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The Council of the Swiss Abroad makes a clear commitment to Swiss neutrality

The Council of the Swiss Abroad, referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, has spoken out clearly in favour of a responsible approach to Swiss neutrality – and endorsed a resolution to this effect.

With the current geopolitical situation giving cause for concern, the highly charged issue of neutrality has also become a topic of discussion within the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). At its autumn meeting on 5 November 2022, the CSA addressed a motion from one of its delegates, John McGough (Hungary). Referring to the war in Ukraine, McGough said the CSA should urge the Federal Council and parliament to “observe the right to neutrality as an absolute imperative”. Even in times of war, Swiss expats have always been “free to travel to and from Switzerland as they please” thanks to their country’s “credible and universally recognised neutrality”, he argued, adding that the Federal Council should, therefore, be “strictly neutral” at all times.

But the CSA ultimately rejected McGough’s motion – and emphatically endorsed an alternative resolution put forward by the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and its president, Filippo Lombardi. Instead of demanding that the Federal Council observe “strict neutrality”, the approved resolution now calls on the Swiss government to deliver a “coherent foreign policy that, above all, promotes peace and international dialogue, continues to walk the line of neutrality, defends our democratic values, and supports humanitarian efforts to help populations affected by armed conflict”. The CSA believes that such an approach also works in the interests of expats. “It is crucial that Swiss Abroad continue to enjoy freedom of movement and residence in times of conflict,” says the resolution. Free movement needs to be guaranteed at all times.

Not only does the CSA state its position, but it also formulates a clear set of expectations. It wants the Federal Council to pursue a policy of “strict military neutrality” and defend “our democratic values in partnership with countries that share these values”.



Picture-perfect neutrality?

Cartoon: Max Spring

Humanitarian aid is another important area. Switzerland must support the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations (UN) in their efforts to help victims of armed conflict. This also entails providing safe haven to war refugees.

The CSA's 2023 election manifesto

At its November meeting, the CSA also discussed the adoption of a manifesto for the 2023 federal elections. The manifesto is primarily addressed to Switzerland’s politicians and their parties, calling on them to promote and safeguard the exercise of political rights abroad, promote the development of e-government, and ensure continued freedom of movement between Switzerland and EU countries. Furthermore, the manifesto advocates removing barriers for Swiss Abroad in relation to social secu-

urity and maintaining the good level of coverage provided by Switzerland’s consular network. The CSA will approve the final draft of its election manifesto at its spring meeting on 18 March 2023 in Berne.

ANNA WEGELIN

Further information including a Zoom recording of the CSA meeting: revue.link/council1122



Webinar on the topics of aging abroad and OASI (Old-age and survivors’ insurance)

On 9 February 2023, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) will be holding a webinar in collaboration with the FDFA, the Swiss Compensation Office and Soliswiss on the topics of aging abroad and OASI. The webinar is aimed at people with Swiss citizenship who already live abroad or who are considering moving abroad for their retirement (see also the contribution on aging abroad on pages 24-25). During the webinar, experts will give an overview of this complex issue and answer questions directly or indirectly connected to OASI.

The event will take place in German and in French and begins at 13.30 Central European Time (CET). Anyone interested can sign up by 7 February 2023 at swisscommunity.link/webinaroasi. A summary of the webinar will be available on the OSA website, www.swisscommunity.org, from 13 February 2023.

SMILLA SCHÄR,
ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD (OSA)

Our 2022 summer holiday camps – in figures

Every summer from June to August, the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) run numerous summer camps for children and teenagers from the “Fifth Switzerland”. Our holiday camps are a great place to start lifelong friendships, enjoy wonderful hikes in the Swiss mountains, and become familiar with typical Swiss specialities. But you probably know all that by now. Our review of the 2022 holiday camp season is therefore slightly different: it comes in the form of statistics.



Hiking

At our 2022 summer holiday camps, we hiked a total of 463 km on foot. This is roughly the **distance between Berne and Montpellier or Berne and Florence**.



Rösti

We got through 140 kg of potato in 2022. This corresponds to **approximately 560 portions of rösti**.



