

Switzerland Report

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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Executive Summary

Based on a careful international comparison, eminent Austrian-German political scientist Herbert Obinger (2023: 795) has argued that “Switzerland, more than almost any other country in the world, has realized the ideal of government by the people and for the people. Nowhere else do citizens have such extensive opportunities to participate in the political decision-making process, and there are very few countries that have a similarly strong track record as Switzerland across all policy areas. The unique rights of citizens in political decision-making and the excellent performance of the political system are closely related. In conjunction with consensus democracy, they generate an extraordinarily high degree of input and output legitimacy, which is the root cause for political stability and peaceful coexistence in a multi-dimensionally fragmented society.”

There is no doubt about Switzerland’s strengths: They include a stable and robust democracy, an efficient rule of law, an excellent system of public education and research, and a competent system of public transportation. The country has high levels of GDP per capita (one of the highest in the OECD) and accumulated wealth, and the natural environment remains ecologically sound. Social and economic policies are pragmatic, solution-oriented and heterodox. In general, Swiss citizens support national democracy, show high levels of trust in their government and parliament, and are very satisfied with their lives and with how national democratic and economic institutions operate. The Swiss government can be commended for maintaining a highly competitive economy, a sustainable fiscal position, a comparatively sustainable welfare state, and moderate and stable levels of income inequality. The flexible labor market has maintained full employment, with high employment rates for both men and women. Youth and long-term unemployment rates remain low. These outcomes have resulted in an absence of deep social divisions and marginalization (among Swiss citizens).

Notwithstanding these successes, notable shortcomings have persisted:

- 1) The country has failed to develop a sustainable relationship with the European Union, an entity on which it depends in many respects. The European Union insists on rules that allow for the smooth updating of bilateral treaties and an efficient process of adjudication should conflicts arise. In January 2024, there were signs that a new compromise could be in sight – if a

support coalition could be built, a difficult task domestically. A solution that “squares the circle” – that is, that preserves national sovereignty while maintaining the benefits of European integration – must be found. Moreover, this must be acceptable in a popular vote.

2) Climate policy is a crucial field in which Switzerland has failed to make swift and significant progress. In a popular vote on June 18, 2023, the people accepted a target of net-zero CO₂ emissions by 2050. However, this goal needs to be implemented by effective policies. A major setback in this regard occurred in 2021, when a CO₂ law was rejected in a popular vote. Consequently, the government proposed a highly watered down CO₂ law that avoids any new levies on CO₂. It was accepted in principle – and further watered down – in both houses of parliament in the fall of 2023, in part with view toward a very likely new popular vote.

3) While encompassing reforms of the pension system were previously rejected in popular votes, a more limited reform was accepted in a popular vote on September 25, 2022. This is a temporary measure to mitigate the short-term effects of the long-term demographic change. However, it does not solve two major conflicts in the field of pensions. The first conflict relates to the relative size of the three pillars. The political left intends to strengthen the first pillar, which is highly redistributive and mainly concerned with combating poverty in old age, which still exists to a considerable extent in Switzerland. This strategy implies increased social contributions (absent a major economic boom), which would translate into a growing tax wedge or higher indirect taxes. There will be a popular vote on such a project in 2024. As a consequence, the relative importance of the second pillar – with benefits proportional to previous contributions – will decrease. This is against the interests of the major centrist parties and also of the private financial institutions that administer these large funds. The second conflict relates to intergenerational fairness and sustainability. In the interest of sustainability, either benefits have to be cut, or taxes and contributions or the effective average age of retirement must be increased. There are many thinkable combinations of these strategies across the three pillars of the pension system, and the final combination needs to be accepted by the people in a popular vote. However, given the experiences in past pension reforms, a decision in favor of the (unsustainable) status quo is very likely.

4) There are significant shortcomings in the field of social justice and the ability to reconcile work and family life. Switzerland lags behind in terms of the social and political integration of foreigners – even though one-quarter of the population holds foreign citizenship, and produces at least one-quarter of the gross domestic product. Children from lower-class families face

considerable problems of upward social and educational mobility. Women suffer from a lack of affordable childcare opportunities when trying to reconcile work and family. Structural and nonintentional institutional racism – defined as systematic or durable mechanisms operating within organizations or society as a whole (Mugglin et al. 2022: 21) – is an overlooked issue.

5) Likewise, health policy faces major challenges. Costs are rising, and the political system lacks a clear strategy to curb this growth process. At the same time, health insurance premiums are increasing, and families with low to medium incomes find it difficult to pay their health insurance bills. This leads to inequalities in health access. It in turn raises the question of whether the system of competing mutual funds with parallel administrations is sustainable, and whether the liberal model of flat rate per capita premiums – albeit weakened by subsidies for low-income earners – can still be defended. The healthcare system lacks sustainability regarding its governance, environmental durability and low focus on prevention policies.

6) The historical pattern of decision-making in postwar Switzerland consisted of efficient negotiations and compromises between the political elites (consociationalism or “Konkordanz”) and a smooth integration of capital and labor in the design and implementation of economic and social policy (neocorporatism). Arguably this Swiss “winning formula” has been undermined by political polarization – pitting the national-populist Swiss People’s Party against the moderate bourgeois block and the green-left parties – and by the organizational and political weakening of the interest organizations representing capital and labor.

7) The system of direct democracy succeeds in giving citizens the feeling that they have a say in government policies. This system is one of the major reasons why Swiss citizens are far more satisfied with the way democracy works in their country than their European neighbors. Recent research has found in particular that “direct democracy is not generally related to more satisfied people but rather closes the ‘satisfaction-gap’ between electoral winners and losers” (Leemann and Stadelmann 2022).

However, the system of direct democracy also demonstrates serious shortcomings. Among them is the likelihood that voters will approve constitutional amendments that cannot be literally implemented on legal or economic grounds, or that they block reform even when the need for change is urgent. The problem of decisions that contradict international law or contracts, however, is largely mitigated by the large discretion for interpretation during the implementation process.

Major recent examples are the reform gridlocks with regard to European integration, pension systems and climate policy. While there are certainly good arguments as to why institutionally driven slowness in decision-making can be an advantage with regard to avoiding mistakes others have made, it is also obvious that slowness can become dangerous, for example in the cases of delayed environmental action or insufficiently adjusted pension systems.

Key Challenges

Two key challenges for Switzerland's democracy are obvious: the lack of ability to respond swiftly to external and internal changes, and the conflict between assertions of national sovereignty and the ability to benefit from international integration.

Over the past years, the political system's inability to respond quickly and effectively to challenges has become a prominent concern. Three cases of delayed responses stand out: first, the stalemate in finding a response to the European Union's demand for a solid institutional basis for bilateral relations; second, the failure to push through an encompassing CO₂ reform in a referendum; and third, pension reforms that have showed a tendency to muddle through rather than enact deliberate grand strategies. As shown by various empirical studies, this disadvantage has been compensated for by the quality of the solutions found, especially in terms of efficiency and sustainability based on broad societal consensus and well thought-out policy designs. However, the more that socioeconomic processes accelerate – that is, the more that things are not only changing, but are also changing at an increasing rate – the greater the burden of slowness may become. Three institutional impediments to quick policy responses can be highlighted.

First, direct democracy has an inherent reform-averse tendency in the case of referendums if citizens vote on a bill accepted by parliament. Besides a “no” heuristic (i.e., rejecting something one is unsure of or knows very little about; see Kriesi 2005), opposition from various sides of the political spectrum can be relatively easily mobilized by interest groups and political parties. A case in point was the rejection of the CO₂ law, which was defeated following the mobilization of homeowners, car drivers and rural-area citizens, among others. Direct democracy is highly valued by Swiss citizens and political parties. It is considered to be the core DNA of the country's political system. Therefore, institutional reform that makes direct democracy compatible with swift solutions to problems is arguably politically infeasible.

Second, historically Swiss federalism differs from the “unitarian federalism” of neighboring Germany, as it gives cantons considerable and autonomous policymaking powers (including taxation) and allows for variations in living conditions. This “dual model” in which federation and cantons have clearly separate tasks for which they carry sole responsibility has been significantly modified over time. This has brought Swiss federalism ever closer to the German model, which is well-known for its tendency for policy gridlock. While some experts support further “interlocking” and hence mimicking of the German system, others support a return to the “dual model.” Arguably, the stronger the Germanification of Swiss federalism, the higher the likelihood of further slowing down a system that already suffers from slowness.

Third, Swiss corporatism has been effective, with social partners designing policies in their fields and efficiently sidelining parliament and party politics. This came, of course, at the price of transparency and the jurisdiction of institutions and actors of representative democracy. In recent decades, the parliament and federal administration have increasingly gained power in the policy process due to external changes. Interest organizations representing capital and labor have lost influence and resources, political pressure groups have been layered onto the old corporatist system, and new actors – such as citizen groups (e.g., the WWF) – have successfully gained access to the political system. However, they remain less influential than the traditional key players within the corporatist system in a strongly liberal and industrial state. In addition, the media has increasingly investigated previously opaque policy processes. Given the complexity of the Swiss political system and its vulnerability to gridlock, preserving or finding substitutes for the advantageous aspects of Swiss corporatism may be a major institutional challenge.

In addition to these institutional impediments to swift policy responses, another major challenge lies in squaring the circle of national sovereignty, and thereby taking full advantage of the cultural, economic and social benefits of international integration.

Switzerland’s share of foreign citizens within its resident population among the highest in the world. Immigration has stimulated economic growth. To sustain the high economic growth rate, it will be essential that the country continues to recruit labor from abroad. An extraordinarily high proportion of elite positions in the economy and within the higher education system are staffed by foreign-born workers. Foreign citizens are also on average younger than the average Swiss citizen. Consequently, they contribute far more to the Swiss pension system than they receive. Hence, they subsidize the Swiss

pension system and contribute significantly to its sustainability. Nevertheless, immigration has prompted considerable concern among Swiss voters about house prices, jobs, the use of infrastructure (e.g., roads and public transportation) and national identity.

Today, the Swiss People's Party is among the strongest right-wing populist parties in Europe in terms of popular vote share, representation in government and success in referendums. Notably, this political strength cannot be primarily attributed to xenophobia. At least in international comparison, Switzerland and some of the Nordic countries show a relatively low level of xenophobia. Even so, the Swiss People's Party has been extremely successful in mobilizing xenophobic elements within the population, leading to breaches of fundamental rights of foreigners in individual cases (ban on minarets).

Likewise, for decades politicians have been eager to argue that international integration and the sovereignty of the democratic political system can be achieved at the same time. However, experience has shown that this is extraordinarily difficult. Switzerland has already lost much of its sovereignty, just as other European countries have both within and outside the EU. Since the political elite has emphasized the notion of Switzerland as a fully sovereign country and the large majority of the population is convinced of this narrative, any pragmatic European integration – even below the level of full EU membership – would be hard to sell to the public if, as it inevitably would, it included obvious constraints on Switzerland's sovereignty.

This problem of reconciling national sovereignty with international integration is also reflected in the growing number of popular initiatives that have been approved by voters but only partially implemented or not implemented at all. Several recent constitutional changes that followed publicly approved initiatives remain only partially implemented because full implementation would violate international law, international treaties or economic norms. This has put the administration in a difficult position. Full implementation would violate international or economic norms, but partial implementation gives rise to accusations from right-wing politicians that the “will of the people” is not being respected.

To mitigate the conflict between “responsive” and “responsible” government, political elites must effectively communicate that the Swiss nation – like all modern consolidated democracies – is at best semi-sovereign, and that there are strict limitations on what the public can decide upon. Yet any such a communication strategy would clash with the self-image of the Swiss, who are immensely proud of their (perceived) independence and sovereignty.

On the other hand, a major advantage of Swiss democracy is its pragmatic approach. Hitherto, Swiss political and administrative elites have found ways

and means to reconcile tensions between input legitimacy (voters' decisions) and output legitimacy (policies framed as being in favor of the interests of the majority of the people). Policy implementation is a political process in which many extreme decisions are downsized and adapted to reality so they do not cause as much harm as feared. The public administration plays an important role in this cooling down of policy conflicts.

Democratic Government

I. Vertical Accountability

Elections

Free and Fair
Political
Competition
Score: 10

There are no doubts that Switzerland's formal procedures correspond closely to the democratic ideal. Registration procedures for candidates and political parties meet standards of transparency and fairness. New transparency regulations regarding financial support for political parties became effective for the last national election in 2023 (Federal Council 2022). This mitigates international critique of the opaque financing of political organizations (such as by Transparency International (2019) or GRECO (2017)), although there is still considerable room for improvement with regard to transparency. This lack of transparency can be explained by the liberal stance of the Swiss political system with regard to political-party financing – which in turn means that public authorities need more arguments than elsewhere to justify controlling party organizations. Eligible candidates are not prevented from being elected and are not disqualified from registration in a manner that does not adhere to objectively verifiable criteria set by law. To the best of our knowledge, candidates and parties have not been denied the right to be elected or registered. In any case, Switzerland is a state under the rule of law and decisions by public authorities can be challenged in court. There is no special law on political parties; parties are associations according to Article 60 of the Swiss Civil Code, which says: “The articles of association must be done in writing and indicate the objects of the association, its resources and its organization” (on formal rules see: Schiess Rütimann 2011).

Candidates and parties enjoy fair opportunities to access the media and other communication channels without discrimination, for example, on the basis of ethnicity. The media landscape as a whole offers fair coverage of various political positions (Hänggli and Feddersen 2022, 2023).

The new rules on transparency, in effect since 2023, mandate that “the political parties represented in the Federal Assembly must annually disclose their income, the monetary and non-monetary donations received if their value exceeds CHF 15,000 per person per year, as well as the contributions made by individual mandate holders. The source of the contribution must also be disclosed. In the case of votes and National Council elections, the campaigners must disclose the financing of their campaigns before the vote or election if they have budgeted more than CHF 50,000 for these campaigns. After the vote or election, they must disclose the final accounts. In Council of States elections, the transparency rules only apply to those elected. Campaign leaders must disclose the final accounts. The final accounts must include all income, including any contribution of more than CHF 15,000 per person and campaign, which the campaigners have received to finance the campaign in the 12 months prior to the vote or election. The acceptance of anonymous donations and donations from abroad are now prohibited. Exceptions apply to donations from Swiss nationals abroad and for elections to the Council of States” (Federal Council 2022).

Party funding is monitored by the Swiss Federal Audit Office. There is no gerrymandering. However, in national elections, cantons serve as electoral districts. The smaller the number of seats within an electoral district, the lower the chances of small parties, and the larger the disproportionality of electoral rules. In the six cantons with only one seat in the National Council, the de facto proportional rule is replaced by a first-past-the-post mechanism. There is no evidence that political competition is affected or distorted by deliberate manipulation through new media.

Free and Fair
Elections
Score: 9

Voting rights are granted to all Swiss nationals. Swiss nationals abroad without permanent residence have voting rights. Prison inmates are not excluded from voting rights. Persons who are subject to a general deputyship or are represented by a carer as they are permanently incapable of judgment are ineligible to vote (Federal Act on Political Rights, Art. 2). Foreigners, even those with permanent residence in the country, have no voting rights at the national level. In a few cantons, they are granted voting rights in their canton of residence.

There is no disenfranchisement resulting from a flawed voter registry. Rather, the commune of residence keeps an electoral register; voting documents are sent automatically to those who are in the electoral register. There is an impartial and highly capable electoral management body equipped with sufficient trained staff and the financial resources to administer elections effectively. During the past national election in 2023, a minor problem arose due to technical issues, which were fixed quickly.

Elections are conducted according to the established schedule, and the election process is carried out in an impartial and nondiscriminatory manner; there are no hidden impediments to electoral participation. Voting by mail (but not by email) is an established method, and is implemented impeccably. There are no incidents of harassment, violence or intimidation against voters. Likewise, there is no evidence of irregularities.

The real problem with regard to electoral participation in Switzerland is twofold: the rate of participation in popular votes and in elections is very low (47% in the national election of 2023; about 43% in the most recent popular vote on the national level in June 2023). This may be due to electoral fatigue (Swiss voters are called for popular votes several times a year on the municipal, cantonal, and national level), political dissatisfaction, political satisfaction – which is particularly high in Switzerland – institutional opportunities (citizens know that they may challenge a parliamentary bill in a popular vote if needed), or a lack of political interest or knowledge (Freitag/Zumbrunn 2022: 203; Fatke/Freitag 2015; Lutz 2022; 2023; Sciarini/Tresch 2022; 2023).

The other problem in the field of active and passive voting rights is the obvious challenge that 25% of the total population holds foreign citizenship, a much higher share than in other countries. The strict rules governing naturalization and the sheer size of the foreign population transform the “quantitative” problem of every modern democracy – that some adult inhabitants face discrimination on grounds of their nationality – into a qualitative problem: If almost one-quarter of the voting-age population is not entitled to vote or to run for public office, the legitimacy of parliament and government to rule on behalf of the total population (which is vastly more than the citizen base) is arguably called into question. Furthermore, criteria and procedures for nationalization vary across cantons and communes, which opens the door to arbitrariness at the local level.

Others argue, however, that while the economy is globalized, democracy functions only based on a national society that identifies itself in terms of citizenship. This includes the (constitutional) right to define who is eligible for citizenship. Hence, migration certainly creates new problems, in that the “demos” and the resident population do not coincide.

The interaction of low political participation among Swiss nationals and the exclusion of about a quarter of the resident population due to their status as foreigners creates very small “decisive majorities”: If 44% participate in a popular vote, this means that 22% of the Swiss nationals have the final say. These 22% represent almost 17% of the total adult population – Swiss nationals and adult foreigners – meaning just 17% of all adults in the nation

have brought about a political “majority” decision. In addition, interest in politics and voting participation is correlated with income and level of education (BFS 2021), raising questions regarding de facto equal access to voting.

To date, Switzerland has dealt with these problems somewhat slowly and hesitantly. For example, some notable liberalizing changes were adopted with regard to naturalization (e.g., costs have been substantially reduced) and with regard to passive voting rights in some cantons and local communities.

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted
Party System
Score: 8

The major Swiss political parties offer clearly distinctive programmatic positions, with some considerable overlap in the case of the Social Democratic and Green parties. The Swiss party system is one of the programmatically most polarized systems in Western Europe (Zollinger 2022: 6; Zollinger and Traber 2023). These distinctive party manifestos are easily publicly accessible, in particular via the websites of the parties.

