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Santa's post office

Every year, thousands of children in Switzerland write letters to Father Christmas just before the festive season. They receive replies from Ticino.

THEODORA PETER

It just says "Father Christmas at the North Pole" on the envelope – the recipient has no fixed address. Nor does he need one. The post will end up in Ticino. Every year, a dedicated team of around eight "elves" in Cadenazzo near Locarno have the job of sorting all the letters to Santa that have been painstakingly handwritten by children in Switzerland. One of these elves is 55-year-old postal worker Moritz Succetti from Camorino, who says he gets a kick out of giving joy to so many children. His normal day job at Swiss Post in Cadenazzo consists of handling undeliverable mail from all around Switzerland.

More than 30,000 letters

Tens of thousands of letters to Santa are set to arrive in Cadenazzo again this December. Some 33,000 items were counted last year. There were nearly 36,000 in the previous year – a record. The letters often include drawings, wish lists – or even the odd baby's dummy that the child in question has promised to stop wearing. "We get a lot of touching messages," says Succetti. For example, children will write about losing one of their parents or mention that one of their family has fallen ill. "I remember reading a letter from a girl whose sister was seriously ill. It almost brought me to tears." Recent things in the news, like war or Covid, are not lost on children either. "Many kids were worried for Father Christmas's health during the pandemic, writing that they hoped he wouldn't catch the virus."

The Cadenazzo elves make sure that all children receive a signed reply from Santa in French, German or Italian – with a small gift enclosed, like a colouring book for example. If the child has not provided an address, the elves do their best to find one. The Swiss Post directory comes in handy, while the postmark on the envelope can also provide clues. They are able to get a match in 90 per cent of cases, but there will always be letters that cannot be traced. "This is why it is important that children give their full address," says Succetti.

Cultural differences

The amount of mail to Santa has almost doubled in the last ten years. Nearly three quarters of the letters come from French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, and around 20 per cent from German-speaking Switzerland. Another five per cent are written in English – Santa naturally also replies to these. Cultural differences come into play as well: children in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland



Dressed for the occasion – in Swiss Post yellow. The Christmas elves in Cadenazzo search meticulously for every child's missing postal address. Photo: Keystone

write to Father Christmas, German-speaking children traditionally address their letters to the "Christkind" (Christmas angel). Regardless of recipient, all the young authors of these letters want their wishes to come true.



Letters to Father Christmas from Switzerland have become more numerous in recent years. The largest proportion of them come from French-speaking children.

Photo: Swiss Post/provided