Chocolate

We ate **76.1 kg** in chocolate at our summer camps – our own contribution to Switzerland's impressive annual per capita rate of chocolate consumption, which amounts to 11.3 kg.

Lost property

People lose things. It's a fact of life. But at every holiday camp, we collect and keep all lost items until their rightful owners claim them again. In order of ranking, the most frequently lost items of property in 2022 were:

1. t-shirts
2. shoes
3. charging cables



Staying the night

At our summer holiday camps, we clocked up 6,089 overnight stays. This would correspond to one person staying in Switzerland for **almost 17 years**.

Leaders

The success of our summer holiday camps owes everything to the preparation, planning and organisational work put in by our sizeable band of camp leaders, who themselves represent a geographically diverse cross-section of Switzerland. In addition to our camp leaders from the “Fifth Switzerland” (of whom there were 23), they also came from the cantons of Berne (14), Fribourg (7), Vaud (6), Solothurn (6), Zurich (6), Aargau (6), St Gallen (5), Lucerne (4), Basel-Stadt (4), Nidwalden (3), Neuchâtel (2), Jura (2), Geneva (2), and Basel-Landschaft (2) as well as one camp leader each from Grisons, Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, Thurgau, Zug, Schwyz and Valais.



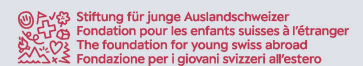
Participants from around the world

The children and teenagers attending the 2022 summer holiday camps came from 50 different countries. **From which country will you be travelling to one of this year's camps?**

Summer holiday camps for children

Every year from June to August, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) runs a series of two-week summer holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad aged eight to 14, offering these children the chance to get to know Switzerland and make friends with other young people from around the world. Information about this year's summer holiday camps is available on the FYSA website: www.sjas.ch/en/summer-camp. The registration deadline is 15 March 2023.

SIBYLLE KAPPELER



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News and stories for young people on Instagram

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is active on Instagram under the @swisscommunity handle. Aimed particularly at young Swiss Abroad, the page profiles a range of amazing people and inspiring projects, provides first-hand accounts and insights from the OSA youth camps, and, of course, gives a heads-up on the best “Swiss Review” stories. Help us to attract attention by adding the @swisscommunity handle as well as the #swisscommunity and #youngSwissAbroad hashtags to your own Insta posts.

FABIENNE STOCKER AND DESIRÉE KÜFFER
[REVUE.LINK/INSTAGRAM](https://www.instagram.com/revue.link)



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What changes with the AHV 21 reform?

The question: I have worked in Switzerland and many other countries outside the EU/EFTA over the past decades. Next year, I will be returning to Switzerland under a new employment contract. What impact does the AHV 21 reform have on me as a Swiss woman abroad born in 1962?

The answer: The changes introduced by the AHV 21 bill voted into law by the Swiss population in September 2022 are expected to take effect in early 2024. They apply to both mandatory and voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance. Under the reform, the retirement age – now referred to as the 'reference age' – will be the same for all genders; in specific terms, this means that the reference age for women will be raised from 64 to 65. In addition, you can now retire at any age between 63 (62 for women in the transitional generation) and 70. There is also the option of drawing part of your pension in advance, or deferring it. For example, once you reach the reference age, you can keep working, at reduced hours, and draw part of your pension at the same time. These financial incentives are intended to encourage the workforce to continue working beyond the reference age. This means that you can increase your pension even after you reach

the reference age, with contributions that can be deducted even from small salaries. Under certain conditions, you can also use the OASI contributions you pay after reaching the reference age to plug any gaps in contributions from the past. This prevents your pension being reduced due to missing contribution years.

The increase in the retirement age for women will occur progressively. One year after the changes have come into effect, the reference age will increase by three months every year, until it finally reaches 65. If the changes come into effect in early 2024 as planned, your personal reference age will become 64 years and six months. Compensatory measures are planned for women who are already on the verge of retiring and therefore cannot plan their pensions to take account of the changes. The transitional generation will probably include those born between 1961 and 1969, so you will also qual-

ify for these compensatory measures. If you decide not to draw your pension early and to wait until you are 64 years and six months of age before retiring, you will thus receive a supplement to your pension for the rest of your life. If, on the other hand, you decide to retire earlier, lower reduction percentages will apply. The exact amount of the supplement or the reduction percentage will depend on the year of your birth and your average income. You can calculate them on the website of the Federal Social Insurance Office.

