



WE HAVE THE FINAL SAY

How well do you know Switzerland?

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Direct democracy

Switzerland is a direct democracy. Sovereignty resides with the people, who exercise supreme political power.

There are 2 ways to cast your vote: at the ballot box or by postal vote.

Participation

Swiss citizens have comprehensive rights to participate in political life.

Initiatives to amend the constitution: 100,000 signatures

Optional referendums against new laws passed by Parliament: 50,000 signatures

45.4% is the average voter turnout for federal votes.

N°1 Switzerland tops the world rankings for active political participation by citizens.

The Swiss electorate votes up to 4 times a year on approximately 15 different federal popular votes.

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Many believe that the basis for this success lies in the country's decentralized political system - with 26 cantons each having their own constitution and parliament - and participative direct democracy, where citizens can collectively propose or veto new laws by launching popular initiatives or challenging parliament through referendums. This system may often seem cumbersome and, indeed, change often comes slowly to the country. Women's right to vote on national issues, for example, was established only in 1971. However, the ability to elect representatives and directly influence policies on all levels of government also creates accountability as well as a creative internal competition for resources and ideas.

country therefore pursues an independent foreign policy driven by its values of neutrality, universality, rule of law, sustainability and solidarity. Switzerland is committed to a strong and effective multilateral system, placing human dignity and security at the center of its international engagement. With its candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2023-24, Switzerland is ready to step up its commitment and take on even more responsibility on the global stage.

How does this all translate into Switzerland's 50-year long presence in Bangladesh? Since establishing diplomatic relations in March 1972,

Switzerland has invested over 1 billion USD in Bangladesh's development and provided millions more of humanitarian aid in times of crisis. Swiss companies have invested even more, providing employment to thousands and Swiss quality products and services to millions in Bangladesh. Trade between the countries has tripled over the past decade and is set to reach the symbolic milestone of 1 billion USD soon. Through the promotion of good governance, rule of law, human rights and ease of doing business, Switzerland continues to partner with Bangladesh on its path towards a stable, just and prosperous future that leaves no one behind.

CLOSE your eyes for a couple of seconds and think about Switzerland. What do you see?

You probably visualize beautiful landscapes with blue lakes, green hills, happy cows and snow-capped mountains? You surely thought about cheese, chocolate, watches or banks? Fair enough, you will find all of these in Switzerland. They form an integral part of the country's identity and the Swiss people are proud of their national icons.

Are your eyes still closed? What if you tried to look beyond these icons and think about Switzerland and its people, its economy and its role in Europe, the world - and in Bangladesh? Now, what do

you see?

Let's start with the basics. It is a small country, with less than 1/3 of Bangladesh's surface and 5% of its population. Yet, in many aspects, Switzerland punches above its weight. The country's economy ranks among the world's top 20 and regularly leads on global innovation and competitiveness ratings. With many world-class universities and research institutions and a unique vocational education system that train youth "on the job", Switzerland boasts one of the world's most productive and innovative workforce. I am pretty sure that you heard about the internet, hand sanitizers or zippers? They were all invented in Switzerland.

Many believe that Geneva, home to the United Nations' operational headquarters and over two hundred international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), is Switzerland's capital - it is actually Berne - and that the country is a member of the European Union - it is not. Located in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is neither member of the EU nor of the European Economic Area, but the country is nevertheless integrated in the European single market and the Schengen area through a set of over 100 bilateral agreements. As a neutral country, Switzerland is not a member of any military or defense alliance. The

WE SPEAK SWISS

Romansh is a language from the Rhaeto-Romanic family, derived from Latin.

4 LANGUAGES

Switzerland has 4 national languages.

22.9% French

62.9% German / Swiss German

8.2% Italian

0.5% Romansh

24.3% of the population do not have one of the four national languages as main language.

DIALECTS

"Swiss German" is a term that covers a large variety of Alemannic dialects.

English and Portuguese are the most commonly spoken foreign languages in Switzerland.

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Switzerland boosts COVID-19

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

worried not to be able to sell their delicious produce amid movement restrictions. PRABRIDDIHI - a Local Economic Development project mandated by Switzerland - stepped in to support Mango farmers' associations in the Shibganj sub-district to recalibrate their marketing model and linking them up with leading e-commerce platforms and national retail and grocery stores. That has allowed them to supply their "garden fresh" mangoes throughout the country, upholding safety and quality standards, and has thus contributed to protect the livelihoods of thousands of people.

Youth are social change-makers if given a chance! Maisha Alam Urmi lives in an overcrowded slum in Dhaka's Mirpur, where maintaining social distancing and hygiene practices are big challenges. By teaming up with WaterAid, Switzerland has provided hygiene support and handwashing facilities in 31 slums in Dhaka. Together, we have also engaged youth activists, such as Urmi, to raise awareness about hygiene practices and other safety measures in their communities in order to keep the virus at bay.

Or take the case of Abu Tayeb (name changed), who is a survivor of human trafficking and lost almost his entire life-savings to a fraudulent-employment trap abroad. While trying to rebuild his life in the southern Satkhira district, cyclone Amphan and its impacts again shattered his dream. Switzerland partnered with Winrock International to provide financial support to Tayeb and over five hundred other persons who have escaped human trafficking and are now struggling at home because of the pandemic. This start-up capital support has enabled Tayeb to invest in a livestock farm.

These are examples of the COVID-19 initiatives supported by Switzerland. These interventions have proven to be effective in providing some relief against the negative impacts of the pandemic. So far, with Swiss support, around 1.5 million people were sensitized and trained on upholding hygiene standards; 1 million people accessed telemedicine services for better treatment of COVID-19; 130'000 slum dwellers got hygiene kits and 80'000 gained access to handwashing facilities; 115'000 people received cash and 60'000 food or vitamin contributions. Moreover, four helplines were established, offering psychosocial and legal support to survivors of gender based violence.

Moving ahead, ensuring vaccines for all is key to find a way out of this unprecedented global crisis. Following the pledge of an additional 300 million Swiss Francs to the COVAX facility, the Swiss Federal Council announced the donation of 4 million Astra Zeneca vaccine doses to this multilateral initiative. That way, more vaccines will be distributed more quickly to developing countries.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Swiss companies operating in Bangladesh have also played a key role in maintaining livelihoods, food security, health services as well as critical infrastructure and logistics. Many of these companies have also shown great solidarity with the affected communities by implementing their own projects. LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Limited, for instance, has supported the local communities around its operations with cash, food, healthcare and hygiene support. Secure Link Services, a leading software exporter, has created over 100 new jobs and provided loan and equity financing to two local start-ups during the last year.

Visit the Facebook page of the Embassy to learn more about Switzerland's engagement and COVID-19 interventions in Bangladesh.

SBCCI

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