While party identification (respondents saying that they are close to a political party) has decreased from about 60% in 1971 to 30% in 2019 (Lutz 2022: 542; Vatter 2018: 146), party voters identify very strongly in terms of positive feelings with their chosen party. At the same time, their degree of dislike of other parties is at the lower end of the distribution of 20 established democracies (Häusermann and Bornschier 2023: 24).

Given the proportional electoral rule in elections to the House of Representatives (Nationalrat), the representation of relevant societal interests through political parties is not hindered. Furthermore, in the bicameral parliamentary system, the Council of States (Ständerat) ensures the representation of cantonal-level representatives at the national level, thus allowing for the integration of regional interests into the institutional political structure. There have been recent debates about whether this gives excessive weight to the more conservative voice of non-urban cantons, as opposed to the political preferences of the cities in which a large proportion of the population is clustered. At the level of the federal government, the historically instituted “formule magique” (since 1959) mandates stability in the party representation of the seven members of the Federal Council (Bundesrates) (Burgos et al. 2009). Here again, there have been political discussions as to whether the Federal Council still reflects the composition of the parliament, as there has never been a representative of the Green Party in the Federal Council.

Historically, the Swiss party system has been very decentralized both programmatically and organizationally. Rather than one national party system, there have been 26 cantonal systems. In recent decades, some programmatic centralization has taken place; however, parties still have strong regional and local organizations (Ladner et al. 2022). The Swiss People's Party (SVP) has historically strong links to farmers and small traders, with its policymaking clearly offering benefits for this electorate. In that regard, there may be some clientelism; however, in general, parties comprehensively represent significant societal interests programmatically.

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation
Score: 6

On the one hand, the Swiss consensus democracy ensures strong cross-party cooperation, with representatives of the main parties seated together in federal and cantonal governments. On the other hand, the Swiss party system has become programmatically polarized over the past three decades. The three polar parties are very far apart by international comparison: The Swiss People's Party (Schweizerischen Volkspartei, SVP) occupies the particularistic-right quadrant, while the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party are in the universalistic-left quadrant of the ideological space (Zollinger 2022; Zollinger and Traber 2023; Häusermann and Bornschier 2023).

Even within the major right-wing party (Swiss People's Party), the core values of democracy are broadly accepted, if with two major qualifications. First, democracy is understood as decision-making by the people. The people are considered to be the ultimate sovereign, and their power is not viewed as something that should be limited by international law, membership in international organizations, human rights or domestic veto actors such as constitutional courts. This reflects a narrow Schumpeterian view of democracy that was prominently challenged by de Tocqueville, and which is today contested by a broader understanding of an embedded democracy (Merkel 2004).

The second qualification concerns populism and xenophobia. The Swiss People's Party is a radical right national-populist party (Mazzoleni 2008) based on nativism and populism, with a strong dose of authoritarianism (Mudde 2007: 22). The dichotomy between "them" and "us" and the staunch opposition to universalism, international openness and European integration is the electoral winning formula of the Swiss People's Party. The polarizing political program of the SVP is also evident in direct democracy votes, as the party regularly launches xenophobic initiatives, such as the ban on the construction of minarets that was accepted by the Swiss population in 2009, and the initiative against mass immigration that was accepted in 2014.

The increasing programmatic polarization has become a main hindrance to cooperation between political elites, particularly on issues relating to migration

and international openness. The failure to reach a sustainable relationship with the EU is a major example of this polarization. The effectiveness of the other political parties in neutralizing the isolationist and xenophobic-nativist stance of the country's major party is limited by electoral constraints: A considerable share of voters of the two other major bourgeois parties (the center and liberal parties) and even of the Social Democratic party shares the isolationist-nativist views of the populist right.

Access to Official Information

Transparent
Government
Score: 10

Swiss authorities pursue very open strategies of information release. For example, the website of the federal administration offers access to major sources of political information.

Article 16 of the constitution, dealing with the issue of freedom of opinion and information, states that: “(1) The freedom of opinion and information is guaranteed; (2) Every person has the right to form, express and disseminate opinions freely; (3) Every person has the right to receive information freely, to gather it from generally accessible sources and to disseminate it.”

The Federal Law on the Principle of Administrative Transparency (Loi sur la Transparence, LTrans) was approved in December 2004 and took force in July 2006. The law gives any person the right to consult official documents and obtain information from authorities. The authorities must respond within 20 days. If a request is refused, a citizen can seek redress from the Federal Delegate for Data Protection. However, this law's coverage is limited, applying only to public federal bodies, other organizations and persons who make decisions under the Administrative Procedures Act, and parliamentary services. The Swiss National Bank and the Federal Commission on Banks are exempted, as are the Federal Council (federal government) and the parliament as bodies. Similarly, the law also does not apply to official documents concerning civil or criminal law processes, documents relating to foreign policy, or political party dossiers relating to administrative disputes. Consumer organizations have argued that the law contains too many exceptions.

Given these qualifications, it is noteworthy that this law has gained some influence since the Federal Supreme Court has interpreted it in a liberal way. The cantons have similar laws on administrative transparency.

In systems of direct democracy, federal governments bear a particular burden in terms of ensuring proper information is provided for referendums and

popular initiatives. In spring 2019, the Federal Supreme Court overturned a national referendum on how couples should be taxed because the information provided by the executive proved to have been incorrect. In its decision, the court pointed out that the information provided by the administration on the alternatives in referendums needs to be improved.

II. Diagonal Accountability

Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media
Score: 9

Public- and private sector media corporations are free from government influence (Hänggli/Feddersen 2023). This is enshrined in Art. 17 of the Swiss constitution, which states: “Freedom of the press, radio and television and of other forms of dissemination of features and information by means of public telecommunications is guaranteed. Censorship is prohibited. The protection of sources is guaranteed.”

Although the federal government chooses the chairperson and some board members of the quasi-public nonprofit radio and television organization, it exercises no influence over the organization’s daily reporting or journalistic work.

Since 2014, journalists reporting on illegal financial activities have faced up to three years in prison if they use information that violates bank secrecy regulations. Hence, no Swiss journalists took part in the Suisse Secrets investigations (NZZ 2022).

The Swiss government subsidizes media in various ways. It subsidizes the delivery of subscription-based daily and weekly newspapers, as well as club and association magazines, so that all parts of the country and all language regions can be covered by the media. This applies in particular to daily newspapers in sparsely populated regions. Likewise, private local radio and regional television receive money from the government. More far-reaching subsidies were rejected in a recent popular vote on 13 February 2022. However, the government has no means of influencing the contents of these media. These subsidies are not considered to be linked to political interference, as they are granted indiscriminately to many outlets (Höchli 2008). To the best of our knowledge, there have been no attempts to use these subsidies to influence the work of journalists. Likewise, no scandals or conflicts have

become public regarding the government's choice of board members of the quasi-public media organizations.

To our knowledge, there is no substantial issue with regard to self-censorship or harassment of journalists in Switzerland.

Pluralism of
Opinions
Score: 8

The most important electronic media organizations in Switzerland in terms of coverage and intensity of citizen use are either online or publicly owned. Private sector television stations play only a small role in the country's media landscape. These are largely regional stations. A number of foreign radio and television stations can be received in Switzerland, contributing to the country's media plurality. The country has a high number of privately owned newspapers, with a highly decentralized system of regional concentration. However, a strong tendency toward centralization has weakened the regional newspaper market. This has been amplified by the strong growth of free papers for commuters such as 20 Minuten in the morning (which is distributed in three of the country's linguistic regions). These newspapers have crowded out the readership of traditional newspapers, which have collectively suffered from a decline in subscriptions. The number of independent newspapers has also been on the decline as media concentration continues. There are eight major publishing houses in the whole country; among these major publishing houses, the three largest – Tamedia, NZZ and Ringier – account for about 80% of all major publishers' newspaper circulation (calculated from FSO 2024; see also Hänggli and Feddersen 2022; 2023). In parallel, online media consumption is outgrowing print media consumption. A specialized website finds in 2024 that there is “no nationally dominant majority media that could determine the opinion and audience market alone, even in 2022.” Combining the perceived media quality by citizens and the quantitative “market power” of media in an index of “opinion power,” Medienmonitor Schweiz found that online information is most important (29%), followed by television (23%), radio (18%), social media 16% and finally print media (14%) (Medienmonitor Schweiz 2024).

Certain media are politically oriented. This is most evident in the leading national newspaper Neue Zürcher Zeitung, which has strong historical and ideological ties to the “freisinnig” or pro-free-market liberal party. There are other newspapers and television stations that have been criticized for a left-green bias. In general, however, it can be said that all political positions are adequately represented in the media.

In a popular vote in March 2018, a proposal for a constitutional article relating to the public radio and television services was rejected by a large majority of

72%. The proposed article would have prohibited the federal government from subsidizing or running radio and television stations. This would have implied the abandonment of public radio and television. Although rejected, the debate on the initiative triggered reform processes within the public radio and television system – such as increasing efficiency and improving the use of resources.

In February 2022, a referendum that would have increased and expanded public subsidies for media was rejected. This aimed to ensure broad coverage of various media across the country. This represents a threat to smaller regional media channels, as well as to the pluralism of media and media ownership in Switzerland.

Currently, right-wing politicians are making attempts to reduce state subsidies to public sector media. If these attempts are successful, the campaign will in all likelihood lead to reduced subsidies to public TV and radio. According to the public sector media, “(t)he reduction of the SRG budget would inevitably have a negative impact on the program, for example in the areas of regional information, sports productions, coproductions of Swiss films and music recordings, and major popular events” (Tageanzeiger 2023).

Civil Society

Free Civil
Society
Score: 9

The constitution safeguards political rights such as freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

Art. 22 states: “Freedom of assembly is guaranteed. Every person has the right to organize meetings and to participate or not to participate in meetings.”

Art. 23 states: “Freedom of association is guaranteed. Every person has the right to form, join or belong to an association and to participate in the activities of an association.”

Art. 28 states: “Employees, employers and their organizations have the right to join together to protect their interests, to form associations, and to join or not to join such associations. Disputes must wherever possible be resolved through negotiation or mediation. Strikes and lockouts are permitted if they relate to employment relations and if they do not contravene any requirements to preserve peaceful employment relations or to conduct conciliation proceedings.”

These constitutional rules are implemented by public authorities without any major deviations in practice. While freedom of association as a fundamental right is strong in international comparison, human rights associations have raised concerns about the extended powers granted to surveillance authorities through the Federal Act on the Intelligence Service (put in place in 2017) for preventive surveillance purposes (Amnesty International 2023; Human Rights.ch). The 2022 Federal Act on Police Measures to Combat Terrorism has raised similar concerns among human rights organizations regarding the prerogatives granted to the Federal Office of Police and the criteria used to justify restraining measures taken against individuals (Amnesty.ch).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 9

The right to form professional associations is enshrined in Art. 28 of the constitution. Trade union representation is split across several organizations. The Swiss Trade Union Federation is the leading union organization, and is historically close to the Social Democratic Party. It is strongest in membership figures (48% of all trade union members, 2021). Travail.Suisse was formed by a fusion of Catholic trade unions and unions for salaried employees. It is politically independent but close to the Social Democrats and the Center Party, and represents about 20% of all trade unionists (2021). The remaining smaller organizations account for about another third of all trade unionists (FSO 2024).

There are three types of associations representing capital. Economiesuisse (<https://economiesuisse.ch/en>) represents employers on the political level, the Swiss Employers' Association is the main negotiation partner with the trade unions, and the Swiss Union of Arts and Crafts represents small and medium-sized enterprises.

Swiss interest organizations are pragmatic and avoid rigidly ideological stances. Of course, the major interest organizations do have their ideologies, but this does not prevent them from entering rational discussions with other organizations and political parties. Furthermore, interest organizations in general have access to more substantial professional resources and often have a better-informed view of problems than do political parties. Switzerland is well-known for its liberal corporatist integration of interest organizations into the state. Trade unions are the junior partners, with the main axis of influence constituted by employers' interest organizations and the state. Interest organizations have an important role in developing and implementing policies. Since about the 1990s, this corporatist arrangement has been weakened but not eliminated by two developments. First, policymaking influence has shifted somewhat to the interaction between government and parliament. One of the major reasons for this change is the increasing Europeanization of Swiss

policymaking. In addition, the power of the Swiss Employers' Association has been weakened by the increasing internationalization of industries, with many foreign-managed or foreign-owned companies now active in the country (Armingeon 1997; 2011; Mach et al. 2020; 2021; 2023).

Hence, the major civil society organizations (CSOs) have the organizational strength to independently formulate policies and to participate in an integrated policy formulation process with the government. They pursue a policy of social partnership. While trade unions directly represent only about 20% of all employees, their collective agreements cover about half of all employees, and they are respected as representatives of the working class. In addition to these strong corporatist features – with traditional key players having established access to the decision-making process – additional citizen groups have gained access to the administrative and parliamentary venues in the last decades. The threat of referendums and a weakly professionalized parliament explain the system's relative openness to demands from civil society groups. Corporatist groups remain, however, by far the most dominant interest groups in the decision-making process (Christiansen et al. 2017).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 8

While trade union membership fees are tax-deductible, other social welfare groups – such as church-affiliated organizations – do not enjoy these organizational safeguards. In addition to the plethora of organizations in the areas of social policy, social welfare and vocational training, there are also local and cantonal public organizations in these areas. Private and public organizations work together, but it is difficult to summarize and assess the power and effectiveness of these very different organizations.

In contrast to almost all European democracies, interest organizations in Switzerland may exert influence using the channels afforded by direct democracy. They can trigger a referendum or propose a new constitutional article by way of a so-called initiative. Moreover, as the Swiss administration is weak in international comparison and parliaments are weakly professionalized, CSOs have specialized sectoral expertise that is needed and used within the Swiss politico-administrative system (Christiansen et al. 2017; Sager et al. 2022). In this regard, these organizations have more opportunities to advocate on behalf of their preferences than do comparable organizations in other countries. However, CSOs do not have the capacity to match the influence of economic actors and industries in many sectors such as health, and Switzerland is well-known for its weak structural regulation of harmful products such as tobacco in European comparison (Mavrot 2021).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 8

A plethora of environmental groups exist in Switzerland. Four large organizations – Greenpeace, Pro Natura, the Transport Club (Verkehrsclub der Schweiz) and WWF Switzerland – cooperate in the Alliance for the Environment (Umweltallianz; <https://umweltallianz.ch/>). Steven Eichenberger (2020; Mach et al 2020) has found that citizen groups – including environmental groups – are strongly represented in the political system. Their share of seats in various commissions and their overall influence are comparable to the influence wielded by trade unions. Evidently, such groups are very capable of cooperating (Alliance for the Environment). Bailer and Bütikofer echo Eichenberger’s finding that environmental groups are a strong parliamentary lobbying influence (Bailer and Bütikofer 2023: 187). In the most recent European Social Survey (wave 10), about one-quarter of all respondents claimed to volunteer for a not-for-profit or charitable organization – which is a comparatively high share.

In contrast to the case in almost all European democracies, interest organizations may exert influence using the opportunities afforded by direct democracy. They can trigger a referendum or suggest a new constitutional article by way of a so-called initiative. For more on the institution of direct democracy, see Vatter (2018) and Stadelmann and Leemann (2023). This is a very powerful lever for citizen groups and interest associations.

In this regard, these organizations have substantially more power than comparable organizations in other countries. For example, the environmentally focused Transport Club (Verkehrsclub) has successfully collected signatures for a referendum against a massive motorway expansion. While environmental CSOs have considerable means and access to the political system, their concrete influence on policies remains limited, as Swiss domestic climate-change policy is in line with a typical industrial country perspective, and is strongly influenced by industry (Ingold/Pflieger 2016).

III. Horizontal Accountability

Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public
Auditing
Score: 10

“Within the scope of legal and constitutional provisions, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) is independent and autonomous. It determines its own audit program annually based on risk analysis and on criteria contained in Article 5 of the Federal Auditing Act. The Federal Council and the Joint

Committee on Finance of the Federal Assembly are notified of this program. For administrative purposes, the Swiss Federal Audit Office is assigned to the Federal Department of Finance, but is not subordinate to it” (SFAO 224a).

Switzerland’s Audit Office supports the Federal Assembly and the Federal Council through the production of analyses and reports. The chairman of the Audit Office is elected by the Federal Council; this election must be confirmed by the Federal Assembly. The Audit Office acquired a very independent and self-confident role in the case of the politically controversial export of arms to war-prone regions (NZZ 4 September 2018). It has harshly criticized the federal administration for being insufficiently critical of and for working too closely with representatives of the arms industry.

The power and salience of the Audit Office have been further strengthened by the new rules on political-party financing transparency (SFAO 2024b). The Audit Office has substantial inquiry powers and means. Although it is affiliated with the Department of Finance, its mandate extends beyond strictly financial audits, and include the implementation and impact of laws. The Audit Office now has a dedicated line of action regarding whistleblowing.

Effective Data
Protection
Score: 10

Article 13 of the constitution mandates that every citizen must be protected against the abuse of data. Data protection legislation has been in force since 1993. “The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC) is the authority responsible for data protection in the case of data processing by private parties (e.g., companies) and by federal bodies. Data processing by municipal and cantonal authorities is the responsibility of the data protection supervisory authorities of the cantons or municipalities. The FDPIC has the following tasks in particular in the area of data protection:

- It supervises data processing by the federal administration and federal-related companies ... as well as by private parties (e.g., companies),
- It advises citizens, companies and private organizations as well as the federal administration and federal-related companies.
- It comments on federal legislative projects,
- It exchanges information with domestic and foreign data protection authorities and cooperates with them on a case-by-case basis,
- It raises awareness and informs the public” (FDPIC 2024).

The Federal Data Protection Law was revised in 2020, taking into account the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union, a regulation that Switzerland had already signed. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (Eidgenössischer Datenschutz- und Öffentlichkeitsbeauftragter, EDOEB) had 41 employees in 2023 (FDIP 2023: 101). A 2011 evaluation of

the Federal Data Protection Law attested to the effectiveness, independence and transparency of the EDOEB (Bolliger et al. 2011).

Rule of Law

Effective Judicial
Oversight
Score: 7

The Swiss judicial system is guided by professional norms without political interference. The judicial system is based on professional training, though a mixture of lay and professionally trained judges serve at the local level in many cantons. Decisions by these judges are subject to review by higher professional courts. The character of the Swiss judicial system varies substantially between cantons. This is due to Swiss federalism, which gives cantons great leeway in cantonal lawmaking and hence also in cantonal administration of justice. This also includes variations in the rules and examinations with regard to lawyers' admission to the bar.

