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Working for Switzerland: two reports from Haiti and Venezuela

Hanoi one day, maybe London the next. Moving among countries and cultures comes with the territory for Swiss embassy and consular staff. Every year the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is on the lookout for professionals and managers to apply their skills in the service of their country.

Switzerland has a global presence with about 170 representations and 250 people working in “consular affairs, operations management and finance” (KBF). What makes these positions stand out is that employees change location every three to four years. Ariela Kraska (Port-au-Prince) and Pascal Sollberger (Caracas) share their experiences and talk about the challenges of a KBF career below.

“I’ll be ready for an interview at midday (CET), which is 6 a.m. in Haiti.” Setting up a phone call is not so easy when there is an entire ocean between you and your interlocutors. Ariela Kraska is on the other side of the Atlantic. Her interest in other cultures led her to embark on a career with the FDFA, which houses consular affairs, operations management and finance under its international cooperation programmes. She has been based in Port-au-Prince since July 2021, where she is head of finance, HR and administration at the Swiss Cooperation Office in the Republic of Haiti. She will stay in Port-au-Prince until 2024 and then either transfer to another Swiss representation abroad or return to the head office in Berne. “Every two to four years I have the opportunity to discover a new country and interact with people from a different background, tradition and with a different mentality. That is both enriching and challenging at the same time. The challenge is evident: the harder the setting, the more unpredictable is the course of daily business.”

Training and required skills

Most KBF employees work outside Switzerland. That can be difficult, for example if the person’s partner can’t find work locally, freedom of movement is restricted or there is a low standard of living. Adaptability and intercultural competence under what can be precarious circumstances come with the job. “The days are long and sometimes hectic. You need to be able to stay calm and maintain an

overview of all the different areas including finance, human resources and security,” says Kraska. “I recall visiting a prisoner being held in degrading conditions and working on

“The harder the setting,
the more unpredictable
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daily business”

Ariela Kraska

cases of child kidnapping.” Candidates undergo a selection process and complete a 15-month training programme. It starts with two months of theory in Berne. Then comes one year of practical training in the FDFA’s external network. The last part is another month of theory and final evaluation by the admissions committee in Berne. The training prepares employees to work towards Switzerland’s foreign policy aims and priorities: peace, security, poverty reduction, prosperity, sustainability and digitalisation.

Representing Switzerland throughout the world

KBF employees are indispensable to Switzerland being in a position to fulfil its mandate abroad. “I’ve been with the FDFA since 2014 and have worked on almost every con-



Ariela Kraska began her career in the hotel industry and subsequently completed a course in business administration. Photo provided, Charly Amazan, Getty Images (photomontage)



Pascal Sollberger is a qualified insurance economist and spent over ten years in the private sector working in insurance and process management prior to joining the FDFA. Photo provided, Pascal Sollberger, iStock (photomontage)

continent, in countries like Indonesia and Lebanon. I've been in Venezuela since 2021. The Swiss embassy in Venezuela also covers seven other Caribbean countries, including Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago," explains consul Pascal Sollberger. The staff at the representations are responsible for representing Swiss interests in all aspects of international diplomacy. KBF staff coordinate operations and act as a hub for all the departments in the foreign representation. On a day-to-day basis, that involves combining plannable and ad-hoc activities. "An embassy is both a Swiss and a local employer. Operations management, security and crisis management bring me into close contact with Swiss and Venezuelan staff, external service providers, other embassies and in-

"I've been with the FDFA since 2014 and have worked on almost every continent, in countries like Indonesia and Lebanon"

Pascal Sollberger

ternational organisations, for example the International Committee of the Red Cross." Responding quickly to critical situations is part of the KBF employees' remit. Pascal Sollberger remembers the explosion at Beirut port in 2020, which caused serious damage to the embassy. "The employees play a key part in dealing with events like that, in my case as head of crisis management. What happened that day will stay with us for a long time." Another important task is to ensure the provision of high-quality consular services for Swiss people living abroad and Swiss tourists (intercultural marriages, issuing passports, repatriations etc.) in close cooperation with the professional staff at the consulate.

FDFA

Jobs for people who like variety

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is looking for Swiss who are ready to apply their skills and experience in the service of Switzerland.

They will work on a relocatable basis, as employees are obliged to transfer every two to four years. The following paths are offered:

- Career "Consular affairs, operations management and finance"
- Career "International cooperation"
- Career "Diplomacy"
- Consular specialist

Would you like to offer your abilities and experience to serve Switzerland? Further information is available at www.eda.admin.ch/karriere



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2023 federal elections

The general elections to both chambers of the federal parliament took place on 22 October 2023. For the election results plus information, explanatory videos and interactive charts about the elections to the National Council and the Council of States, visit www.ch.ch/en/wahlen2023, a service brought to you by the Federal Chancellery, the Parliamentary Services, the Federal Statistical Office and the cantons.

This information including the election results, will also appear on the Federal Chancellery app VoteInfo. To download the app, visit: revue.link/voteinfo

Due to the abovementioned federal elections, there are no further voting dates in 2023. The next voting date is 3 March 2024. The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about these 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 had already been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- Federal Popular Initiative “For food security – by strengthening sustainable domestic production, more plant-based food and clean drinking water (Food Initiative)” (13 December 2024)
- “No to a Switzerland of 10 million!” (Sustainability Initiative)” (4 January 2025)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at <https://www.bk.admin.ch/> > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

Please note

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