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CSA Election: Insights from the Pilot Project in Australia

Last year, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) established a working group to develop guidelines for democratic digital elections, aiming to enhance the representativeness of the CSA. The group can draw on the experience of countries where direct elections have been conducted previously. This article provides an overview of the changes and experiences made during the OSA pilot project in Australia in 2017.

Australia holds the third-largest Swiss expatriate community outside Europe and is allocated four seats in the CSA. Before 2017, the nomination and election of delegates were primarily internal matters, decided by committees or presidents of a few clubs.

The 2017 elections revolutionised this process on three fronts. Firstly, the call for nominations reached all Swiss whose email address was registered with the Consulate General, as well as readers of the “Swiss Review” and relevant Swiss online channels. Secondly, all Swiss citizens above 18, registered with an email at the Consulate, were eligible to vote, totalling 14,800 people. Thirdly, the elections were carried out electronically, through the then-still-existing e-voting platform of the canton of Geneva.

The campaign utilised a variety of local communication platforms and the “Swiss Review”. However crucial in achieving the wide reach was the Consulate General. They sent out two emails to all registered Swiss over 18: the call for nominations and later the call to vote.

The outcome was remarkable, as for the first time the number of candidates exceeded available seats - twice over. In the elections, 1,100 Swiss seized the opportunity to vote, resulting in a 7.4% participation rate. While this number may still appear modest, it is a big increase from the estimated 0.05% - 0.3% achieved previously.

Having more candidates than available seats in openly conducted elections implies a competition for votes. To get a vote, people must know who we are and what we stand for and have confidence in our ability to fulfil this role well. While this places pressure on the candidates, it provides voters with a genuine choice. Additionally, the opportunity to vote was extended to 14,800 people, not just a handful of club committees.

Overall, the pilot project in 2017 was a great opportunity for Swiss in Australia to democratically choose their delegates and for us to gain legiti-



In Australia the pilot project revolutionised the election process for the Council of the Swiss Abroad: All of a sudden, 14,800 Swiss had the opportunity to vote – and no longer just a handful of club representatives.

Photo: iStock

macy as the representatives of the Swiss community in Australia.

Based on its experience, Australia continued with direct elections in 2021 and is planning to offer a digital and democratic election process again in 2025.

CARMEN TROCHSLER, CSA DELEGATE, AUSTRALIA

For questions and feedback on the topic, please contact:
workgroup.osa@outlook.com

E-voting for elections to the CSA

An e-voting system developed and tested numerous times by Berne University of Applied Sciences (BFH) is ready to be used for digital elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). The CSA's dedicated working group announced this news on 14 March 2024 at an information event at the Federal Palace in Berne. Eric Dubuis, a professor at BFH who specialises in e-voting, told everyone present that the system would be made available for the CSA elections, at virtually no cost. Speaking in Berne on behalf of the working group, Noel Frei said that he now hoped as many regions as possible would express interest in using the system.

Photos of the meeting are available in the online edition of “Swiss Review” at www.revue.ch. (MUL)

New Swiss postage stamps – inspiration from young Swiss Abroad

In summer 2023, 124 young Swiss Abroad from 33 different countries had the rare honour of helping to create new Swiss postage stamp designs during holiday camps run by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity.

It was certainly a great experience for the 15 to 18 year olds to be able to contribute to creating the new stamps, which have now been unveiled by Swiss Post. The designs symbolise 2024, which as the “Fifth Switzerland” will know, is the year of the 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad, the 90th anniversary of our youth camps, and the 50th anniversary of “Swiss Review”.

The teenagers drew up ideas for the new stamps during their stay in Switzerland. These were then forwarded as sketches or videos to three Swiss graphic designers living abroad, who were specially invited by Swiss Post to participate in a competition to design the stamps. The process of creating what would be the 2024 Pro Patria stamp issue, dedicated to Switzerland’s expatriate community, therefore began at last summer’s holiday camps.