Formally, legal education is inclusive and accessible to all segments of society. However, due to the strong social selectivity of the Swiss education system – in particular direct access to universities (Becker and Schoch 2028) – lawyers and judges de facto come disproportionately often from academic families.

The Swiss Federal Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in Switzerland. It adjudicates, in the last instance, appeals of rulings made by the high cantonal courts of appeal, the Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court. The areas of law thus covered are civil law, criminal law and administrative law. Violations of federal law, international law, intercantonal law or constitutional rights can be addressed. The Federal Supreme Court's jurisprudence ensures the uniform application of federal law throughout the country. The other courts and the administrative authorities comply with the Federal Supreme Court's case law and adopt its principles.

The Federal Administrative Court rules on the legality of rulings issued by the federal administration. The court also adjudicates appeals against certain decisions of the cantonal governments, for example, in the area of health insurance. However, constitutional review is not fully developed: "Acts of the Federal Assembly or the Federal Council may not be challenged in the Federal Supreme Court" (Art 189.4, Federal Constitution). The Federal Supreme Court has no powers to annul federal laws "if they are unconstitutional, and it can't even refuse to apply them" (Flick Witzig et al. 2022: 217). However, there are

some options to mitigate these constraints, and therefore in international comparison Flick Witzig et al. (2002: 226) suggest that “Swiss constitutional review appears to be de facto of medium strength.”

The judges of the Federal Supreme Court are elected for a period of six years in a joint session of both chambers of parliament, with approval requiring a majority of those voting. A parliamentary commission prepares the elections by screening the candidates. Unwritten rules stipulate a nearly proportional representation of the political parties then in parliament. By tradition, judges voluntarily pay part of their salary to the political party to which they are affiliated. This is considered a tax on their salary, which they would not have without the support of their party (Vatter/Ackermann 2014).

In 2017, a committee of the Council of Europe criticized this arrangement and recommended that “the system should be backed up by safeguards to ensure the quality and objectivity of the recruitment of federal judges. Once judges have been elected it is important to sever the ties with the political powers by doing away with the practice whereby judges pay part of their salary to their party” (GRECO 2017:4). Another unwritten rule demands representation of the various linguistic regions. There is no special majority requirement.

In international comparison, the independence of the Swiss judicial system has been ranked at only 106th place among 124 countries surveyed. However, taking into account the de facto independence found in empirical studies, Switzerland has been ranked at 17th place among 108 countries (Flick Witzig 2022: 222, 226).

In 2021, a popular initiative aiming to have federal judges selected by lottery rather than through election in parliament was rejected in a popular vote. Also in 2021, parliament started to discuss the legitimacy of the contributions federal judges are required to make to the parties that nominated them, and in March 2022 it rejected a ban on mandate taxes and party donations from members of the federal courts.

Switzerland is regularly called to order by supranational bodies for a lack of respect for the terms of international treaties, or for breaching fundamental rights. Examples include the United Nation’s concern “that persons with disabilities deemed ‘permanently incapable of discernment’ are excluded from exercising their right to vote” (see section D1) (UN/CRPD 2022), and a 2023 ECHR ruling against the rejection of refugees’ requests for family reunification.

Universal Civil
Rights
Score: 7

Civil rights are guaranteed by the constitution. However, the country does not have a classic constitutional court able to monitor the conformity of federal laws with the constitution outside the context of a particular case. Federal laws are binding for the federal courts. In contrast, the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne monitors the conformity of federal regulations and cantonal laws with the constitution. With respect to basic civil rights, the European Court of Human Rights complements the Swiss Federal Supreme Court.

In December 2012, a parliamentary attempt to give the Federal Supreme Court the right to abstain from applying federal law if the federal law was incompatible with the constitution failed. The main argument was that in a direct democracy, the constitutional court should not be authorized to declare federal laws void as a whole (see also above D7.1).

Conflicts between human rights and direct democracy have emerged, particularly in recent years. One such concern was represented by the successful 2004 popular initiative providing for the life imprisonment of particularly dangerous criminal offenders without any opportunity for reexamination. This conflicts with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. This convention guarantees periodic reviews in which the necessity for continued imprisonment can be evaluated.

Likewise, there have been conflicts between popular votes at the local and cantonal levels on naturalization and the call by foreign-born individuals for fair and transparent treatment and the opportunity to appeal naturalization decisions. Some observers have argued that the current naturalization procedure fails to conform to the human rights standards set out in the constitution. The Federal Supreme Court decided in 2003 that naturalization procedures previously established by popular vote were unconstitutional, since they violated constitutional norms of non-discrimination and the right to a lawful legal procedure.

The ban on the construction of minarets, approved in a popular vote in 2009, represents a particularly problematic decision. The basic claim of proponents was that minarets signify the potential aggression and power claims of Islam, which in turn need to be suppressed as a strategy for keeping the peace. However, it is evident that the popular initiative was clearly aimed against Islam and the Islamization of Europe. Legal scholars tend to argue that the text of the measure violated the freedom of worship and the non-discrimination rule. Another initiative launched by the People's Party, the text of which prohibited Muslim women from covering their faces in public, was approved

by the public in June 2021. Once again, Muslims were targeted, and their right to self-determination was undermined or even completely eliminated.

The approval in 2009 of an initiative to deport foreign criminals is also seen as problematic in terms of respect for fundamental rights. Finally, several measures passed via popular vote have contradicted international law, such as the 2014 initiative on stopping mass immigration. This was not compatible with Switzerland's commitment to the free movement of persons as made in its bilateral agreements with the EU. Parliament therefore decided not to implement the constitutional provision directly (Armingeon and Lutz 2020, 2022).

The major underlying problem is the claim by many political actors that the people have an unrestricted right to decide any matter through popular vote. This conflicts with the basic rule of any liberal democracy that there are limitations to the will of the majority, such as human rights standards and protections for minorities. Switzerland's public debate on the limits to majority rule (via popular vote) shows little cognizance of these traditional limitations to majoritarian rule. This has become very obvious in recent debates over the conflicts between international law and Swiss citizens' decision-making rights in popular votes.

Although anxiety over the ebbing of popular sovereignty extends beyond conservatives, this latter group in particular feels uneasy with the internationalization of law and some recent interpretations of human rights that have been made by professional lawyers. In the right-wing populist and conservative view, the internationalization of law and international court rulings against the results of Swiss referendums contradict Switzerland's legislative culture, which is characterized by the principle of subsidiarity and guided by the idea that popular decisions have the highest degree of legitimacy. Consequently, in the summer of 2016, the country's strongest political party, the Swiss People's Party, collected sufficient signatures for an initiative aiming to give federal law precedence over international law. This initiative was rejected on 25 November 2018. On the other hand, the Federal Constitutional Court has generally assumed (with exceptions) the primacy of international law (Flick Witzig et al. 2022: 223).

Switzerland has proved to be particularly resilient with regard to upholding political rights and democratic standards. The Pandemic Violations of Democratic Standards Index by the V-Dem project ranks Switzerland second out of 144 countries regarding non-violations of democratic standards during the pandemic (measured for the March 2020 – June 2021 period) (Edgell et al. 2021, 2022).

However, the approval in June 2021 of the Federal Act on Police Measures to Combat Terrorism represents an additional threat to civil rights in Switzerland. This law gives the federal police (Fedpol) the power to implement several types of preventive measures, without any judicial decision, in order to prevent a “potential terrorist” from acting in the future. What or who exactly is considered a terrorist is not defined clearly within the framework of the law, which opens the door to potential abuses. In addition, the measure directly targets children beginning from the age of 12, in violation of the rights of children enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The preventive measures include electronic monitoring, a contact ban, a perimeter ban and house arrest. The bar association of the canton of Geneva released a statement opposing this law (2021), arguing that it represents a clear violation of many fundamental rights as well as international conventions including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights. Many human rights associations, such as Amnesty International, have also explicitly opposed the law and highlighted its threat to civil liberties, activism and basic human rights.

Still on the topic of breaches of human rights, several NGOs have criticized the criminalization of protests and civil disobedience in Switzerland – including those related to climate activism. This relates to restrictive laws on protest authorization as well as excessive police repression (Amnesty International 2023; Humanrights.ch 2023). Another matter of concern is the structural racism and institutional discrimination that persists in Switzerland, which have been comprehensively documented by several studies conducted on behalf of the Service for Combating Racism, a Federal Ministry of Home Affairs project (e.g., Mugglin et al. 2022). A comprehensive review of 304 empirical studies across a large array of policy fields in Switzerland has found “clear indications of institutional and structural discrimination” in the fields of work, housing, administrative procedures and naturalization, as well as in social protection, policing and the justice system to a certain extent (Mugglin et al. 2022: 50).

Effective
Corruption
Prevention
Score: 9

Corruption in Switzerland is rare according to international rankings. Indeed, Switzerland is consistently rated as being among the most successful countries with respect to corruption prevention. The country is governed by the rule of law, has clear rules on corruption that are implemented effectively, offers high wages to public officials, and is based on a decentralized democracy with parties that efficiently control and audit public officials.

However, there are opportunities and incentives for political and societal elites to abuse their positions for private interests. This is due to the country’s small size and the correspondingly small number of people interacting in elite

positions; to the culture of amicable agreement; and to the very pragmatic problem-solving culture. In addition, holders of elite positions know they are highly likely to meet again in the future (and probably in different roles). This creates opportunities for the creation of broad informal networks, a reluctance to engage in close mutual surveillance and incentives for the non-observance of formal rules.

Given the considerable overlap between economic and political elites (Bühlmann et al. 2012), critics have pointed to processes in which politicians' economic interests may influence their decisions in parliament. Although it is legal, and does not fall within the realm of corruption, Swiss non-professionalized parliamentarians frequently sit on several organizational boards (e.g., of health insurance companies) in addition to their political activities, which leads to conflicts of interest.

There have been recurrent scandals about corruption. However, the overall level of corruption seems to be very low in Switzerland as compared with other countries. If there is evidence of corruption, officeholders are held accountable and face penalties. The problems listed above are clearly minor in international comparison. In contrast, Switzerland is little inclined to sanction domestic companies that engage in corruption or laundering (Transparency International Switzerland 2023).

As of the last national election, transparency rules on the private financing of political parties have been implemented. However, they are less stringent than those of other European democracies. This is due to the lack of public financing provided to political parties and the corresponding notion that the state must not monitor or intervene in the exchanges between citizens and their nonpublic organizations.

The members of the national parliament are required to disclose their links to organizations.

Legislature

Sufficient
Legislative
Resources
Score: 6

The Swiss parliament is not broadly professionalized. Officially, it is still a militia parliament, meaning that legislators serve alongside their regular jobs. However, this construction is far from the reality (Vatter 2018a: 283). Almost 90% of members use more than a third of their working time for their political roles. Legislators' incomes have also been increased over time. On average, the various components of remuneration total more than CHF 100,000

annually (about €104,000). Because of this, fewer and fewer members of parliament have other professional activities beside their political mandate (including external mandates, paid or otherwise, that are related to their activity as a politician). In other words, an increasing number of members of parliament can be considered “professional politicians.” The parliamentary system is, therefore, often today described as semi-professional.

However, legislators do not have personal staff, and the parliamentary services division offers only very limited research services, though legislators do have access to the parliamentary library. Thus, from a comparative perspective, the resources available to members of parliament are very limited. The parliamentary services are staffed with 238 employees (2022); much less than in comparable small countries (Austria 485; Belgium 603). According to one recent review, the Swiss parliament is “an influential pseudo-militia parliament with modest resources” (Bailer and Bütikofer 2022: 182, 188). However, since 1990, the Federal Assembly has had an internal evaluation unit called the Parliamentary Control of the Administration (Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle), which is permanent staffed by policy experts with extensive inquiry prerogatives. Parliamentarians can mandate reviews of administrative activity within any policy sector as well as within the Federal Chancellery or the federal courts (Ledermann 2016).

Effective
Legislative
Oversight
Score: 10

Parliamentary committees can be regarded as one of the major elements of the Swiss legislative process. They are equipped with major prerogatives (Sciarini 2023: 272, 278). They design, debate and reach compromises on legislative projects. “A more recent study of all votes in the National Council between 1996 and 2018 confirms that the committees are very often followed by the plenum: During this period, in 87% of cases, the plenum supported the proposal of the majority of a committee, rather than the proposal of the minority” (Sciarini 2023: 453). They, like individual members of parliament, have access to government documents and receive copies of these promptly upon request. Legislators have also electronic access to the majority of government documents.

Parliamentary committees can summon ministers for hearings. Formally, this request is not binding. However, for political reasons, ministers typically respond to these requests and answer the committees’ questions.

Parliamentary committees are free to invite experts to provide testimony at hearings. This right is actively used. For example, in the summer of 2018, the National Council’s Foreign Policy Committee decided that it would publicly hear from experts on the outcome of the negotiations on the institutional

agreement between Switzerland and the European Union. The committee set the relevant hearings for the afternoon of 15 January 2019, and the hearings were broadcast live over the internet.

Effective
Legislative
Investigations
Score: 9

Legislative committees have the capacity to investigate unconstitutional or illegal activities carried out by the executive branch. Both houses of parliament are “responsible for the overall supervision of the activities of the Federal Council, the federal administration, the federal courts and other federal bodies. In order to fulfill this supervisory duty, it can set up a PUK (parliamentary commission of enquiry) if incidents of major significance need to be clarified. ... It is important to note that a PUK is neither a criminal court nor a disciplinary authority. It is set up in the form of a simple federal decree. This decision is initiated by means of a parliamentary initiative by a member of the Council or a parliamentary group or a committee initiative. It is set up after consultation with the Federal Council” (Federal Assembly 2024). These commissions in some cases arrive at conclusions which are highly critical of the government. For example, a commission examining problems with the national pension fund in 1995 concluded: “The main responsibility for the debacle at the [pension fund] lies with the former head of the [finance ministry] and the two former directors of the [relevant administration]” (Federal Assembly 2024).

Unfavorable investigation outcomes are likely to have consequences within the federal administration. However, given the logic of coalition building in Switzerland (the government coalition does not result from the outcome of an election; rather it is a “historical” compromise between the major parties) and the quasi-presidential position of the government (it does not depend on the support of a parliamentary majority once it is elected at the beginning of the legislative term), it is not very likely that a governing party will be forced to leave the government or that a member of the government will feel pressure to step down.

Legislative
Capacity for
Guiding Policy
Score: 9

The Swiss government is an oversized grand coalition of the four major parties, which together hold 80% (2023) of the seats in the House of Representatives (Nationalrat). The government-opposition dichotomy does not apply to the Swiss system. The federal government is elected every four years by both houses of the parliament (Vereinigte Bundesversammlung) and cannot be dismissed by parliament within these four years. There is no impeachment procedure. Corresponding to the quasi-presidential structure, political parties in the federal parliament did not follow strict party discipline in parliamentary votes for many years. This has changed considerably in recent decades. Currently, the political party with the largest vote share in national elections, the Swiss People’s Party, systematically opposes the policies of the other three

large parties, acting as an “opposition” – even though it holds two of the seven seats in the collegial government structure. There is neither a prime minister nor a “super” minister. All seven members of the government are on equal footing. The president of the council, a position that rotates annually, is *primus inter pares* and has no superior role in directing the politics and policies of the government.

All attempts to enlarge the number of ministries have failed due to political opposition within parliament. Hence, most of the seven ministries have responsibility for many more issue areas than in other democracies. Both the first and the second parliamentary chambers have nine committees dealing with legislation and two committees with oversight functions. There are nine committees for policy issues (foreign policy; transport and communication; legal questions; social security and health; security, state policy and politics (i.e., organization of government and administration, relationship between federation and cantons, etc.); environment, spatial planning and energy; economy and taxes; and science, education and culture), and two supervisory committees for financial matters (examining budgets, supplementary credits and the federal government’s accounts) and general oversight (Geschäftsprüfungskommission; scrutinizes the conduct of business by the Federal Council, the federal administration and other bodies).

Members of these committees are elected by parliament in proportion to the parties’ seats in the parliament (Vatter 2018). Members of the (small) opposition may become committee chairs. For example, the current president of the Political Institutions Committee and the vice-president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council are members of the Green Party, which is not represented in the federal government. Four other committees have additional tasks (e.g., the Drafting Committee, which checks the wording of bills and legal texts before final votes). Thus, the task areas of the parliamentary committees do not correspond closely to the task areas of the ministries. Nonetheless, this does not suggest that the committees are not able to monitor the ministries or legislative proposals. As the mismatch between ministerial committees and ministries is a function of how the federal government is organized, it does not impair parliament’s oversight function. The congruence between the task areas of parliamentary committees and ministries is therefore largely suited to the monitoring of ministries and legislative proposals.

Governing with Foresight

I. Coordination

Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms of
the GO/PMO
Score: 8

The Swiss political system does not have a prime minister or a prime minister's office. The government, called the Federal Council, is a collegial body composed of seven ministries, each of which has a broad area of competency and is responsible for a large variety of issues. There are no line ministries. However, there are federal offices and institutions connected to the various ministries. These work closely with the minister responsible for their group. Every minister is in a sense a "ministerial committee," representing the coordination of their numerous cooperating ministerial units.

Since ministers must achieve a large Federal Council majority in order to win support for a proposal, there is also a strong coordination between ministries. There are several instruments of interministerial coordination, as well as various mechanisms by which ministries' draft bills are evaluated. The ministries, called federal departments, engage in a formal process of consultation when drafting proposals, the Department of Justice provides legal evaluations of draft bills, and the Federal Chancellery and Federal Council provide political coordination. In particular, the Federal Chancellery has gained a reputation as the central institution for interministerial planning (Vatter 2020: Chapter 7).

More precisely, there is first a preliminary procedure of interministerial consultations at the level of the federal departments. After the departments have been consulted, the co-reporting procedure begins. This instrument is specifically designed to coordinate policy proposals between the ministries. This process invites the ministries to take positions on political issues. The Federal Chancellery leads the process by submitting the proposal under consideration as prepared by the ministry responsible to all other ministries. These then have the opportunity to submit a report or express an opinion. A

process of discussion and coordination ensues, designed to eliminate all or most differences before the proposal is discussed by the Federal Council. The co-reporting procedure is largely a process of negative coordination that highlights incompatibilities with other policies but does not systematically scrutinize the potential for synergy. Policy coordination and policy integration could thus be strengthened (Trein/Maggetti 2019).

