since its inception.

SWISS EMBASSY, MANILA



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Travel Admin – the FDFA travel app

Travel Admin – the travel app of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) – helps you to plan trips abroad and provides you with useful functions and information while you are travelling. Create a profile and register your trip abroad.



Travel Admin

The Travel Admin app is for free in the iOS and in the Android App Shop.

FDFA Helpline – your central contact point

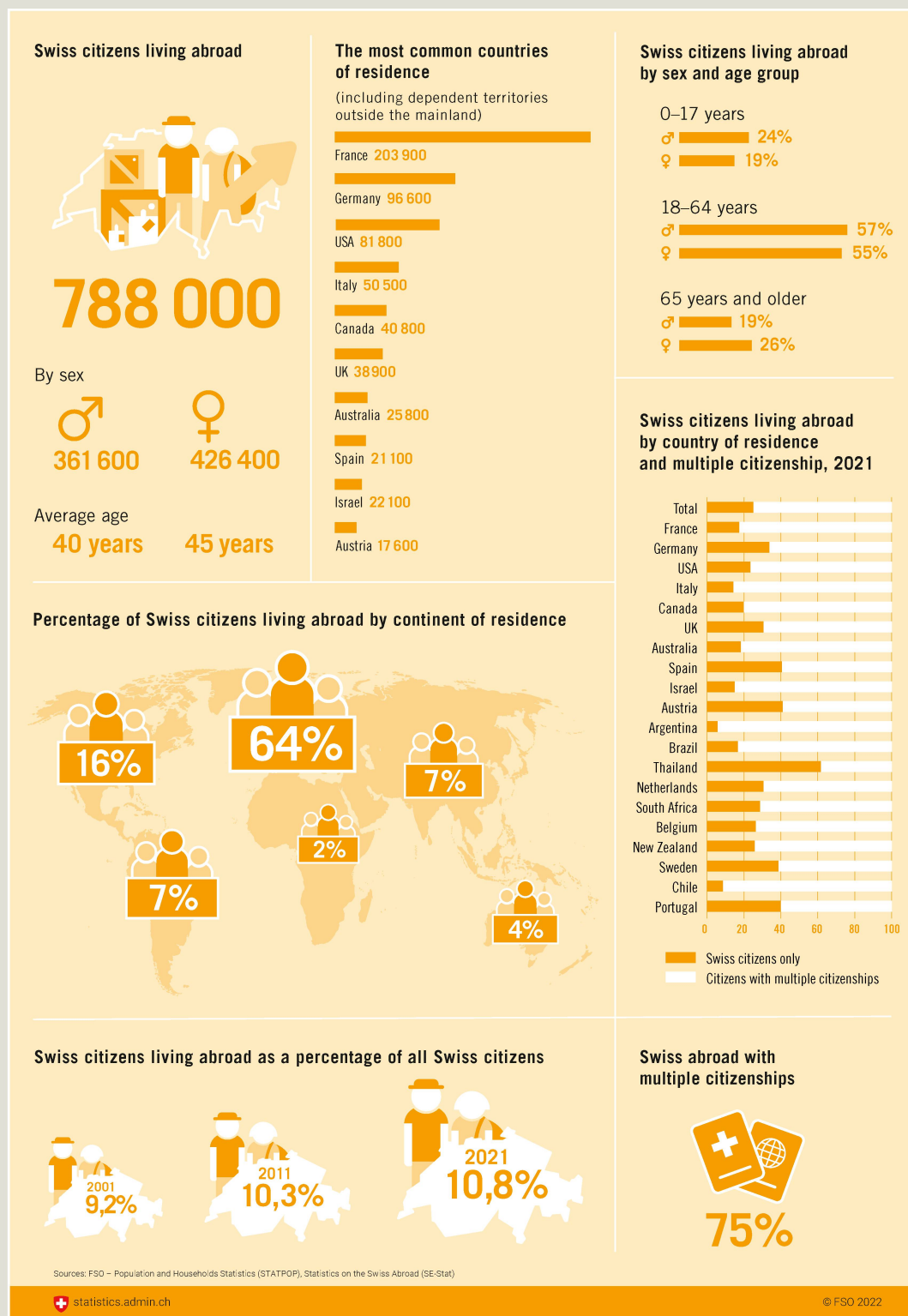
The Helpline of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is your central contact point for all matters relating to consular services. The FDFA Helpline is also ready to assist you in emergencies. Worldwide, 365 days a year, around the clock – by phone, email or Skype.

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The diversity of the Swiss Abroad

Switzerland's diverse population extends beyond the country's borders. More than one tenth of Swiss were living abroad at the end of 2021, 75 per cent of whom are citizens of at least one other country. The proportion of Swiss Abroad with dual or multiple citizenship is particularly high in South America.



In 2021, 788,000 Swiss Abroad were registered with a responsible Swiss representation abroad – 1.5 per cent more than in the previous year. As far as the last two years are concerned, the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to have no significant impact on numbers in 2021, but the exceptional circumstances resulted in lower fluctuation in 2020.

Dual and multiple citizenship is common

Three quarters of Swiss Abroad, or 590,500 people, are citizens of one or more countries other than Switzerland. This proportion has remained the same since 2017.

The proportion of Swiss Abroad who are nationals of at least one other country is particularly high in the Americas (80 per cent) and in South America the proportion is as high as 87.3 per cent. Here, Argentina and Chile top the charts on 94.2 and 91.3 per cent respectively.

The majority of Swiss Abroad overall (68.3 per cent) were born abroad. Out of those with dual or multiple citizenship, 82.8 per cent were born abroad. Argentina and Chile also lead the way in this category, at 98.1 and 96.4 per cent respectively.

(BFS)

For further information, visit
www.bfs.admin.ch:
Federal Statistical Office >
Look for statistics > Population >
and integration > Swiss citizens living abroad