This process involved three stages of preparation. Firstly, the teenagers considered what stamps and written mail mean to them. Next, they thought of the elements that they would use to portray Switzerland. And finally, they sketched mountains, cows, chocolate and other things that symbolise Switzerland.

They then worked on the style, colour, typography and overall design of the stamps in greater detail. When the first confidential drafts were completed, the camp participants were able to give their opinion of them.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity, is proud to have been a part of this collaboration involving young Swiss Abroad, Pro Patria, Swiss Post, and London-based Swiss designer Sandra Liscio who won the competition.

Projects of this nature fulfil one of the fundamental aims of our organisation, namely to facilitate interaction



The two new postage stamps designed by Sandra Liscio, who was inspired by the ideas of our young holiday camp participants.

Photo: Swiss Post

Designer and Swiss citizen resident abroad



Sandra Liscio grew up in Lugano. She moved to London eight years ago for a three-month internship at a creative agency – and stayed. Today, she works as a design director in the film and entertainment industry and visits Switzerland at least twice a year. “A part of my heart is always in Switzerland. I think that many Swiss people abroad can relate to this bittersweet homesickness. So it was important to me to illustrate this feeling, which connects us all, in the stamps,” says the stamp designer.

EXTRACT FROM THE SWISS STAMP MAGAZINE “DIE LUPE”

between the Swiss Abroad and their compatriots in Switzerland. We are also delighted that the new stamps represent Swiss Abroad and look forward to these symbols of the “Fifth Switzerland” travelling far and wide.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD, SWISSCOMMUNITY

Video of the participating teenagers:
revue.link/propatria

Further information: revue.link/stamps
Sandra Liscio: sandralscico.ch
Buy the new stamps: postshop.ch



Photo: Melanie Kaye

Nat Cartier is the “Artist in Residence”

Edinburgh-based Swiss musician Nathaniel “Nat” Cartier will relocate to Brunnen on the shores of Lake Lucerne for a few weeks this summer, courtesy of the Area for the Swiss Abroad Foundation, which has appointed Cartier as its “Artist in Residence” for 2024. After previous residencies in 2016 and 2017, this will be the third time that the Area for the Swiss Abroad Foundation hosts an artist. Cartier’s residency begins on 13 July, coinciding with the

100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne and the day on which the Congress participants go on an organised excursion to Brunnen to visit the Area for the Swiss Abroad. It will provide him with an opportunity to rediscover Switzerland, work with local artists and pick up new sources of inspiration. (PD)

www.auslandschweizerplatz.ch

In Switzerland for university studies or an apprenticeship

Young Swiss Abroad receive personal counselling on the topic of education in Switzerland.

Switzerland has an excellent and diverse education system. The vocational education and training system based on apprenticeships is well established in society and the economy. The universities enjoy a good international reputation.

For young Swiss Abroad, post-compulsory education in Switzerland offers the opportunity of a very good education or training and at the same time the chance to get to know their family's homeland.

Such a step needs to be well prepared. It is important to obtain information at an early stage. The educationsuisse specialist service offers free advice and support on all questions relating to education in Switzerland:

- Information relating to different educational options such as university studies and vocational training
- Information relating to specific questions regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.
- Individual counselling onsite in Berne or online regarding education in Switzerland
- Vocational and study counselling in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider (fee-based)
- Assistance in applying for cantonal scholarship and administrative support
- Financial help (grants/loans) from educationsuisse and private foundations

The educationsuisse staff speak English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. They will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, by telephone or Skype or onsite in Berne.

RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

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Youth+Sport courses – a springboard for prospective camp leaders



Problem solved – even a simple tent needs a bit of planning.