There is a tension, however, between the consensus principle in the Federal Council that demands a common solution supported by all seven ministers, and the departmental principle that enables ministers to pursue their party line within their departments, which in turn allows them to satisfy party members as they secure support for consensus-derived government solutions. Increasing polarization in parliament has strengthened the departmental principle and rendered consensus-driven solutions within the Federal Council more difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, the Federal Council has to date managed to balance the two principles (Sager and Vatter 2019). However, the need to secure a substantial level of consensus within Switzerland’s nonadversarial system accounts for the slow and incremental nature of policy change, which can be an obstacle to ambitious reforms aimed at sustainability.

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms
within the
Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 7

Not surprisingly, given the small number of ministries, there are no cabinet committees in Switzerland’s political system. However, there is considerable coordination, delegation and communication at the lower level of the federal government. Every minister is in a sense already a “ministerial committee” – representing the coordination of numerous cooperating departmental units.

Indeed, the Swiss political system employs several formalized coordination mechanisms across ministries to enhance policy coherence. These mechanisms include the collegiality, departmental and delegation principles within the federal government. These structured forms of coordination are essential for managing the complex and decentralized nature of the Swiss federal system, ensuring effective governance, and facilitating policy implementation (Ali et al., forthcoming).

The principle of collegiality implies that decisions should arise internally by consensus or, in exceptional cases, by majority. Each member of the Federal Council must support the decisions made, even if they have different personal or party-political viewpoints. This approach to decision-making promotes a form of formalized coordination, ensuring that various political perspectives are considered and integrated into policy decisions. “Intra-executive collegialism” is one of the power-sharing institutional features intended to avoid the activation of veto mechanisms such as popular referendums further down the line (Mueller 2021). Collegiality has been put under strain in the past

two decades due to increased party polarization, but is still a core feature of Swiss political life (Freiburghaus/Vatter 2019).

The departmental principle divides government business among the seven ministers. This principle allows each minister to express their political interests and beliefs in their policy decisions within their department. This organizational structure potentially creates an environment for both cooperation and conflict among departments, necessitating formalized coordination mechanisms to ensure policy coherence.

Formal delegation of policy issues to departments and their subsequent delegation to subordinated federal offices is another formalized coordination mechanism. This principle allows for a clear delineation of responsibilities and tasks among different government entities, facilitating coordination and coherent policy implementation.

The Federal Council has developed a strategy for information and communication technology within the federal administration. It uses digital technologies effectively to support interministerial coordination. However, the development and use of IT in the federal administration has experienced challenges with regard to efficiency and the appropriate use of fiscal resources. For example, the development of software for use in tax policy and administration has been heavily criticized by the Swiss Federal Audit Office. In cross-national comparison, Switzerland receives medium to low scores on e-government issues.

Complementary
Informal
Coordination
Score: 9

The Swiss political system, being a consensus democracy with characteristics of consociationalism, involves a complex interplay of formal and informal coordination mechanisms. This implies the presence of deliberative processes in which compromises are made between interest groups, political parties and other stakeholders. This in turn suggests that informal mechanisms play a significant role in the decision-making process. Such informal mechanisms involve less formalized but still significant processes such as ad hoc meetings, personal networks and behind-the-scenes negotiations, all of which complement the formal structures. As the Swiss system includes strong neocorporatist features, informal governance processes also involve key players that are historically strongly integrated into Switzerland's policymaking processes – especially in the pre-parliamentary phase – such as umbrella associations representing the business sector (Mach et al. 2019). This raises questions regarding the equality of access by various interest and citizen groups to the decision-making system.

Indeed, given the small size of the federal administration and the country's tradition of informal coordination, strong and effective informal coordination continues to take place. Political coordination among the high ranks of the administration can be rather intense, although the limited capacity and time of the Federal Council members, as well as their diverging interests, create practical bottlenecks.

Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively
Setting and
Monitoring
National
(Minimum)
Standards
Score: 6

The Swiss political system is one of the most decentralized systems in the world. The subnational self-governments, called cantons, and the municipalities enjoy substantial autonomy not only in terms of organization but also in terms of policy, while the federal state has a subsidiary role. Within the scope of their quite significant competencies, it is up to the cantons and municipalities to decide what public services they want to offer, to what extent and at what level of quality. While this can lead to “distributive injustice” (Sager & Thomann 2016) – the fact that not all Swiss citizens enjoy the same quality of public service depending on where they live – cantonal flexibility of this kind is a historical feature firmly grounded in the Swiss politico-institutional system. Due to the cantons' high degree of legislative autonomy, the delegation of tasks applies not only to the actual implementation of federal laws (i.e., the right to act) but also to the adaptation of these provisions to local conditions (i.e., the right to decide). The cantons' authority extends not only to policy implementation, but also to the tasks of designing and programming policy. Indeed, according to Article 3 of the constitution: “The cantons are sovereign insofar as their sovereignty is not limited by the federal constitution; they shall exercise all rights which are not transferred to the confederation.”

Furthermore, even in areas in which the federal state has tasks and powers, such as social insurance, environmental protection or zoning, the federal level is dependent on the cantons for the implementation of federal legislation. According to Vatter (2007, p. 91), “While the federation holds the legislative power in many areas, responsibility for implementing federal policies resides to a large extent with the cantons.” Cantons have considerable flexibility in performing their work, and the implementation of federal guidelines frequently varies substantially between cantons. Zoning policy has offered examples in which the same federal regulation has led to opposite outcomes in different cantons. In addition, much implementation is carried out by interest organizations through the corporatist channel. According to Sager and Thomann, the delivery of public services varies among the cantons and is determined by the party-political composition of each government, policy pressures and bureaucratic preferences at the cantonal level. This analysis

allows for many different constellations, which helps explain the large variation in cantonal implementation of federal laws. Sager et al. (2019) further show how the cantons use their discretionary power to complement federal policies in order to achieve their stated objectives. Sometimes cantons are even key drivers of change in areas that would normally be better addressed at the federal level (e.g., tobacco regulation), thus creating a bottom-up dynamic of policy change (Mavrot & Sager forthcoming 2024). The delivery of public services must therefore be seen as a multilevel process.

Therefore, there are no national standards for public services except regarding those limited parts of the administration that implement federal law. However, all public services must comply with the rule of law and the human rights standards set out in the constitution. A comparatively small number of issues (i.e., social policies, rules regarding health insurance) are decided at the federal level and are thus subject to national standards. In these cases, federal laws are implemented by cantonal administrations and their implementation partners, who have to follow national norms and are subject to strict monitoring. Multilateral agreements between some or all cantons for common standards of public services – known as “Konkordate” – can be seen as a functional equivalent to national policy standards. As member-state implementation in all policy sectors leads to marked differences in both conformance and performance compliance, the federal government increasingly employs nonbinding policy programs instead of legal acts to steer the cantons and ensure distributive justice in service delivery. These programs often take the form of financial incentives or funding schemes for achieving given policy goals. They rest upon deliberative action rather than hierarchical coercion.

Finally, federal agencies are monitored by the Swiss Federal Audit Office and the Parliamentary Control of the Administration. Public and semi-public enterprises are monitored by various independent regulatory agencies.

Effective
Multilevel
Cooperation
Score: 7

Swiss federalism is dual rather than cooperative. The extensive member-state implementation of federal policy is a consequence of this arrangement, and has become even more nuanced with the reorganization of the financial equalization and division of tasks between the confederation and the cantons (Neugestaltung des Finanzausgleichs und der Aufgabenteilung zwischen Bund und Kantonen NFA) that came into force in 2008. Still, both horizontal and vertical coordination takes place. The most important form of horizontal policy coordination takes place via intercantonal conferences. The cantons have established specialized intercantonal conferences in 15 key policy areas (e.g., finance, social affairs, health).

As Vatter (2018: 99) states, these conferences serve three purposes. First, they provide a forum for exchanging information, best practices and benchmarks. Second, they enhance cooperation in implementing cantonal policies. Third, they enable the cantons to coordinate their interests and policy positions at the federal level. Intercantonal conferences are organizations that are not institutionalized by the federal constitution (Schnabel and Mueller, 2017: 552). They are formed by the cantons in a bottom-up manner and on a voluntary basis.

Vertically, there is close contact between the three federal layers, between governments and the executive administration. However, cantons are full-fledged political systems and consequently insist on their discretionary autonomy. Coordination is somewhat easier among administrative actors due to their shared professional language and values. Mavrot and Sager (2018) refer to vertical epistemic communities.

While these mechanisms broadly work for public service delivery, several authors agree that the system failed to ensure functional policy delivery during the COVID-19 crisis (Ali et al. 2024, Mavrot/Sager 2023). Across the various COVID-19 waves, there was uncertainty as to which governance level was in charge of crisis management, which led to delayed responses and incoherence (Mavrot/Sager 2023). Vertical coordination thus should be strengthened in times of crisis.

II. Consensus-Building

Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing
Scientific
Knowledge
Effectively
Score: 8

In addressing the challenges of crisis management, which became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, Switzerland has demonstrated both strengths and areas in which improvement are needed with regard to integrating scientific expertise into its policymaking process. The formation of the Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force – which during the first wave of the pandemic comprised more than 70 academic experts from diverse fields such as medicine, epidemiology, and even ethics and economics – exemplified Switzerland’s ability to rapidly mobilize representatives of a broad range of scientific perspectives. This interdisciplinary approach facilitated extensive consultations and underscored the country’s commitment to comprehensive crisis response strategies (Hirschi et al. 2022).

However, the Task Force faced challenges related to transparency, particularly with regard to its mandate and communication protocols, highlighting the need for clearer role definitions and processes. Additionally, the balance between scientific independence and political decision-making emerged as a critical issue, alongside the complexity of effectively coordinating scientific advice within Switzerland's federal structure (Sager et al. 2022). Another challenge was the Task Force's difficulty in persuading politicians to adopt its recommendations beginning with the second pandemic wave (Eichenberger et al. 2022).

The Federal Council's recent proposal for activating scientific expertise during crises, as evidenced by the creation of ad hoc scientific advisory groups, marks a significant stride in integrating scientific knowledge into the policymaking process, particularly in times of crisis. This initiative, adopted in response to lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the importance of consulting scientific experts early in the crisis-management process (Federal Council 2023). The involvement of Switzerland's key education, research and innovation (ERI) institutions in nominating experts for these groups is fundamental to ensuring the effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy of the scientific advisory process.

A noteworthy aspect of this approach is the close cooperation with ERI institutions, which include prominent organizations such as the Swiss Conference of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions (swissuniversities), the ETH Board and the Swiss National Science Foundation (Swiss Science Council et al. 2023). This collaboration ensures a broad-based support system for the scientific advisory group, enhancing its multidisciplinary reach and representativeness. The implementation proposal mandates that the need for a scientific advisory group be examined whenever an interdepartmental crisis organization is established, thereby institutionalizing the inclusion of scientific advice in crisis response mechanisms (Federal Council 2023).

Additionally, the ERI institutions and the confederation have collaboratively developed a Code of Practice that clearly defines the tasks and responsibilities of scientific experts. This code stipulates that experts are expected to advise policymakers about the current state of certainty and uncertainty in their fields, develop realistic scenarios, and outline different policy options along with their respective risks and benefits. Importantly, the code acknowledges that scientific evidence, while crucial, is not the sole basis for decision-making; societal values and interests must also be taken into account (Swiss Science Council et al. 2023).

This structured approach is further complemented by the establishment of topic-related clusters for crisis preparation. These clusters, focused on areas such as cybersecurity, public health and international challenges, enable the rapid recruitment of experts in times of crisis (Federal Council 2023). Moreover, they foster ongoing discussion in these individual fields with the federal administration, and as necessary with parliament and the cantons. Such proactive engagement ensures that a network of experts is continually in dialogue with policymakers, enhancing the responsiveness and relevance of scientific advice.

Overall, Switzerland’s approach to utilizing scientific knowledge in policymaking – particularly evident during the COVID-19 crisis and evolving with the more recent structural changes – demonstrates a commitment to improving the integration of scientific advice into decision-making. These efforts reflect an ongoing process intended to balance scientific expertise and political considerations, ensuring more effective and transparent policymaking in times of crisis. In normal times, the inclusion of external expertise is based on the broadly diffused practice of mandating policy evaluations (see section G8), on ad hoc informal consultations of academic experts by administrations (which can lack transparency), and on thematic extra-parliamentary commissions filled either with academics or practitioners (e.g., on the topics of vaccination or nuclear safety) (Hirschi et al. 2022).

Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 9

Policymaking in Switzerland is strongly based on public consultation with interest groups. Traditionally, in the Swiss liberal-conservative political system, business and employer interest groups have more influence and power than trade unions or non-producer interests. The latter, however, have recently enjoyed a significant increase in their political influence (Kriesi 1980; 1982; Häusermann et al. 2004; Armingeon 2011; Sciarini et al. 2015; Eichenberger 2020; Mach et al. 2020).

Within Switzerland’s corporatist system, which links the state and organizations representing labor and capital, there are numerous pre-parliamentary procedures and committees focused on consultation with various societal groups. One of the main such mechanisms is the consultation procedure, which enables invited (communal and cantonal umbrella organizations, relevant interest groups) and uninvited parties to submit statements in the context of a preliminary legislative procedure. These instruments are designed to prevent government proposals from failing in parliament or in subsequent referendums, and to offer solutions that benefit all

parties. However, authorities can synthesize and integrate these comments into the design of policy at their discretion.

Research shows that the degree of corporatist integration has declined in recent years. This is in part attributable to the growing intensity of conflicts between the social partners, as well as to the influence of European integration and internationalization. If judged from a comparative perspective, the level of corporatist integration remains very high in Switzerland, but from a historical perspective it is low.

During the pandemic, corporatism proved to be a resilient and efficient instrument for swift socioeconomic policymaking, although this corporatist coordination happened very silently, while the mass media was more focused on lobbying efforts (Armingeon and Sager 2022). These neocorporatist features also gave the upper hand to economic actors with regard to influencing COVID-19 measures, to the detriment of other CSOs (Sager/Mavrot 2020). In any case, the direct democracy aspects of the system offer interest groups very significant influence, since they can threaten to trigger a referendum. This offers strong incentives for political elites to incorporate major interest groups in the policy-development process. On the other hand, the federal government has become stronger in the domestic political environment due to the consequences of European integration.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 7

Historically characterized by neocorporatism, the Swiss political system has seen a gradual shift toward a more pluralistic approach in which a variety of interest groups, including social welfare CSOs, have gained increased access to the policymaking process. This transition reflects a move away from a system that was predominantly dominated by major economic umbrella associations.

Eichenberger (2020) notes that the legal framework in Switzerland has evolved to mandate “balanced representation” in decision-making bodies, ensuring the inclusion of diverse interests. This legal evolution is evident in the participation of social welfare CSOs in extra-parliamentary committees and in these organizations’ responses to consultations, in which the share of access granted to citizen groups has increased in both administrative and legislative venues.

However, major economic groups, including business interest associations and trade unions, continue to hold a dominant position, particularly in the domains of economic and social policies (Mach, Varone and Eichenberger, 2020).

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 6

Historically, the Swiss neocorporatist regime was dominated by major economic umbrella associations, which were central political actors in the pre-parliamentary phase of decision-making, including in extra-parliamentary committees and consultation procedures (Mach, Varone & Eichenberger 2020). Since the 1990s, however, there has been a significant reconfiguration toward a more pluralist system in which interest groups, including environmental CSOs, have actively sought to influence the parliament (Mach, Varone & Eichenberger 2020; Eichenberger, 2020). This shift is attributed to factors such as the declining role of the pre-parliamentary phase, the revalorization of the parliament and the increasing role of media in politics (Mach, Varone & Eichenberger 2020).

Eichenberger (2020) notes that the share of access granted to noneconomic interest groups, including environmental CSOs, has increased in both the administrative and legislative venues across all federal departments and most legislative committees in Switzerland. This change suggests an adaptation of the Swiss system of interest intermediation to the growing significance and organizational consolidation of these groups.

Noneconomic interest groups are very heterogeneous in Switzerland. Nevertheless, some environmental groups, undertaking cooperative efforts with academic bodies, offer reasonable proposals and hold considerable capacity for political mobilization. Recent research emphasizes the growing importance of environmental CSOs such as the WWF (Eichenberger 2020; Mach et al. 2020).

The revalorization and growing professionalization of the Swiss parliament have made the parliamentary venue more hospitable to citizen groups defending general causes and objectives. Nevertheless, economic interest groups have also adjusted their political strategies and expanded their presence within the parliamentary venue, indicating a nuanced strengthening of citizen groups (Mach, Varone & Eichenberger 2020).

Openness of Government

Open
Government
Score: 9

The government and its institutions – in particular the Federal Statistical Office – pursue a highly user-friendly policy of internet-based access to information. Any citizen interested in public policy and having access to the internet will find a large body of qualitative and quantitative data available. The Freedom of Information Act (Bundesgesetz über das Öffentlichkeitsprinzip der Verwaltung, BGÖ/LTrans) ensures full access to public documents apart from classified information (see section D3).

The official information bulletin is the most important source of information for citizens making decisions in direct-democratic votes. Overall, government information policy can be considered comprehensive, and enables citizens to fully inform themselves about most aspects of the political system and its policymaking.

However, as made clear by the 2019 case in which the Supreme Court overturned the outcome of a popular vote, this information policy is not flawless, and is subject to close scrutiny in the context of the country's direct democracy. The mistakes made by the Federal Council in delivering erroneous information regarding a vote on the taxation of couples compelled the court to annul the referendum (Jacquemoud 2019).

III. Sensemaking

Preparedness

Capacity for
Strategic
Foresight and
Anticipatory
Innovation
Score: 5

Strategic planning is not given significant weight in Switzerland. It is further rendered difficult by the fact that the country has a quasi-presidential political system – meaning the government cannot be voted out of office by the parliament – with a collegial government, a strong nonprofessional element, a consociational decision-making structure, a strong corporatist relationship between a weak federal state and outside interest organizations, and considerable uncertainty deriving from the system of direct democracy. The rather weak administration and the fact that there are no specific and specialized education curricula for public servants are further factors hindering the prospective capacities of the state. Compared with other advanced democracies, strategic planning in Switzerland is underdeveloped. Moreover, as it is constrained by the governmental and federal structure and the logic of direct democracy, it is rather inefficient.

Strategic planning is the task of the Federal Chancellery, the central coordinating body of the federal administration. Strategic planning in this context involves identifying the current legislative period's major challenges, describing the period's major goals and instruments, specifying goals for the current year, and exercising accountability by providing parliament with annual reports.