Federal Social Insurance Office,
www.revue.ch/65

Smilla Schär,
OSA Legal Department,
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What does the new Swiss law on inheritance mean for me as a Swiss woman living abroad?

The question: I am a Swiss woman who has taken early retirement and is now living abroad. On 1 January 2023, the new Swiss inheritance law came into effect. Can you tell me about the most important changes this law will introduce? Can I now have my estate handled via Switzerland and, for example, make sure my eldest daughter receives the maximum amount?

The answer: The law on inheritance when you have moved abroad is a complex topic. The answer to your question depends on where you are living. We therefore recommend, as a general rule, that you seek advice on your specific situation from an expert in international inheritance law.

In Switzerland, the Federal Act on Private International Law (IPRG) applies, which is

used as a national legal structure in international inheritance law issues. For Swiss people whose most recent place of residence is abroad, the legal structure that determines the country of residence for such a circumstance applies. As a Swiss Abroad, you can also have your inheritance governed by Swiss law via a writ or a contract of inher-

Continued on page 30.



Arranging your estate fairly is a challenge. Photo: iStock

In the country or in the city

Why not come to Switzerland to gain your first work experience? The advisory service on education in Switzerland from [educationsuisse](http://educationsuisse.ch) also provides tips on initial work experience for young Swiss Abroad.

Continued from page 29.

itance, if this is not already the case by default in your country of residence. Nonetheless, you should contact the authorities of your country of residence to find out if they will recognise a writ of this nature. This option is not available for plots of land where a country asserts sole jurisdiction over immovable property.

The IPRG is not affected by the current revision in the law and continues to apply unchanged. Therefore, if you should decide to make your inheritance subject to Swiss law, the following changes also apply to you. In principle, you can stipulate in your will that you want your inheritance to be settled under Swiss law. However, certain limits have been imposed on the so-called compulsory portions: some family members are entitled to a minimum portion of your inheritance, determined by law. To take account of alternative forms of family life, however, heirs will now be able to dispose of their estate more freely under the new law. The compulsory portions are now lower: from 2023 onwards, the compulsory portion for parents will be abolished. The compulsory portion for children is reduced from three quarters to half of the legal estate, bringing it in line with the (unmodified) compulsory portion for spouses and registered partners.

The portion of your estate that you will be able to bequeath to your eldest daughter therefore depends on your other family relationships. If you are married or in a registered partnership, you will have to observe the corresponding compulsory portion. All your children will also be entitled to their respective compulsory portions. With the change in the law, however, you can now dispose of half your estate however you like. If you so wish, you can bequeath this part to your eldest daughter in full, in addition to the compulsory portion to which she is entitled by law.

Smilla Schär,
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In a Swiss city as a language assistant

Young students or recent graduates from countries where English, German, French, Spanish or Italian is the official national language can gain experience in the teaching profession. As native speakers they add an extra dimension to language lessons at upper secondary schools or vocational schools and illustrate cultural aspects of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which covers their living costs in Switzerland. The application period for the school year 2023/24 runs until the end of March 2023. More detailed information on the Language Assistance programme can be found at revue.link/movetia or by sending an email to edith.funicello@movetia.ch.

Supporting a farming family in the countryside

The sound of cowbells or the smell of hay... helping out on a farm is fun and an experience for life. The association Agriviva arranges placements lasting several weeks for young people up to the age of 25 from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money,

you help a farming family with their daily work. Ideal for anyone who likes being active, loves nature, and who would like to meet a new family and life on a Swiss farm.

More detailed information on Agriviva can be found at www.agriviva.ch or by sending an email to info@agriviva.ch.