Photo provided

Obernau in the canton of Lucerne served as the picturesque setting for an eventful week in which 15 prospective camp leaders cemented their knowledge and expertise in dealing with children and teenagers. With the Youth+Sport (J+S) course being conducted in both French and German, participants were able to brush up on their language skills at the same time. English was also occasionally spoken. Hidden away in the countryside, the local scouts and guide camp provided the ideal venue for intense training and a range of thought-provoking workshops and discussions on culture, education, safety and teamwork. The participants were also able to put what they had learned into practice – organising various sports activities, embarking on a two-day hike around Rigi and Pilatus, and going through many of the situations that you would typically encounter at a holiday camp.

The course was geared to young Swiss who wish to prepare for the responsibility of being a holiday camp leader. Training on safety, risk prevention, care, and activity coordination, as well as input on outdoor techniques, also proved particularly valuable. The course brought together Swiss Abroad, people doing civilian service, and Swiss residents without any experience of youth organisations – an exciting mix that provided lots of opportunities for participants to en-

gage and interact. After an intense week, everyone returned home with bags of knowledge and new perspectives. The J+S course is not only a milestone in personal development but also helps to promote diversity and togetherness among Swiss youth workers.

National scheme to promote sport

J+S assists sports organisers by providing them with funding as well as subsidised training and further education opportunities. It also supports courses and camps for children and teenagers in around 85 different sports. Some 80,000 sports courses and dedicated camps take place every year, attended by about 640,000 children. The holiday camps and training courses of the FYSA and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad are also supported by J+S and available in the camp sports/trekking and ski/snowboard categories.

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA

Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
The foundation for young swiss abroad
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

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Swiss politics – an easy navigation guide

We aim to bring the latest issues in Swiss politics closer to home through a new series of easy-to-understand webinars geared to Swiss Abroad of all ages.

The issues at stake in federal votes sometimes seem quite complex. In partnership with easyvote, we are running a new series of webinars that explain everything you need to know in a simple, straightforward, neutral manner. The aim of these webinars is to make Swiss politics easier to understand for everyone, regardless of age or existing political knowledge.



Easyvote was originally geared to 18 to 25 year olds, but its accessible educational approach allows everyone to familiarise themselves with current issues without wading through complicated terminology or party-political arguments. This makes our webinars suitable for everyone, regardless of age.

Would you like to learn more? Do you have questions about the upcoming federal votes? We and our friends at easyvote will provide you with reliable, unbiased information. Participation in the webinars is free of charge and available via a direct link on our website: revue.link/voting. In just a few clicks, you can access the webinar as well as relevant information on the latest voting proposals.

Don't miss this chance – visit us online on 14 May, 27 August and 29 October 2024.

MARIE BLOCH, YOUTH SERVICE



At the epicentre of Swiss politics – young people from the “Fifth Switzerland” sitting in the National Council chamber. Photo: Jugenddienst

revue.link/easyd



How to avoid an unexpected problem with your driving licence when you return to Switzerland

Question: I am 75 years old and have been living in Australia for many years. I still own a Swiss driving licence. When entering Switzerland recently, I received a warning saying that I had failed to comply with a request from the driver and vehicle licensing office to undergo a medical fitness-to-drive test. What's this all about?

Answer: If you own a Swiss driving licence and move abroad, you must deregister from your local cantonal driver and vehicle licensing office. Furthermore, driving licence holders in Switzerland who turn 75 must undergo a medical fitness-to-drive test. From this age, drivers have to be checked by a doctor every two years.

Fail to deregister and you may be in for an unpleasant surprise. If the driver and vehicle licensing office is not notified about your residence abroad, your residential address will be deemed as unknown in Switzerland. A notice instructing you to undergo the medical test will then be published in the official cantonal gazette. If this request



Motorists in Switzerland who reach the age of 75 must go to a doctor every two years for a medical fitness-to-drive test. Photo: iStock

remains unanswered and no all-clear from the doctor has been provided in time, the driver and vehicle licensing office will order the withdrawal of your driving licence. A notice to this effect will subsequently appear in the cantonal gazette, and a relevant alert will be issued in the federal government's computerised police search system, RIPOL. This is because you will no longer be regis-

tered in Switzerland but still be in possession of a Swiss driving licence. And when you next enter Switzerland, you may be pulled aside by a border official – not necessarily the nicest welcome.