A recent review of the state of research finds that “in the context of a strongly federal and non-parliamentary system with extended direct democracy, the Federal Council usually fails to present – and implement – a forward-looking strategic management and coherent policy-planning with clear priorities” (Vatter 2020: 251). The COVID-19 crisis revealed shortcomings in the government’s prospective preparedness, as many crisis-management functions had to be put in place in an ad hoc manner (e.g., procedures for coordination between cantons and the federal state, scientific advice) and could not rely on previously planned procedures (Hirschi et al. 2022; Mavrot/Sager 2023).

Analytical Competence

Effective
Regulatory
Impact
Assessment
Score: 7

There is no formal institution responsible for ex ante impact assessment in Switzerland. Article 170 of the constitution states that “the federal parliament shall ensure that the efficacy of measures taken by the confederation is evaluated.” In some ministries, such as the Department of Economic Affairs, individual units occasionally perform systematic and encompassing ex ante impact assessments. Furthermore, ex ante evaluations by the administration always include checks for consistency with existing law (performed by the Department of Justice) and compatibility with EU regulations, and if necessary, an analysis of budget implications, probable administrative costs and personnel requirements. Ex post evaluations are also frequently performed; however, it is unclear whether the results of these analyses have any substantial effect on implementation.

In a 2011 study, Sager and Rissi argue that “the meager impact and success of the RIA is due to its institutional context, namely Swiss semi-direct referendum democracy. Direct-democratic involvement and the division of power in the course of consensual government are both great barriers for effective policy appraisal.”

Beyond these processes, functional equivalents of impact assessments do exist. First, expert commissions that draft or suggest laws also evaluate alternatives while examining the potential impacts, benefits and problems associated with proposed solutions. Second, and probably more important, is the so-called consultation procedure derived from Article 147 of the constitution. This article stipulates that “the cantons, the political parties and the interested circles shall be heard in the course of the preparation of important legislation and other projects of substantial impact, and on important international treaties.” As a consequence, all those who are affected by a planned law have a

constitutional right to give their opinion as to its pros and cons. This has been emphasized recently in a report written by collaborators of the OECD (Arndt-Basacle et al. 2022).

From a comparative perspective, Switzerland was a relative latecomer to performance-management policies, as were Germany and Austria. It was only in 2011 that the federal administration decided to implement some form of performance management on a consistent basis.

In 2016, a report by the Federal Audit Office criticized RIA praxis in Switzerland, arguing that it did not fully comply with the formal requirements for RIA. This critique led to a political debate about whether the federal administration had deliberately misinformed the parliament. In the course of this debate, the widespread neglect of RIA by politicians was largely ignored. In December 2018, the Federal Council emphasized the need to improve RIAs by optimizing existing processes without creating new institutions. In a recent report, the OECD noted that, while there has been no significant improvement, Switzerland has made some adjustments by reforming “its regulatory policy framework in 2019, in particular through the issuing of new regulatory impact assessment (RIA) directives by the Federal Council. The requirement for RIA to be conducted for all regulations in Switzerland has been refined with a ‘quick check’ procedure and additional consideration for proportionality; however this does not mean that RIA is done in an encompassing and systematic manner. All regulations must undergo a preliminary RIA, which will allow identifying regulations to be subject to an in-depth assessment. A threshold test, based on quantitative and qualitative criteria, is applied to determine whether a regulation should be subject to a simplified or full RIA. The obligation to quantify regulatory costs has been extended and systematized, such as for all new regulations which cause additional regulatory costs for more than 1,000 companies or which place a particular burden on an economic sector. Switzerland focuses less on quantifying benefits and costs of regulations to citizens” (OECD 2021: 286; Arndt-Basacle et al. 2022).

While stakeholder participation in regulatory impact assessment (RIA) procedures is a particularly strong point in Switzerland, communication processes vary between regions and policy fields. For in-depth RIA, an extended version of standard RIA, Rissi and Sager (2013) show how procedural assessments used to be the most prominent form of RIA utilized in Switzerland. RIA is often outsourced to independent research companies, though this does not affect utilization. In the course of the debate about the Federal Audit Office report on the quality of RIA, an independent Regulation Assessment Unit was demanded by some politicians. However, this proposal has yet to be made concrete. Several cantons have adopted sector-specific

tools of regulatory assessment, such as regulatory health impact assessments (Plateforme EIS).

Effective
Sustainability
Checks
Score: 5

The government conducts effective sustainability checks within the RIA framework. However, given Switzerland's decentralized political and administrative system, they are used in only a few departments.

The Federal Office for Spatial Development uses the Sustainability Impact Assessment (Nachhaltigkeitsbeurteilung, NHB) process, while the Federal Office for the Environment uses the Economic Impact Assessment (Volkswirtschaftliche Beurteilung, VOB) process. There is no social impact assessment at the federal level. According to the Federal Act on the Protection of the Environment, cantons have the obligation to proceed with an environmental impact assessment for the construction or renovation of specific types of infrastructure.

Furthermore, most of the cantons have sustainability, health promotion or social cohesion programs that are inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These tend to take the form of mission statements rather than of binding frameworks, however.

Effective Ex Post
Evaluation
Score: 9

Evaluation is a well-established practice in Switzerland, with diverse institutions and practices that have progressed significantly since the 1990s. According to the recent literature, Switzerland has a highly institutionalized evaluation system compared to other countries (Jacob et al. 2015).

Indeed, Article 170 of the constitution states that “(t)he federal parliament shall ensure that the efficacy of measures taken by the confederation is evaluated.” Ex post evaluations have been strongly developed, and are standard in most policy fields, if to varying degrees. Evaluations are best established in the fields of development cooperation, public health, education and economic policy. Ex post evaluations are an important source of information for the revision and development of policies when used by the administration and can lead to genuine policy learning (Bundi/Trein 2022).

Administrations use evaluation to gather external expertise that is not available in-house, but evaluations are also used in administrative and political strategic games focusing on potential future policy developments (Mavrot/Pattyn 2022). Administration experts prepare reforms and draft laws and reports based on the available empirical evidence, which includes policy evaluations (Sager et al. 2021). Administrations sometimes publish reports as a means of

transparently explaining how they have addressed policy evaluations' recommendations, but there is no systematic and binding rule regarding this practice.

However, the administration formulates drafts that are subject to pre-parliamentary and parliamentary policymaking processes that include many relevant actors that do not prioritize evidence. The main goal of policymaking in Switzerland is acceptance rather than evidence-based policy. Nonetheless, as many evaluations focus on learning within the administration rather than serving the purposes of executive oversight or the development of new legislation, the impact of evaluations remains significant in Switzerland. Evaluation results used in direct democracy campaigns have also been found to enhance the quality of the debate, moving the discussion away from politics to policies (Sager et al. 2023). The Swiss evaluation community is one of the most professional in Europe, and evaluations are of good quality. Evaluation experts are gathered within the Swiss Evaluation Society, which provides guidelines, training and evaluation standards (SEVAL). The role of ex post evaluations in Switzerland can thus be considered important.

Furthermore, the federal parliament has an internal evaluation unit called Parliamentary Control of the Administration. Regarding the use of evaluations in public administration, evaluations are occasionally used systematically in policy formulation. However, evaluations are more commonly used symbolically to increase the attractiveness of legislative bills (Widmer 2020: 214).

Sustainable Policymaking

I. Economic Sustainability

Circular Economy

Circular
Economy Policy
Efforts and
Commitment
Score: 5

In 2010, the federal government signaled the move to a green economy. It decided to take action in the following areas (FOEN 2013):

- 1) A cleantech master plan (i.e., a master plan for using more clean technologies (cleantech), meaning technologies that do not use a large quantity of energy or environmental resources);
- 2) Resource-efficient information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- 3) Information on the environmental impact of products;
- 4) Greening the tax system;
- 5) Creating a global indicator of welfare; and
- 6) Drafting legislation on the issues of resource-efficiency and sustainability.

In 2020, the Federal Office for the Environment concluded: “Despite efficiency gains, Switzerland is currently far from achieving the sustainable use of resources... Switzerland is contributing to [the limits of the resilience of climate stability and ecosystems] through its high consumption of resources per capita. Additional measures are essential so that future-proof, resource-conserving consumption and production models can be strengthened....There remains much to be done to realize [the vision of a green economy and the resource-conserving economy]. Two-thirds of total environmental pollution occurs in the food and agriculture, housing and construction and mobility sectors. Resource-conserving consumption and production models can only be achieved by commitment from government, including cantons and municipalities, and all sectoral policy areas, the private sector, science and the whole of society. Along with consumers, business has to play a central role. A reliable and advantageous underlying government framework also has a major part to play” (FOEN 2020).

The European Environmental Agency concluded in its 2022 country report on Switzerland: Currently, “Switzerland ... does not have a dedicated national or regional circular economy (CE) vision, strategy, action plan or roadmap. ... In 2020, a parliamentary initiative to strengthen the Swiss circular economy has been initiated... This would be implemented as a change of the Environmental Protection Act. The political decision and, in the case of a referendum, a popular vote are expected for 2024” (EEA 2022).

In a similar vein, the OECD reports in its recent country survey: “Switzerland has successfully decoupled economic growth from domestic greenhouse gas emissions and material use, but environmental pressures remain. A high standard of living together with a relative lack of domestic raw materials and energy resources necessitate high imports. As a result, the material footprint per capita is significant and a large share of the associated environmental damage occurs abroad. Municipal waste per capita is among the highest in the OECD and municipal waste generation has not been decoupled from consumption, despite a number of policy instruments. Switzerland has set a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050, but sufficient measures to achieve it remain to be adopted. Switzerland prices its CO₂ emissions at high rates, but various exemptions to the carbon tax reduce its effectiveness. In addition, plans to further raise the carbon tax and introduce an air-ticket levy have recently been halted. Environmentally harmful subsidies and tax exemptions in agriculture, forestry and public transportation give rise to a pricing and incentive system that distorts the link between market signals and costs of environmental damage across sectors.”

There is room for improvement when it comes to aligning investment portfolios with climate goals and promoting eco-innovation (OECD 2022: 12). However, this does not mean that Swiss environmental policy is lacking (see the list of policies and their limitations in Ingold/Nahrath 2021: 850 – 851). Rather, the various policies are not integrated in such a way so as to deliberately target a circular economy. There are several reasons for this lack, including the following:

- 1) The competencies for environmental and economic policy are distributed across municipalities, the cantons and the federation. The federal agency for the environment is relatively weak in resources, and it cannot closely steer and monitor the implementation of eco-environmental policies on the ground.
- 2) Switzerland has eschewed the idea of an explicit and deliberate national industrial policy. Rather, policymaking takes place at various levels, with federal economic policy being very heterodox, pragmatic and poorly integrated. It is a policy of muddling through (Emmenegger 2021).
- 3) The Federal Office of the Environment adds also other political reasons

such as: “In the past, there were no majorities for a political breakthrough in the field of green economy / circular economy,” as well as the lack of a “sense of urgency in the economy and among citizens” (EEA 2022: 9).

4) Finally, according to the Federal Office of the Environment, there are several economic reasons, including:

a. “Comparatively low prices for unsustainable products and primary resources (externalities are not internalized); there is no incentive, and businesses underestimate the potential for cost-cutting.”

b. The slow diffusion of resource-efficient technologies.

c. Low levels of acceptance of secondary raw materials on the marketplace.

d. Insufficient transparency in supply chains (EEA 2022: 9).

Viable Critical Infrastructure

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Resilient
Critical
Infrastructure
Score: 10

Switzerland’s infrastructure in the field of public transportation and roads is excellent. Telecommunications function excellently, although there have been some delays in establishing the glass fiber network (Sager/Kaufmann 2022; 2023). The country’s infrastructure in the field of electricity is technically excellent, but depends very much on cooperation with the EU. As long as Switzerland and the EU do not arrive at a bilateral agreement on electricity, there remain serious risks. The Association of Swiss Electricity Companies (VSE 2023) notes: “The fact that Switzerland has no agreement with the EU on cooperation in the electricity sector is causing serious system risks that are already having a negative impact on security of supply and triggering additional costs. Switzerland is dependent on electricity imports in winter. As early as 2025, Switzerland’s import capability could be severely restricted.”

The Federal Council adopted the National Strategy for Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) on 16 June 2023, revising the versions of 2012 and 2017. The Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP, Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz) summarizes the strategy as follows:

“Switzerland’s new national CIP strategy defines the overriding goals and principles of action for all parties involved. The strategy also identifies eight measures to improve the country’s resilience with regard to its critical infrastructure. For example, the responsible supervisory and regulatory authorities have been tasked with examining all sectors for any significant risk of major supply disruption, as well as taking measures to mitigate this. A further measure involves compiling an inventory, to be updated periodically, of the main objects and operators in Switzerland. These can include important hubs for communication, the power supply, food distribution and the provision of medicines.

The implementation of the national CIP strategy is closely monitored by the Federal Council's Energy, Environment and Infrastructure delegation. The Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) is responsible for coordinating the strategy's implementation, which will be carried out in close cooperation with the operators of critical infrastructure, supervisory and regulatory authorities in various sectors, and the cantons. Although the CIP strategy currently applies indefinitely, the FOCP will assess every four years whether an update is required" (FOCP 2023).

Decarbonized Energy System

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving a
Decarbonized
Energy System
by 2050
Score: 8

Currently, two legislative projects are furthering decarbonization. On 18 June 2023, the people voted to approve a new Federal Act on Climate Protection Objectives, Innovation and Energy Security. It enshrines the country's net-zero target of CO₂ emissions into law. "It further defines interim and sectoral targets toward 2040 and 2050, introduces a subsidy scheme to replace heating systems with heat pumps and, as a framework law, it further mandates the creation of measures in several fields connected to climate mitigation and adaptation" (Climate Action Tracker 2023). Article 3 of this law states: "The confederation shall ensure that the impact of man-made greenhouse gas emissions in Switzerland is zero by 2050 (net-zero target) by reducing greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible; and the effect of the remaining greenhouse gas emissions is offset by the use of negative emission technologies in Switzerland and abroad." Article 4 defines actions by sectors (such as traffic, industry, buildings) and Article 5 requires enterprises to reach a point of net-zero emissions by 2050. Article 10 states: "The confederation and cantons act as role models in terms of achieving the goal of net-zero emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change." This law is a framework law, mostly programmatic at this point. The various objectives must be achieved by separate special laws.

The second legislative project is still in the making. It is the so-called CO₂ succession law: "By ratifying the Paris Agreement, Switzerland has committed in a next step to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% compared to 1990 by 2030. A total revision of the CO₂ Act was supposed to have defined the measures for achieving this target by 2030. But on 13 June 2021, the Swiss electorate rejected the revised CO₂ Act. Parliament therefore decided on a transitional arrangement. This requires that greenhouse gas emissions be reduced by a further 1.5% annually by 2024 compared to 1990 and continues measures that would have expired at the end of 2021 without such a regulation. For the period after 2024, a new revision of the CO₂ Act is

necessary. The Federal Council submitted a new bill to parliament to this end in September 2022” (FOEN 2023).

By December 2023, the respective committees of both chambers of parliament had discussed the bill. On 20 December 2023, the House of Representatives (Nationalrat) indicated its support for the new law in principle, with some differences with regard to the decisions made by the upper house (Ständerat, Council of States). After the final decision in parliament, the new law will likely be subject to a popular vote (Swiss Parliament 2023).

These laws suffer from the downside of Swiss consensus democracy, which hinders ambitious changes aimed at sustainability transition because of the need to integrate a vast array of players with opposing interests into the policymaking process.

On the one hand, on paper, Switzerland is committed to the decarbonization of its economy by the Federal Act on Climate Protection Objectives, Innovation and Energy Security. The overall strategy is well-developed. On the other hand, this framework law needs to be implemented by various laws. The government is an oversized four-party coalition that must develop compromises among all its constituent political parties, ranging from a very pro-environment Social Democratic Party to a much more skeptical right-populist party, as well as industrial actors. Major decisions are made not only by the parliament, but also via direct-democratic popular votes. Finally, decarbonization strategies must also be supported by the cantons, which can at least modify federal laws in the process of implementation. Hence the notion of a central government able to implement a decarbonization strategy as a coherent policy in a top-down mode is not compatible with the basic institutional setup of the Swiss political system (see also Ingold/Narath 2021: 847-849, Ingold et al. 2016).

Adaptive Labor Markets

Policies
Targeting an
Adaptive Labor
Market
Score: 9

In Switzerland, developing skills throughout working life may happen by way of vocational training, professional education, continuing education and training, universities of applied sciences, and general university training (see SERI 2022). In international comparison, there are arguably two outstanding elements of the system of opportunities to develop skills in Switzerland: a) Switzerland is a prominent case of strong reliance on vocational training. About two-thirds of all school leavers start vocational training, in the form of basic training within enterprises that is accompanied by study within public vocational training schools. b) The educational system is highly permeable:

After vocational training, a frequently utilized route to higher qualification at the tertiary level is via vocational education either at universities of applied sciences or at universities. The fields most frequently studied at professional education institutions are nursing, business management and social pedagogy (data of 2020).

The universities of applied sciences were introduced in 1997. A typical route to universities of applied sciences is via vocational training which is combined with a vocational baccalaureate (either in parallel or after vocational training), the latter being the criterion for acceptance at the universities of applied sciences. In 2019, entrants at universities of applied sciences made up 1.8% of the cohort aged 20 to 29, as compared to 2.0% at universities (Emmenegger et al. 2023: 365). This indicates that the route to tertiary degrees via universities of applied sciences is almost as important as the traditional route via general universities. There is also some permeability between professional education institutions and universities of applied sciences, and between the latter and universities. Hence, while in countries such as Germany, upskilling in the knowledge economy relies very heavily on the expansion of general universities, the Swiss pathway is marked by the strong expansion of both general universities and universities of applied science. Having said this, the total share of people holding tertiary education degrees in Switzerland (45% of the population between 25 and 64) is still lower than in neighboring Austria (50%) and Germany (51%) – but higher than in Italy (43%) or France (41%) (OECD 2023).

High-quality vocational education and opportunities for closely related upskilling depend strongly on employers' willingness to invest in education. In the literature, it is frequently argued that in coordinated market economies based on high-quality industrial production such as Switzerland, employers have strong incentives to support vocational education (Hall/Soskice 2001). A second argument for the peculiarities of the Swiss system of upskilling points to weak trade unions and the strong role played by employers in defining vocational training curricula, making upskilling after vocational training an attractive option (Emmenegger et al. 2023).