Au-pair – internship – temporary job

There are various ways to gain initial work experience in Switzerland. What is required is personal initiative: numerous internet portals publish vacancies where you can apply directly. Address lists and tips on staying in Switzerland can be obtained from [educationsuisse](http://educationsuisse.ch). (RG)



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Discussion

The continuing discussion on Switzerland's neutrality is provoking controversy. It is dividing the nation instead of uniting it. This also emerged in the reactions of our readers to the article on neutrality in the December issue of the "Review". It just goes to show: neutrality is a topic that cannot be discussed neutrally at all.



Switzerland is clinging to its interpretation of neutrality

WERNER GEMPERLE, STOFORS, SWEDEN

For me, Switzerland's neutrality means not having the courage to do the right thing and always looking for a way to gain some benefit – as well as acting the great negotiator and looking good in the eyes of the world.

PAUL TAVAN, BAVARIA, GERMANY

In my view, there is no sensible reason for Switzerland to give up its perpetual armed neutrality. In particular, I think that taking part in the sanctions against Russia was a political mistake.

BEA BORNER, HUA HIN, THAILAND

Neutrality is proper and right. But when one country invades another country in the heart of Europe for no reason, Switzerland must under no circumstances turn a blind eye! Switzerland absolutely must stand with the country under attack and use every resource in every area at its disposal to do so.

DIETER SCHIESS, FRANCE

Neutrality during wartime is fine. This, however, is state terror by a megalomaniac. Switzerland cannot and should not just sit back neutrally and do nothing. By doing so, we are automatically condoning these inhuman crimes. As a Swiss man, I am ashamed of the way my country is acting.

GEORGES GLARDON, AGLOU, MOROCCO

Failing to observe strict neutrality with regard to conflicts abroad, whether these conflicts are social, political or military in nature, undermines a country's credibility. I think that taking part in the sanctions against Russia (which is justified for non-neutral countries) is the first chink in the armour of Switzerland's neutrality.

UELI BORNHAUSER, GIESSEN, GERMANY

For me, neutrality means not belonging to any given block or following the conditions for adopting a certain position. It is not the same thing as not having a position. Neutrality can be helpful when negotiating between two warring parties. When there is a clear breach of the rules laid down by the UN, however, neutrality cannot be used as a pretence for refusing to take a stance. We promote moral courage in private, and I think that should apply to the whole community too!

ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

The expression that Switzerland practises neutrality is incorrect. Since the First World War at least, this term has applied solely in theory, a sort of 'pen name' for Switzerland. It's very practical, but it's not practised.

RICHARD JAKOB-HOFF, NEW ZEALAND

Maybe the word neutrality is too open to interpretation, as indicated in this article. Being peaceful and standing up for peace is not a passive thing but takes active determination and action. We should consider other, less ambivalent terms that describe Switzerland's position in relation to external conflicts. A neutral peace broker or facilitator is a role much needed in Europe and elsewhere and Switzerland could be in a prime position to take on such a role. Obviously not an easy task but extremely worthwhile.

BEN-HAMID BERTIZ, USA

Why is being neutral important? Neutrality sets us free. It helps us see something more like the truth, what's happening, instead of experiencing circumstances in relation to expectations and desires. This provides clarity and eliminates obstacles, making this neither awesome nor awful but cool. Enlightenment, the easy way.

The "Fifth Switzerland" and emigration

ANTAL TAMÁS ILLÉS, TENERIFE, SPAIN

I have some experience of emigrating myself: I moved from Hungary to Switzerland in 1956; we then moved from Switzerland to my sailing yacht in 1999; and in 2005 we settled in Spain. Two of my experiences:

Rule no. 1: Everything is different abroad. If you don't have a minimum of flexibility and adaptability, you're guaranteed to come a cropper. The most guaranteed method of making yourself unpopular in any country begins with the phrase, 'Now, the way we do it in Switzerland...'. Forget it! You are now a guest. Conduct yourself accordingly.

Rule no. 2: No-one learns Turkish or Thai just for a fortnight's holiday. If you want to live abroad for longer periods, though, the ability to make yourself at least partially understood in the national language is essential.

Visit the online edition of "Swiss Review" at www.revue.ch. Read the latest comments on our articles and join the conversation yourself. You can also share your opinions on the community discussion forum of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: members.swisscommunity.org/forum