If you are a Swiss domiciled abroad who continues to own a Swiss driving licence, you can contact the relevant driver and vehicle licensing office and request the suspension of your licence. There are normally no fees or costs associated with doing so. For the contact details of the cantonal driver and vehicle licensing offices as well as further information, visit revue.link/asa (website shown in German, French and Italian).

You will normally be obliged in your new country of residence to swap your Swiss driving licence for a local driving licence within a specific time frame. An International Driving Permit (IDP) will also lose its validity and needs to be renewed after a certain period of time. The time limit within which you must renew your IDP will vary depending on the country you are in (e.g. within one year of arrival). If you fail to renew your IDP in time, you may have to take your driving test again in your new country of residence after doing the full complement of theory and driving lessons. For authoritative information on time limits and on how to swap your driving licence, you should always contact the responsible authority in your country of residence.

STEPHANIE LEBER, OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

revue.link/asa



Statistics reveal sense of financial insecurity among over-65s

The “Fifth Switzerland” continues to grow. Last year, the biggest percentage increase in Swiss Abroad was among the over-65s. This is partly because financial insecurity has become more of an issue for people in this age group.

Some 813,400 Swiss nationals were living abroad at the end of 2023. This is an increase of 1.7 per cent on the previous year. The Federal Statistical Office published these new figures at the end of March. It is still the case that easily the biggest proportion of Swiss Abroad – around 64 per cent – live in Europe. France and Germany were again home to the largest Swiss expatriate populations in 2023. And the majority of Swiss Abroad – 56 per cent – are between 18 and 65, i.e. of employable age.

As in recent years, the over-65 age group grew faster than all the other expatriate age groups in 2023 – by almost four per cent. This is partly down to an ageing expatriate population, but emigration also plays a key role. Evidence suggests that financial insecurity is another reason why more Swiss are deciding to move abroad. In a survey conducted as part of the nccr – on the move research project at the University of Neuchâtel, respondents most frequently said that they had moved abroad because the cost of living in Switzerland was too high or because they wanted to maintain or improve their standard of living. State pension figures support this argument. In 2022, Swiss living in Switzerland received an average monthly OASI state pension of 1,919 Swiss francs. The average state pension payment for Swiss Abroad was much lower: 1,209 francs.

Retired Swiss Abroad now see political and media sentiment swinging against them. The National Council recently voted in favour of a motion to abolish child pensions.

To compensate for the loss of child pensions, the motion proposed that individual supplementary benefits should increase if necessary. Given that residence abroad precludes you from receiving supplementary benefits, Swiss Abroad on low incomes would have their child pensions cancelled and not receive any benefits to offset this loss in income.

“Misguided and wrong”

Anyone following the debate surrounding state pensions for the Swiss Abroad may be forgiven for thinking that retired expats live a life of luxury. For most, the reality is different. Many Swiss Abroad would have needed supplementary benefits if they had stayed in Switzerland. “Swiss who emigrate after retirement are normally less of a burden on the Swiss welfare state,” says Filippo Lombardi, president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, “which is why it is misguided and wrong to be chipping away at their pensions”.

SMILLA SCHÄR, SWISSCOMMUNITY MEDIA OFFICER

The next edition of “Swiss Review” will contain a detailed overview of the latest statistics on the Swiss Abroad (for 2023).

Our “Discussion” page containing reader comments is taking a break. It will appear again in the next issue.

Ensuring the future of “Swiss Review”

“Swiss Review” is blessed with an experienced editorial team well-versed in giving their independent journalistic take on the latest burning issues in Switzerland and making this content relatable to readers in the “Fifth Switzerland”. Through your donation, you can support independent, quality journalism directly. Given that printing and mailing costs are so prohibitively high at the moment, we are particularly grateful for donations towards our print edition.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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