The employment agencies (Regional Arbeitsvermittlungszentren) are organized in a decentralized way. Their efficiency varies by region, but can be judged as being at least sufficient. Hence, they facilitate worker mobility across firms, industries and regions. There is no explicit attempt to facilitate worker mobility to other countries. However, Switzerland is seeking formal membership or association with the European Network of Public Employment Services (SECO 2023) – which is dependent on Switzerland's future relations with the EU. Two major problems within the system of employment agencies

are the strong variation in efficiency across regions and the lack of sufficient coordination with other public institutions (such as social assistance and social security agencies). There have been attempts to improve this interinstitutional cooperation (Federal Council 2013; Bonoli & Fossati 2022; Interinstitutionelle Zusammenarbeit 2023).

Short-time work programs are an established practice in Switzerland. The scheme was extensively applied during the recent pandemic, based on corporatist tripartite policy development by employers, the state and trade unions (Armingeon & Sager 2022).

Policies
Targeting an
Inclusive Labor
Market
Score: 9

Switzerland combines a generous system of unemployment benefits with various active labor market policy (ALMP) measures. The latter were introduced in 1997. They aim at the (re-)integration of workers into the labor market, for example, through improved employment agencies and various courses. There is a strong emphasis on job-search activities, and the system offers incentives for the acceptance of new jobs.

A recent meta-analysis of previous evaluations concluded: “Depending on the form, participants and time of availability, a specific offer can be more or less effective. The fact that both positive and negative evaluation results are available for all types of [active labor market policy], signal[ed] a great heterogeneity in the effect.... The analysis shows, for example, that employment programs, coaching offers and interim earnings score above average in evaluations. In the case of basic programs and specialist courses, on the other hand, every second evaluation shows a negative result” (SECO 2018: iii). Hence, it is more appropriate to distinguish between various ALMP elements rather than drawing a general conclusion about Swiss ALMP as a whole (see in general Kluge 2010).

Even with regard to a single policy element, effects vary by groups of workers. A recent study of ALMP in the Swiss hotel industry found that participation in ALMP measures sends signals to prospective employers. They tend to become skeptical about applications by stronger candidates (such as those seeking a job as receptionist) if they participated in ALMP measures, while low-skilled candidates (such as those applying to be a room cleaner) were evaluated more positively if they had previously taken part in ALMP courses (Liechti et al. 2017).

In its recent Economic Survey, the OECD praised the achievements of Swiss labor market policy, in particular the active labor market strategies and the coordination and evaluation of decentralized actors by federal institutions. It also suggested that active labor market policies be further expanded, in

particular via hiring subsidies and job-insertion allowances (OECD 2022: 86 – 88).

Switzerland's economy is close to full employment, and employers seek to attract new workers. Policymakers try to mobilize the working-age population to enter the labor market, thereby reducing reliance as much as possible on foreign labor recruitment. Arguably, the following elements are important in this regard:

- a) Some married couples (especially those with children) pay higher taxes than unmarried couples, as they are taxed jointly. This provides incentives either not to marry, not to enter the labor market or to limit labor market participation (i.e., to engage in part-time work) if the partner's income is sufficient. There are currently several political attempts underway to change this differential tax treatment (NZZ 6 May 2023).
- b) Wage tax is comparatively low in Switzerland (but varies considerably between municipalities and cantons), so the low general tax burden does not reduce the incentive to enter the labor market.
- c) Family policy in Switzerland lags behind the general development in rich European nations (Häusermann/Bürgisser 2022). Given the lack or high cost of childcare facilities, couples have to decide whether one partner (typically the woman) will stay at home looking after the children, or both will take up gainful employment with a large share of the additional income spent on childcare.
- d) Swiss labor market regulations follow to a liberal model that offers comparatively little job security for workers, but also contains some flexible rules. Among these is a high level of flexibility regarding part-time employment. Swiss employment rates are very high, particularly for women, due to a comparatively high share of part-time employment.

Switzerland has a very low youth unemployment rate, which is on par with the general unemployment rate. This is due to the efficient system of vocational training and other aspects of public education, as well as generally excellent labor market conditions. A number of policies and institutions help integrate unemployed young people into the labor market (SECO 2020, SECO n.d.). However, some categories of worker face specific labor market issues: Elderly working immigrants, such as those recruited in the 1950 through 1970s from Southern and Eastern Europe for low-skill jobs, experience precarious socioeconomic situations more often than nationals, and are at higher risk of an early exit from the market due to health issues often related to tough working conditions (Bolzman 2012).

Given the liberal labor market policy, public policies aimed at facilitating a work-life balance (e.g., through remote work) are very limited. It is up to the social partners to find appropriate rules for achieving this balance. During the pandemic, remote work has been generally established, and it has become widely accepted that employees will to some extent work at home if they want to, and if the job allows for such remote work.

Policies
Targeting Labor
Market Risks
Score: 8

Switzerland has a well-developed system of generous unemployment benefits and an active labor market policy. Unemployment benefits are available for traditional employees; the self-employed are not covered by unemployment insurance. Generally, the unemployed are entitled to unemployment benefits if they are unemployed for at least two days, if they are residents of Switzerland (foreigners need to have a valid long-term or basic residence permit), and if they have contributed to the unemployment insurance program for at least 12 months. Students who cannot get a job after finishing their studies can apply for unemployment benefits after a waiting period of 120 days (work.swiss 2023). Unemployment benefits are not extended to undocumented migrants, whose number is difficult to determine, but was estimated between 100,000 and 300,000 in 2005, and who fill the needs of the labor market (Longchamp et al. 2005).

Trade union density in Switzerland is low by international comparison. Due to corporatist integration and the opportunities offered by direct democracy, unions' political influence may be greater than the density figures suggest. But generally, unions' power is limited, making them a junior partner in a corporatist system dominated by employers and their organizations (Armingeon 2007, 2011; Mach et al. 2020; Mach/Eichenberger 2022). However, due to the so-called flanking measures of the bilateral agreements with the EU, a large share of jobs are covered by generally applicable collective agreements (erga-omnes-rules) (Oesch 2011). In 2022, about 50% of all jobs were covered by collective agreements, and among these, every second job was covered by a generally applicable collective agreement (FSO 2023).

Social rights within Switzerland are strongly portable. Social policy is mainly regulated at the federal level. The most important social insurance programs – unemployment and pensions (1st pillar) – are federal-level systems, although they are implemented at the regional level. The second pension pillar is run by private pension funds, but assets can be shifted between these funds in the event of a change of employer.

Policies
Targeting
Adequate Tax
Revenue
Score: 9

Sustainable Taxation

The Swiss tax ratio is significantly below the OECD average, and tax rates are moderate particularly for businesses, with a moderately progressive income tax. Hence, from a liberal point of view and in comparative perspective, there are few disincentives in the tax system that may discourage individuals from seeking employment or companies from making investments. One exception may be the tax for married couples (see below).

The overall public revenues ratio (federation, cantons, municipalities) is around 29% of GDP (2021). The federation receives 36% of all public revenues, the cantons 24% and the municipalities 15%. Social insurance programs – which are regulated on the level of the federation – receive 24% of total public revenue (FFA 2022). Public debt is very low, at 16% of GDP (FFA 2023a).

It is important to note that due to the principle of federalism, tax rates can differ substantially between regions, as individual cantons and local communities have the power to set regional tax levels. For example, the tax load for a couple (one bread earner, CHF 100,000 gross income, no children) varied by a factor of 3.5 between the cantonal capital with the lowest tax rate (Zug) and that with the highest tax rate (Neuchâtel) in 2018 (FTA 2023). Therefore, any information on Swiss tax policy should be accompanied by information on which government – municipal, cantonal or federal – is in charge. In the following, we focus on the federal level.

Switzerland's apparently low levels of government revenue as a percent of GDP can be attributed in part to the way in which the statistics are calculated. Contributions to the occupational pension system (the so-called second pillar) and the health insurance program – which are non-state organizations – are excluded from government revenue calculations. The share of government revenue as a percent of GDP would be about 10 percentage points higher if contributions to these two programs were included. This would bring Switzerland closer to the euro zone average – but even then the Swiss figure would be significantly lower.

Tax policy does not impede competitiveness. Switzerland ranks at the top of competitiveness indexes, and given its low level of taxation, is highly attractive for corporate and personal taxpayers both domestically and internationally. Tax policy has contributed to a balance between revenues and expenditures.

The country's tax policy has come under scrutiny from the OECD and European Union for treating domestic and some international firms differently at the cantonal level. These international firms have their regional headquarters in Switzerland – employing more than 150,000 people and contributing substantially to tax revenue – but do most of their business abroad.

In response to the scrutiny, the federal government introduced a contentious corporate-taxation reform policy. In the end, in 2017, a quid pro quo was agreed to. To win the support of politicians on the political left, contributions to the first pillar of the pension system (AHV) have been increased by the same amount as taxes are reduced for firms. These additional resources for the AHV are generated through increased contributions from the federal state as well as from increased social security contributions from employers and workers. This compensation deal was accepted by popular vote in May 2019.

Another recent tax reform, prompted by international political pressure from the OECD, involves minimal taxes for large, internationally active corporate groups. These are now supposed to pay at least 15% tax on their profits. These taxes were agreed to in a popular vote in June 2023, and became effective on 1 January 2024.

Given that other countries have lagged behind in the implementation of this OECD standard, Swiss businesses sought to delay the date of implementation, but did not succeed (NZZ 10 November 2023).

Another major tax issue with constitutional implications involves tax rates for married couples, which under certain circumstances may be higher than those paid by unmarried couples. A measure that would have implemented reform on this issue failed by a narrow margin in a 2017 popular vote, possibly as a result of erroneous information provided by the federal government regarding the number of persons affected. An April 2019 ruling by the Federal Supreme Court abrogated the outcome of the 2017 referendum. This marked the first time in Switzerland's history that a popular vote had been annulled by the Federal Supreme Court. The Federal Council planned to submit a new bill on this issue in March 2024 (FDF 2023b).

Policies
Targeting Tax
Equity
Score: 4

The redistributive effect of taxes (calculated by comparing income inequality before and after taxes and social benefits) is comparatively limited – that is, tax policy does little to correct for market income inequality.

A tax issue with constitutional implications involves tax rates for married couples which, under certain circumstances, may be higher than those of unmarried couples. The Federal Council planned to submit a new bill on this issue in March 2024 (FDF 2023a) (for details see the discussion in P5.1).

Given the available evidence on tax evasion, wage incomes are arguably treated less favorably than income from property (Baselgia 2023). It is much harder to evade taxes on income than taxes on property.

The fact that specific cantons attract certain companies and wealthy foreigners by offering them preferential tax advantages is another instance of differential treatment in tax policy. Although the share of taxpayers that benefit from this rule is very small (less than 0.1% of all taxpayers), it is a contentious political issue that very rich foreigners – who are not gainfully employed in the country – pay very moderate taxes (FDF 2023b).

The bulk of tax revenue goes to cantons and municipalities. Cantons and municipalities decide on their tax rates, and these rates vary widely. Therefore, the fiscal quotas of cantons and municipalities also vary, and by implication, so does their provision of public services (see also P5.1). In the Swiss political discourse – particularly among center-right politicians – this lack of horizontal equity is intentional. In a strongly decentralized political system, citizens decide democratically, frequently in a popular vote, on their local tax rate. Additionally, center-right politicians argue that different tax burdens create competition between local and regional units for attracting firms and individual taxpayers.

A project aimed at imposing micro-taxes on electronic transactions, mainly targeting the finance sector, was unsuccessfully launched by finance professor Marc Cheney of the University of Zurich. Finally, a major reform project – with implications for horizontal equity – concerns the abolition of taxes on owner-occupied rental value. For decades, the Homeowners Association sought to eliminate this tax while retaining as many of the concurrent tax deductions for renovations and debt service as possible. Despite support from some politicians in the political center and on the right, this campaign ultimately failed. Recently, another similar reform attempt has been launched. Caught in a complex web of different political forces – cantonal ministries of finance, the political left, craftsmen in the construction sector, banks and insurance companies that issue mortgages, homeowners, and some center-right politicians – the fate of the reform is not yet clear (FDF 2023c, FFA 2023).

Policies Aimed at
Minimizing
Compliance
Costs
Score: 9

Apart from flat tax regulations (in the canton of Obwalden), tax rules are considered difficult by many taxpayers. Arguably, comparing German and Swiss rules, Swiss rules may in general be more transparent and comprehensible, and tax forms are relatively easy to fill out without the support of a tax counselor. This conclusion is confirmed by indicators such as the “ease of paying taxes” by the World Bank. For example, taxpayers are calculated to have spent 15 hours doing corporate income taxes in 2020, 40 hours for labor taxation and eight hours for VAT – compare this with a respective 41 hours, 134 hours and 43 hours in Germany (pwc n.d.).

Policies Aimed at
Internalizing
Negative and
Positive
Externalities
Score: 3

Corresponding to the general liberal-conservative approach of Swiss tax policy, taxes do little to internalize externalities. The rejection of a comprehensive CO₂ law in 2017 in a popular vote supports this observation. This law would have internalized negative externalities. After the popular vote, the federal government proposed a new law in December 2021, substantially watering down the failed CO₂ law and renouncing any new attempts to tax CO₂ emissions. Rather, this new measure relies almost entirely on positive incentives, and any attempts to increase the price of gasoline by additional taxes have been opposed vehemently in the political process. However, there are also examples of tax policy that incentivizes environmental protection. A CO₂ levy on fossil fuels has existed since 2008. Two-thirds of its revenue is redistributed to the population and the economy. For citizens, this redistribution is administered via a reduction of health insurance premiums. Similarly, there has been a tax on volatile organic compounds – for instance, those present in solvents and those responsible for ozone pollution – since 2000 (OFEV n.d.); once again, the benefits are redistributed to the population through the health insurance system. Evidently, these initiatives are far from enough to foster a general dissuasive dynamic regarding environmentally harmful behavior.

Sustainable Budgeting

Sustainable
Budgeting
Policies
Score: 9

Budgetary policy in Switzerland is fiscally sustainable. There have been no budget deficits at the federal level since 2008, with the exception of the 2020 – 2022 period due to COVID-19. Between 1990 and 2008, the largest annual deficit was -1.9% in 1993. For the period through 2027, the federal deficit is planned to be between -0.3% and 0% (FFA 2023). Since the federal budget has usually been too conservative in previous years, there is no reason to expect a major deficit in the coming years. However, the federal finance minister points to predictable expenditures in the near future – including on the long-term effects of the pandemic, the military, pensions and support for refugees from Ukraine – that could overstretch the federal budget (NZZ 2023).

12 28). General public debt amounts to around 28% of GDP (2022, according to Maastricht criteria); the federal debt alone totals about 16% of GDP. It must be noted that the Swiss federal state is very slim by international comparison. Only around one-third of state expenditure is spent by the federal government.

This high level of fiscal sustainability is mainly due to the political decision to have a low tax load and a lean state. In addition, keeping the public deficit and debt low has been a major concern of almost all politicians at all levels of the political system. Various rules and structures have been developed to avoid the dynamics of expanding budgets.

For example, on the federal level, there is the constitutional debt brake (Article 126): “The maximum of the total expenditures which may be budgeted shall be determined by the expected receipts, taking into account the economic situation.” Direct democracy offers another effective means of keeping the budget within limits. In popular votes, people have proven reluctant – compared in particular to members of parliaments when elections are drawing near – to support the expansion of state tasks with a corresponding rise in taxes and/or public debt.

Despite the country’s very favorable fiscal position, which allows for some fiscal leeway, the Federal Council pursues a very prudent fiscal policy. Even considering that some individual cantonal and municipal governments pursue unsustainable budgetary policies, the total (i.e., general government) budgetary policy achievement arguably places Switzerland in the OECD’s top group in terms of fiscally sustainable national policies. In its recent country surveys, the OECD praised Switzerland’s budgetary policy, but it also notes that, in the past, authorities tended to skew policy in ways tighter than intended. It suggests making greater use of available fiscal leverage to, inter alia, improve economic and social outcomes (OECD 2019: 34-35, OECD 2022a: 27-36).

Switzerland issues SDG-related action plans on a regular basis (e.g., 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy). The national strategy encourages federal agencies to “incorporate the requirements of the 2030 SDS into their regular budget” (Swiss Federal Council 2021). As the strategy is mostly programmatic and nonbinding, Switzerland has so far only achieved 31 out of 121 SDG targets (OECD 2022b).

The political conflict about fiscal rules such as so-called debt brakes concerns whether deficit-financed counter-cyclical policy and investment in infrastructure may be more advantageous to the economy in the medium and long term, or whether strict adherence to debt brake rules may pay off in the future since – based on experience – debts will otherwise be unlikely to be

reduced in the future. Given the extremely favorable development of Switzerland's public finances, the threat posed by the counter-intentional effects of frugal fiscal policies seems to be greater than the threat of strong increases in public debt. However, this depends very much on political views. The dominant view within the Swiss political elite is clearly conservative-liberal and emphasizes the benefits of frugal policies – except for generous subsidies to agriculture and very pragmatic and interest-driven state intervention in the economy. This heterodox fiscal and economic policy within the framework of a conservative-liberal basic approach to state intervention has been a characteristic of Swiss economic policy for many decades (Gruner 1964; Emmenegger 2022).

The federal government presents its budget to parliament on an annual basis. It also develops financial plans for the legislative term – that is, four years in advance. The process is very transparent; the relevant documents and data are accessible via the government's webpage (FFA 2023). The current budget (2020 – 2024) is presented on about 450 pages in two volumes. The second volume of the budget contains information on how the government aims to achieve sustainable developments in various policy fields (FFA 2023).

Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

Research and
Innovation Policy
Score: 7

Switzerland's achievement in terms of innovation is considerable. It spends 3.4% of GDP (2021) on research and development, placing it among the world's top spenders on R&D, comparable to the U.S., Sweden, Austria and Germany, and clearly ahead of the EU average of 2.1% (2021; OECD 2023; FSO 2021). Switzerland is ranked among the five leading nations in terms of innovation (Foray 2022).

Sixty-eight percent of research spending is corporate spending with the direct aim of economic innovation, an important factor in the country's strong overall competitiveness. With a share of about 29%, public research funding plays a lesser role than in other European countries. The R&D system depends on six main actors: the universities of applied sciences, the cantonal universities, the two federal institutes of technology, the National Science Foundation, the Federal Commission for Technology and Innovation, and the academies of sciences. These actors are independent of each other but cooperate based on complementarity and (limited) competition. The various institutions are highly autonomous, and research policies and processes are driven by bottom-up operations.

Thus, Swiss research policy is not centralized, but rather relies on a concept of decentralized innovation with periodic intervention by the federal government. The output of the research system is impressive. The federal institutes of technology in Zurich and Lausanne number among the top-ranked universities in the world, and the universities of Basel, Bern, Geneva and Zurich regularly appear on the list of the 150 best universities worldwide.

Given this decentralized structure of research and innovation; a university system which is based on the cantons – with the exception of the two federal institutes of technology – and a strong reliance on privately financed R&D, the role of the federal government in utilizing research and innovation as drivers for the transition to a sustainable economy and society is very limited. Every four years, it submits a document to the national parliament detailing its requests for public funding of R&D and stating its goals. It claims to contribute “to sustainable development and equal opportunities in all areas. In this way, it also contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and thus supports the development of the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy” (Federal Council 2020).

Basically, an observer’s own political views will affect judgments of whether a sustainable economy and society requires a clear commitment and strategy on the part of the central government, or whether sustainability may be best served by a decentralized and competitive approach. The latter stance would probably correspond to the views of a large share of the Swiss political elite.

A major problem for Swiss R&D is exclusion from EU research funding and researchers’ limited access, as external partners financed by Swiss institutions, to these EU programs (Baschung and Leresche 2023). This has been due to stalled negotiations that have undermined the relationship since May 2021. At the time of writing, some rapprochement between the EU and Switzerland appeared evident, which may mitigate these problems in the foreseeable future.

Stable Global Financial System

Global Financial
Policies
Score: 7

Switzerland is one of the world’s most significant financial markets. The major Swiss bank UBS is a global financial player. The post-2007 global crisis and the economic problems of UBS in Switzerland – which forced the Swiss government to intervene massively to avoid the bankruptcy of this major bank in 2008 – triggered banking reforms, introducing measures to deal with the problem of banks being “too big to fail.” Action was taken swiftly by the competent authorities, but lacked democratic transparency (Hirschi et al.

2022). Though it remained unclear whether these new rules and institutions would be sufficient in the event of a major crisis, the Swiss approach numbers among the most sound and prudent systems of regulation worldwide. However, this reform could not prevent a further major banking crisis in 2023, when Credit Suisse experienced a serious crisis of trust. Once again, the government actively and successfully intervened in the crisis, and motivated and even pressured the remaining large bank, UBS, to integrate the quickly eroding Credit Suisse into UBS. The government supported this in part by providing guarantees to UBS in case of substantial problems in the takeover. Fortunately, these resources were not needed in the end (FDF 2023b).

The federal government, bankers and international organizations such as the OECD (OECD 2019) assert that Swiss private and public actors have been active on the global level in reforming the international banking system, in particular in interaction with regulatory bodies in the United Kingdom, United States and European Union. In this regard, the government has credibly implemented international agreements to prevent and combat high-risk financial activities that pose systemic risks.

Switzerland has proved very active in regulating new financial technologies, particularly in the case of distributed-ledger technologies. In September 2020, parliament passed the distributed-ledger technology (DLT) blanket act, which selectively adapts 10 existing federal laws. In June 2021, the Federal Council brought the Federal Act on the Adaptation of Federal Law to Developments in Distributed Electronic Register Technology into full force. This will allow for innovative DLT trading facilities and increase legal certainty in the event of bankruptcy (Federal Council 2021).

In 2014, the Swiss government supported the OECD declaration on the automatic exchange of information in tax matters (OECD 2014), making the automatic exchange of information effective by 2017. This considerably modified Swiss banking secrecy – which had been rightly criticized for many years as a major element of international tax havens. In this case, rather than actively pursuing a strategy of transparency and avoidance of policies allowing it to become a tax haven, Switzerland simply reacted and bowed to massive international pressure (Gava 2023). Likewise, the OECD minimum tax for large international enterprises – abolishing tax havens in certain cantons – was reluctantly accepted by political elites and by the people in a popular vote in 2023. The major motivation for this retrenchment of regulatory havens has not been the desire for fairness and transparency. Rather, the main reason why even staunch supporters of Swiss sovereignty in tax matters agreed with the reform was the following: “If Switzerland were to refrain from introducing the minimum tax rate, the Swiss arms of corporate groups from these jurisdictions would be taxed more heavily by their parent country, which would lead to base

erosion in favor of other countries” (FDF 2023a). Finally, in the 2023 AML Index of the Basel Institute on Governance assessing risks of money laundering and terrorist financing, Switzerland ranks only at the 16th place out of 34 European countries.

II. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Education System

Policies
Targeting Quality
Education
Score: 9

Switzerland’s education system (see for an overview: SKBF 2023; Giudici and Emmenegger 2023) is strongly influenced by the country’s federal and decentralized structure, as education policy falls under the jurisdiction of the cantons and municipalities. The system provides a high-quality education for a rich country that is dependent upon high-quality products in the industrial and services sectors. Given this dependence on education in a knowledge-based economy, education spending is relatively immune to short-term economic downturns. The university system performs very well, as is the case in many other small and open European countries. Vocational training is very solid and seems to be one of the most important factors in the low levels of unemployment, particularly among younger people. Two out of three young people undertake basic occupational training. The state plays an active role in orchestrating the vocational training system (Busemeyer et al. 2022, see in particular the section on Switzerland). The permeability of vocational and tertiary education has improved in comparison to other countries and is very high.

During the past 20 years, Switzerland experienced very strong growth in tertiary education. To a large extent, this has also been due to the strong growth of universities of applied sciences (Emmenegger et al. 2023). The number of students enrolled at the tertiary level (universities, universities of applied sciences, and professional education institutions) more than tripled between 1990/1991 and 2022/23. This is chiefly due to a growth of student numbers in colleges of education and universities of applied sciences, which have been institutionalized since the mid-1990s. Students with vocational training can acquire a diploma to enter these universities of applied sciences either during their training or through a special one-year course after they have finished their apprenticeship. For the educational year of 2022/23, 61% of all students in tertiary education attended universities, 30% attended universities

of applied sciences and 9% attended professional education institutions. The share of female students in tertiary education increased from 39% in 1990 to 53% in 2022/23 (FSO 2023).

A strong growth of 21 percentage points occurred in the share of population with tertiary attainment between 2000 and 2022 – slightly above the average growth rate in 27 countries for which data are available (Indicator P9.4).

The vocational training system also offers considerable career prospects. Men with vocational training have similarly high employment rates throughout their working life as men with tertiary education. However, there is a significant difference in earnings. At the age of 50, the median annual earnings of a male academic are about CHF 125,000, in contrast to about CHF 80,000 for a male worker with vocational training. Average figures indicate that workers with vocational education earn about 60% of what a worker with a university degree earns (Korber and Oesch, 2016; BASS 2017). “(V)ocational education is associated with substantially lower earnings once workers enter their thirties, and this disadvantage is larger among women than men. While vocational degrees protect against unemployment, they come at the cost of flat earnings curves over the life course” (Korber and Oesch, 2019: 1).

Continuous monitoring of labor market demands, enabling the adaptation of education and training programs, is supported on the federal level by a specialized university of applied sciences (Swiss Federal University for Vocational Education and Training (<https://www.sfuvet.swiss/>)) and by a research project that explores how the Swiss Vocational and Professional Education and Training and comparable systems in other countries are governed (SERI 2023).

Universities and schools offer a range of opportunities for further education, such as certificates, diplomas and master’s of advanced studies, in addition to many other courses offered by firms or private organizations, ensuring that individuals have access to lifelong learning opportunities (www.berufsberatung.ch).

Educators, particularly at high schools and universities, are very well paid in international comparison, thereby facilitating the recruitment of highly skilled educators. For example, the maximum wage of a university professor is almost three times the median wage, and the average wage of a professor (all types of higher education) or a teacher at a high school is 1.5 times the median wage.

Education for sustainable development is integrated into the curricula of all school levels (Deutschschweizer Erziehungsdirektoren-Konferenz 2016).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
to Education
Score: 5

While women and – with some exceptions – persons from peripheral regions have equal access to higher education, the Swiss education system continues to discriminate at all levels against students from families with low social status. A recent report summarizes the current state of research: “(N)ot all citizens enjoy the same level of participation in education, achievement and qualifications. Despite the expansion of the education system and increasing participation in more advanced levels of education and training (‘educational expansion’), education opportunities depend on factors that have little to do with performance, such as social origin, migration background or gender. This runs counter to the principle of equal opportunity enshrined in the federal constitution and to the generally accepted notion that goods and positions should be allocated on the basis of merit. Measured in terms of learning outcomes, the Swiss education system is therefore not only inefficient but also unfair. Equal opportunity remains a utopia” (Becker and Schoch 2018: 30). This is exacerbated by the fact that children are separated into different education curricula tracks very early on at school (at the age of 12) leading either to high school or to occupation training.

Higher education in Switzerland is also affected by the federal system. Whereas cantons such as Geneva, Basel-City and Ticino have followed international trends favoring general qualifications for university entrance, other cantons – in particular the German-speaking parts of the country – have focused on a split system of university and vocational education. Thus, in the canton of Geneva, around 34% of each age cohort acquires the matura, a high school exit diploma that allows the student to go directly to a university or university of applied sciences. In contrast, in the canton of Uri, only 13% gain direct access to a university or university of applied sciences (2019). In any case, the proportion of individuals obtaining this university-track high school diploma is low in European comparison. The recent report on education finds that not only does the probability of obtaining a university-track high school diploma vary between cantons, the probability of entering a high school (Gymnasium) in the first place does as well. “The cantonal entry rate for high schools varies between 12.8% and 48.6%” (SKBF 2023: 158). However, the effect of this “federal” discrimination is somewhat reduced by permeability within the school and university systems.

Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies Targeting Equal Access to Essential Services and Basic Income Support Score: 8

Where individuals have access to the internet, information on rights and opportunities to access basic services and basic income security is readily available. See, for example, the list on SKOS 2023. Some organizations offer online tools for checking the availability of income support (e.g., SRF 2023), although the non-uptake of social benefits is also a relevant issue in Switzerland (Tabin/Leresche 2019). Several cantons are addressing the issue of non-uptake through dedicated units or programs. Likewise, access to these services and transfers is available provided the eligible individual is willing to accept the stigmatizing effects of means-tested income support. For example, a large group of pensioners who are entitled to social assistance (Ergänzungsleistungen) do not apply for these schemes either because they do not know about these opportunities or because they are embarrassed to apply (Pro Senecute 2022; SRF 2023).

In contrast to social security (i.e., the major insurance programs for health, unemployment, invalidity and old age), social assistance comes under the jurisdiction of cantons and municipalities. Therefore, there are no national policies ensuring that everyone in need has access to cash transfers, subsidies, earmarked financial support or benefits in kind in various areas such as housing, energy or transportation. This is done in a decentralized manner, and there are major differences between regions. For example, the city of Zurich is currently following the example of the city of Basel in the area of care for the homeless. These two cities offer unconditional housing to the homeless following the idea of “housing first” (NZZ 2023 12 27, pp. 1, 12-13).

Policies Targeting Quality of Essential Services and Basic Income Support Score: 6

The task of combating poverty is a competence of municipalities and cantons. By implication, there is substantial regional variation. For example, old-age poverty is lowest in the canton of Basel Stadt (6%) and almost five times higher (29.5%) in the canton of Ticino (Pro Senecute 2022: 20).

A national organization, the Swiss Conference for Social Assistance, develops guidelines jointly with the cantons, municipalities, cities and private aid organizations. The guidelines are adopted by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs (SODK) and recommended to the cantons for application. They become binding through cantonal legislation and municipal legislation and judgment (SKOS 2023a). These guidelines are followed to varying extents in the cantons and municipalities (SKOS 2023b).

Thus, the answer to the question of the generosity of basic income benefits enabling the fulfillment of basic human needs depends to some substantial extent on the region of the person in need.

Corresponding to its level of economic and social development, Switzerland manages on average to keep its residents from poverty – provided individuals do not shy away from applying for income support due to ignorance, embarrassment about the stigmatizing effects of means-tested social assistance or their legal status.

The risk of poverty is particularly large for foreigners and elderly citizens in Switzerland. According to the OECD, the old-age poverty rate is clearly above the OECD average in Switzerland, and it is particularly widespread among women (OECD 2023: 199). The major explanatory variables are education and uninterrupted professional careers. The pension system amplifies the inequalities that exist during working life. While about 86% of all pensioners are well-off, the remaining 14% are in poverty. This poverty rate could be halved if eligible pensioners would claim social assistance, but they often refrain from doing so because of ignorance, fear of red tape, fear of contradicting their liberal values, or shame (Pro Senecute 2022, 2023).

In the housing sector, emergency structures do not meet the current need, leaving homeless persons in the streets of Swiss cities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed new light on the social and health needs of vulnerable populations in the eyes of the authorities (Jackson et al. 2021).

The public transportation system is strongly developed and of high quality. While the Green and Socialist parties have periodically proposed making it free of charge, the idea has never been adopted.

Sustainable Health System

Policies
Targeting Health
System
Resilience
Score: 6

Major characteristics of the Swiss health system are decentralization and liberalism. There is one federal health system and 26 cantonal health systems; within the cantonal health systems, there are also variations by municipality. The cantonal competence is in the field of health provisions (such as services in case of emergencies or catastrophes, and provision of transportation or rescue services), hospitals, health policy, training of medical staff, licensing to practice medicine and medical services, and the provision of subsidies for health insurance premiums for low-income groups. Competencies on the federal level are mainly in the field of general health policy issues, supervision

of health insurance providers, pharmaceutical industry oversight and regulation of medical staff training.

In 1996, health insurance was made obligatory for all residents. Premiums for health insurance do not depend on income and do not take into account the number of family members. Hence, insurance must be bought for each member of the family, although premiums are reduced for children. In recent years, this liberal model has been modified through the provision of subsidies for low-wage earners and their families. The cantons decide on the extent of subsidies; the federation covers about half the cost of these cantonal subsidies.

Mandatory healthcare insurance is provided by a large number of competing mutual funds (nonprofit insurance programs), all of which are required to offer the same benefits. However, health insurance companies can make a profit on optional healthcare insurance packages (see section P.11.3). Hence, there is no competition in the area of benefits, but only in the field of premiums, which is largely a function of administrative costs and membership structure. Considerable discussion has focused on whether this competitive market structure should be replaced by a single state-owned insurance company. In 2014, voters decided in a popular vote to retain the present system.

Total costs of the Swiss health sector amount to about 12% of GDP, and 13% of all employees work in the health sector (Trein et al. 2022: 904; Trein et al. 2023). In comparative view, Switzerland numbers among the countries with the highest healthcare costs, and arguably those with the highest quality of healthcare (see for instance the large Lancet study on comparative mortality index GBD 2015). The availability of health products and services is generally good, although the system has equity issues (see next subsection).

In 2021, the healthcare system was financed by the public sector (23%), by private mutual funds (health insurance providers) (36%), by other (private) health insurance providers (9%) and by patient own payments (22%) (FSO 2023). The health sector depends crucially on foreign labor, in particular physicians and nurses, since the Swiss education system does not attract and train enough such specialists.

Given this decentralized structure and the strong role of private (and competing) actors, there is no single answer to the question of how health policy contributes to the resilience of the health system.

Digitalization of health systems is a concern, in particular at the federal level (Federal Council 2019: 12-15). The system produces sufficient health products and services when and where they are needed, even in times of crisis. This was demonstrated during the pandemic when the health system was placed under strong pressure but did not collapse at any time.

While the resilience of the healthcare system in terms of quality, health outcomes and sufficient supply of health services is exceptional, the system has limited resilience in many regards, above all with regard to rising costs in the health sector. Currently, a number of attempts to curb the rapid increase in health expenditures are meeting with stiff resistance from vested interests, such as doctors, hospitals and health insurance funds. Arguably, the political elites have no consensus and or even convincing ideas regarding a grand cost-curbing strategy. Likewise, a salient issue is the strong increases in healthcare insurance premiums, which tend to overburden the household budgets of low- to middle-income earners. This raises the question of whether the system of competing mutual funds with parallel administrations is sustainable, and whether the liberal model of flat rate per capita premiums – albeit weakened by subsidies for low-income earners – can still be defended. Resilience is also limited regarding environmental durability: the Swiss health system could better take into account the close interactions between human, animal and environmental health (Senn et al. 2022). Resilience is also lacking with respect to the complex governance of the Swiss health system that is not sustainable in its current form, with its fragmentation across governance levels, lack of a central overview and steering body, poor foresight capacity regarding labor shortages, and excessive influence of insurance companies in the policymaking process (Monod et al. 2023). Finally, the system has room for improvement regarding its capacities to meet future challenges, be it population aging or health crises.

Policies
Targeting High-
Quality
Healthcare
Score: 9

By international standards, Swiss healthcare is of outstanding quality. The system fosters preventive healthcare, including detection and treatment, as well as the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. This is demonstrated by the country's top position with regard to avoidable mortality and high life expectancy (see also FSO 2023) – phenomena that are also related to the general wealth and high quality of life in Switzerland. Health specialists note that despite excellent outcomes, the Swiss health system is oriented toward cutting-edge biomedical interventions at the individual level, while showing clear shortcomings with regard to preventive health, structural regulations and action on the social determinants of health (Monod/Grandchamp 2022). This latter perspective is believed to achieve better sustainability and stronger equity in the health field. To act in this direction, a large coalition of the main health advocacy organizations tried to pass a federal law on prevention and health promotion (LPrév), which failed in the Council of States in 2012 (Gesundheitsförderung Schweiz 2013).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
To Healthcare
Score: 7

High-quality healthcare is accessible to all inhabitants, as basic insurance coverage is mandatory in Switzerland. However, an explorative small-N study conducted in the canton of Vaud showed that 40% of health insurance companies refused affiliation to undocumented migrants, which is against the law (Dabboudi et al. 2011).

However, there are further qualifications: As in many other countries, the supply of medical services varies by region, with large cities having higher densities of medical staff. More serious are the side effects of self-payments by patients. The share of healthcare costs borne by individuals is comparatively very high in Switzerland. Individuals pay a monthly health insurance premium (on average more than CHF 300), an annual deductible, and an additional participation in purchased medication and hospitalization costs. The basic insurance package does not cover elements that are considered basic elsewhere, including dental care, glasses or physiotherapy. For additional optional health insurance packages, the costs depend on individual characteristics, and health insurance providers can reject applicants. This accounts for inequalities in health access.

Drawing on several studies, the federal government reported that the proportion of people who forego medical services for cost reasons is in the range of 10% to 20% of the population. According to a report by the Swiss Health Observatory, the proportion of the population that has given up going to the doctor because of cost-related reasons rose sharply between 2010 and 2016, and is most marked in the 18 to 45 age group, with an increase of around 15% (Merçay 2016). The proportion of those who would forego necessary services is in the lower single-digit percentage range, although it is very difficult to define “necessary treatments” (Federal Council 2017: 22-26).

Gender Equality

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Gender Equality
Score: 6

Passed in 1981, Article 8 of the constitution expressly states that women and men have equal rights and that gender discrimination is prohibited. A Federal Act on Gender Equality (1996) implements the constitutional mandate for gender equality in the workplace. Gender equality came late to Switzerland. It was only in 1971 that women were given suffrage on the national level. The last canton that – following pressure by the Federal Court – implemented female suffrage was Appenzell Innerrhoden in 1990.

Formally, gender equality is respected in law and politics with a Federal Office for Gender Equality and a Conference of Cantonal Delegates for

Gender Equality supervising the implementation of the constitutional rules. There is no doubt that federal and cantonal governments are committed to the constitution and willing to implement rules of equality. It is much less clear whether these governments actively pursue the objective of gender equality. As in many other countries, gender equality is not reached in practice (Engeli 2022; 2023).

In 2021, a survey revealed that 82% of respondents think that women tend to do more unpaid domestic and caring work. Female employees find it particularly difficult to reconcile work and family. But equality is also an accepted goal in society: For example, only 10% of men and 11% of women prefer the traditional male-breadwinner model (Equality.CH 2021).

One of the major elements of gender inequality – the gender wage gap – occurs in the private sector of the economy. Public policy has done little to ease this situation. In 2022, the OECD found: “The sizable gender income gap and disproportionately high incidence of part-time work among women call for measures to address women’s disincentives to work full time. The high cost of childcare, and low supply of early childhood education as well as an organization of the school day that is not well aligned with working hours have long been reported as major reasons for difficulties of mothers to join the labor force full time... Moreover, the income tax system leads to high marginal taxation of second-earner incomes, adding further disincentives to work” (OECD 2022: 88f.).

Due to the difficulties in reconciling work and family typically experienced by women, female workers suffer from disadvantages in the area of pension funds. Frequently, they cannot contribute to these funds to the same extent as male workers do – mainly due to part-time employment or interrupted careers due to child-rearing – which means they receive lower pension payments during retirement. Therefore, old-age poverty rates are higher among women (Pro Senecute 2022). At least in this regard, an element of a recent reform of the pension system tried to improve the position of women (FSIO 2023). However, the political left considers this reform to be insufficient and not well targeted, and it triggered a popular vote that will be held in 2024.

Given the decentralized structure of Swiss politics in the field of gender equality, as well as the role of private firms in creating gender wage gaps and engaging in discrimination in career patterns, it is hard to evaluate the overall effect of equality-promoting policies. Starting from indicators of outcomes, the position of females seems to correspond at least to the continental European pattern. There is a noticeable gap in the share of women in high managerial positions, as only one woman serves as head of one of the 50 biggest Swiss

companies. That woman is Magdalena Martullo-Blocher, the daughter of Christoph Blocher, the former leader of the SVP party (rts.ch 2020).

Regarding violence against women, sexual harassment is defined in the Labor Act and the Code of Obligations (private law), but it lacks a comprehensive definition in the Penal Code (see SECO), which limits opportunities for legal action. After many debates between the two chambers of the Federal Assembly, an extended definition of rape was adopted in 2023. While the majority of the National Council advocated an “only a yes is a yes” option, the Council of States won with a “no is no” option.

A major obstacle to realizing gender equality is the lack of policies helping to reconcile work and family. Family policy is clearly underdeveloped in Switzerland, and the lack of affordable public services for childcare may be a major impediment to gender equality in working life (Bürgisser and Häusermann 2022; 2023). Reforms fostering such policies have frequently lacked support in the political system, which is dominated by liberal-conservative forces. Moreover, these reforms have typically not been successful in popular votes. A major argument in these votes has been the consequences in terms of taxes needed to finance these goals. A related argument concerned the consequences for the tax wedge – that is, the increased labor costs – and its implication for the international competitiveness of Swiss industries.

Strong Families

Family Policies
Score: 4

In general, Swiss family policy has a clearly conservative outlook with a strong liberal undertone (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022; 2023). It is mildly supportive of the traditional family. For example, there is a period of 14 weeks of parental leave for mothers (introduced after a popular vote only in 2004), as well as a very limited number of childcare facilities. In September 2020, a constitutional amendment was accepted in a public vote. The amendment, which establishes two weeks of parental leave for fathers, while covering 80% of the father’s wage, came into effect on 1 January 2021. This clearly falls short of the WHO guideline of six months of maternity leave, and likewise does very little to promote shared responsibility within households and families. There are no federal rules providing parents with paid leave to care for sick children or elderly family members in need of assistance.

Recent statistics show that women spend an average of 16.6 hours a week in paid employment compared to 27.3 hours for men. Likewise, women spend a weekly average of 28.1 hours on domestic work and men 17.9 hours (FSO 2017). Other figures show that within couples that live together, domestic chores are carried out by women in 60% of cases. In 33.7% of households, the tasks are divided equally between men and women. However, it was noted that inequalities in the distribution of domestic chores explode with children. Tasks are distributed equally among 49.5% of couples without children, as compared to 25.9% of couples in households with children under 25 (FSO 2019).

In international comparison, Swiss family policy has done relatively little to enable women to enter the workforce. Policies facilitating the reconciliation of work and family lag behind those in other comparable modern societies. Overall spending for family benefits is low in international comparison, and Switzerland ranks very low with regard to the length of paid maternity leave as well as enrollment of children between the ages of three and five in formal pre-primary education (Bürgisser and Häusermann 2022). Along with Turkey, Switzerland is at the bottom of enrollment rates in early childhood education and care (OECD 2022: 89). Additionally, the tax system with its high marginal personal income taxation of second earners, combined with high costs for external childcare, is a major impediment for caregivers, typically women, to move into the labor market. The OECD reports that “for a family with two young children using childcare facilities, the cost for a second earner to move from inactivity ... to full-time employment (earning the average wage) represents 75% of the average wage, versus 53% on average in the OECD countries” (OECD 2022: 89).

A January 2009 federal law providing subsidy payments to families – amounting to 3.7% of all social policy spending in 2020 (FSIO 2022) – has done little to change the country’s ranking in international comparison. Nor has it changed the substantial variation between cantons, one of the most salient characteristics of Swiss family policy. The new federal law defines minimum child and education benefits, but cantons may add a variable amount to this basic federal benefit level. Single-parent families suffer in particular from lack of public support both with regard to income as well as affordable childcare facilities (FSIO 2023).

In 2020, the WEF’s Global Competitiveness Report, which focused on the road out of the pandemic, ranked Switzerland 12th among 37 countries regarding expansions of care for the elderly, childcare, and healthcare infrastructure and innovation, after countries including Canada, the United States and Germany (WEF 2020: 74). It is also notable that many measures introduced to mitigate the pandemic placed a greater burden on women than

on men. For example, the closure of schools and childcare facilities, as well as quarantine periods for children, were mostly compensated for by women who were pushed back into the household, reinforcing the traditionally conservative division of labor.

There are substantial variations in family policy at the cantonal and municipal levels. The canton of Ticino has a very extensive family policy aimed at helping mothers reconcile work and family; other cantons and their municipalities frequently fail to offer any substantial help, such as childcare facilities, on a broad scale. Differences and reform dynamics are particularly pronounced between municipalities with regard to external childcare. For example, in the largest canton, Zürich, 75% of the costs of preschool care (Kitas) are covered privately by parents (NZZ 9 December 2020). Local communities with minimalistic family policies coexist with municipalities that strongly facilitate the reconciliation of work and family for young mothers. The interplay of local, cantonal and federal family policies makes the policy process and power distribution very disparate.

Likewise, tax policies providing incentives either to stay at home or reenter the labor market vary from canton to canton. However, taking the median canton and municipality, the portrait of a liberal-conservative family policy applies. Policies tend to create incentives for young mothers to stay at home during the first years of their children's lives (the short duration of the maternity leave notwithstanding). Afterward, mothers are provided with reasonable opportunities to find employment; however, these are in most cases part-time jobs. This incentivizes mothers to care for their children while also having some limited employment. Taking part-time jobs usually reduces the ability to have a sustained career compared to the opportunities offered by full-time employment (FSIO 2023; OECD 2022: 79). In this regard, the OECD recently suggested expanding affordable childcare and access to early childhood education so women can expand their working hours (OECD 2022: 89). Currently, the system works in the sense that it mobilizes women within the labor market, but without giving them opportunities for income and career advancement equal to those afforded to men – with considerable regional variation.

Sustainable Pension System

The Swiss pension system is based on three pillars, each with its own logic of financing and redistribution. The underlying concept is that pension income should not fall below the subsistence level and should provide 60% of average pre-retirement income. The first pillar guarantees a basic income. The

minimum benefit level for a single person in 2023 was CHF 1,225 per month, while the maximum benefit was CHF 2,450 per month. The sum of the two individual pensions of a married couple may not exceed 150% of the maximum pension (i.e., CHF 3,675 per month). If this maximum amount is exceeded, the two individual pensions are reduced accordingly. Employers and employees finance this through contributions. It is a pay-as-you-go system and is highly redistributive, since the maximum benefit level for couples (provided to high-income earners) is just 1.5 times that of the minimum benefit level, while contributions are proportional to income. Every resident has to contribute to this first pillar.

The second pillar is a funded system financed through contributions by employers and employees. Contributions and benefits are proportional to income. Employees whose income from the first pillar already covers about 60% of their wage income are not entitled to this system. Many pension programs, particularly in the public sector, are very generous and provide pension incomes (first and second pillars combined) that exceed 60% of previous income. Historically, this system of occupational pensions is the core of the Swiss pension system, and powerful interests – especially major political parties and financial institutions – have allowed for only piecemeal reforms (Armingeon 2018; Leimgruber 2008).

The third pillar takes the form of personal tax-deductible savings of up to CHF 7,056 per year (2023). This system benefits high-income groups, since they can afford to put aside these sums and have the highest returns on these savings given the tax advantages.

In international comparison, the Swiss pension system performs extremely well. According to a comparative analysis of 24 countries, this system has one of the smallest pension gaps among developed democracies. A pension gap is the estimated share of income which a worker at age 50 must save privately in addition to contributions to the pension system if she wants to enjoy an adequate lifestyle during retirement. The respective figure for Switzerland is 14%, while in Germany it is 30%, in the United Kingdom 26% and in France 44% (UBS 2021).

Typically, low-income groups are neither covered by the second pillar nor can they afford to use the third pillar (FSO 2023). If their pension income does not meet the minimal costs of living, they can apply for additional payments (Ergänzungsleistungen). For example, a pensioner (single, with usual rent and health insurance costs) who receives the minimum pension is entitled to another CHF 6,000 per annum as supplementary benefits, resulting in an annual income of about CHF 20,000 (<https://www.ahv-iv.ch/en/Social->

insurances/Supplementary-benefits-EL). Given the Swiss cost of living, it is extremely hard to survive with this income. In addition, these additional payments are means-tested – that is, they are stigmatizing, and many individuals who are entitled to additional payments either do not know about it, are discouraged by the complexity of the system or are embarrassed to ask for this social assistance (Leyvraz et al. 2022).

Statistics from the OECD (2022) and a recent survey on old-age poverty (Pro Senecute 2022) show that Switzerland’s old-age poverty rate is above the OECD average. Old-age poverty affects about 15% of the population aged 65 or above, which is striking given the overall wealth of the country. This rate could be halved if all eligible pensioners claimed social assistance (Pro Senecute 2023). Poverty is measured as having an income below half the national median equivalized household disposable income. If a measure of material deprivation is applied, Switzerland has one of the lowest shares of the population aged 65 or above being in a state of deprivation (i.e., not possessing items considered basic, such as a washing machine, telephone or television; not living in a neighborhood without excessive criminality or noise; and not being able to afford expenditures such as eating meat twice a week, heating the apartment or paying an unforeseen expenditure of around CHF 2,000) (Bonoli and Fossati 2022; 2023: 708 – 709).

Policies
Targeting
Intergenerational
Equity
Score: 8

The Swiss pension system is composed of three pillars (see also P14.1). The first pillar is highly redistributive since the spread between minimum and maximum pensions is low (i.e., maximum pensions are twice minimum pensions) while contributions to the first pillar are basically linear to income. This corresponds to a social democratic model of redistributive social policy.

The second pillar is conservative, since its benefits are linear to income during working life. While the first pillar is a pay-as-you-go system, the second pillar is a capital accumulation fund in the name of the contributor.

The third pillar is liberal and regressive, since only well-to-do citizens can afford to contribute to these tax-deductible funds; the higher the income, the greater the beneficial effects of this pillar (Armingeon 2001; Bonoli and Fossati 2022; 2023).

The pension system offers few incentives to work longer. In the first pillar, pensions can be deferred if individuals work beyond age 65. This leads to slightly higher pension payments afterward. There is also the possibility of early retirement with reduced pensions in both the first and second pillars. However, this is mainly a feasible option for high-income groups who will

receive sufficiently high pensions from the second and perhaps also the third pillar.

Given demographic developments, the first pillar is particularly vulnerable. In the second pillar, there are also some opportunities to redistribute from younger generations to older ones. Notwithstanding the likely unsustainability of the first pillar due to demographic aging, the political left supports the extension of the first pillar because of its redistributive logic and its aim to minimize old-age poverty. This implies either a shrinking of the size of the second pillar or higher taxes or social contributions. Hence, the values of intergenerational and intragenerational equity are in conflict, and it depends on political views which solution is preferred.

A recent study finds that there is no majority for substantial retrenchment of pension systems, particularly regarding an increase in the retirement age. Likewise, there is no majority for increasing the generosity of the system if this endangers its financial sustainability (Häusermann et al. 2019). Hence, major reforms in the coming years do not seem very likely.

In sum, while there are certainly some demographic challenges for the Swiss pension system, given its three-pillar construction it is more robust than national systems that rely only on pay-as-you-go pension systems.

Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Integration Policy
Score: 6

Swiss industries depend heavily on the recruitment of foreign labor. In the first postwar decades, immigration mainly involved low-skilled workers from Mediterranean countries, though some sectors such as universities also relied on high-skilled labor. Since the 1990s, the pattern of immigration has changed, with an emphasis on high-skilled labor. Currently, Germans and Italians are the largest group of foreigners. Forty-one percent of the Swiss population had a migration background in 2022 (FSO 2023), and about 25% of the population has no Swiss passport. Immigration is one of the most salient political issues, with the largest political party – the Swiss People’s Party – taking a very critical stance on immigration.

Apart from the small share of asylum-seekers and refugees from Ukraine, access to the labor market is available, as foreigners fill the market needs. For high-skilled foreign labor, unemployment figures and rates of reliance on social assistance are as low or even lower than among Swiss citizens, while these figures are higher among low-skilled foreign workers. Most migrants come from the EU based on the bilateral treaty on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU. This treaty creates conditions for EU

immigrants that are similar to those that EU citizens enjoy within the EU. Citizens of non-EU/EFTA countries may immigrate only if they are highly skilled, and if similarly qualified workers cannot be recruited from the EU/EFTA. For the group of foreigners permanently residing in Switzerland, rules relating to family reunification and change of place of residence have been strongly liberalized (Lavenex and Manatschal 2022; Lavenex 2023; Manatschal 2023; Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, 15 Dec. 2005, article 37 and chapter 7).

Integration characteristics vary by cantons and municipalities, and the group of foreigners in the country is highly diverse, ranging from high-skill specialists to precarious workers in the informal economy.

While immigration policy is mainly based on economic needs, integration policy is politics-driven (Lutz 2019) and is implemented by cantons with considerable intercantonal differences (Manatschal/Stadelmann-Steffen 2013). For many years, Swiss integration policy was predicated on the perception that foreigners were “guest workers,” whose limited stay meant that broad efforts to encourage integration were unnecessary. As many foreign workers gained access to unlimited-time work permits between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, the policy approach grew inappropriate over time. Accordingly, a number of efforts to improve integration policy have been made, starting as early as kindergarten. Nonetheless, integration policy cannot broadly be called a success in Switzerland. For example, the Migrant Integration Policy Index score for Switzerland (MIPEX 2022, data for 2019) is “halfway favorable” (45), while being clearly below all neighboring countries except Austria. There is substantial variation in integration success across different groups of migrants. In 2017, 39% of migrants from Northern and Western Europe were members of voluntary associations and groups compared to about 50% of Swiss citizens without a migration background. In contrast, less than 20% of those from southern and eastern European countries hold such memberships.

Yet if the lack of a coherent federal integration policy is undisputable, this does not mean that integration policy as a whole is failing. Many local and cantonal authorities are doing a good and sometimes innovative job with regard to integration services, especially for second-generation migrants. In this respect, most policy development and implementation tasks are decentralized to the local and regional levels.

According to OECD statistics, second-generation migrants in Switzerland perform better in school and are better integrated into the labor market than in other European countries. This is not to say that immigrants have equal opportunities. Individuals with an immigration background score lower on

PISA tests and are less likely to go to university than individuals with Swiss-born parents (Picot/Hou 2013). If immigrants' rates of unemployment and dependence on social aid are above the national average, this is in part because the share of low-skilled workers, with a correspondingly higher risk of unemployment, is also above average among immigrants. But the lack of a coherent integration policy may add to the problems, and social discrimination is not limited to the labor market. Within the housing market, for instance, some groups of immigrants find it comparatively difficult to rent apartments, and rental agents openly discriminate against applicants based on racial stereotypes (Bonnet/Pollard 2021).

Thirty-seven percent of the resident foreign population comes from countries in which one of the official languages of Switzerland is spoken (Germany, Italy, France, Austria) (FSO 2023b). Among high-skilled workers, language is also a secondary problem, since English is the lingua franca in many industries. Language problems are considerable among less-skilled workers and refugees/asylum seekers. Depending on the canton, various opportunities exist to learn the language of the region.

Social integration is difficult for expats in Switzerland. According to a large survey among expats, the country ranks 47th among 53 nations with regard to ease of settling. Expats express concerns about local friendliness and welcome. The headline of the report reads: "Expatriate life in Switzerland is safe, but lonely and expensive" (InterNations 2024).

With regard to naturalization, about 41,500 foreigners were granted Swiss citizenship in 2022, with Germans and Italians comprising the largest groups (FSO 2023c). Calculating the number of naturalizations as a share of all migrants actually living in the country, the Swiss rate of naturalization is very low in comparison with other consolidated democracies. In 2022, about 2.0% of resident foreigners acquired Swiss citizenship (FSO 2023c). Only some of the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and a few Western democracies – such as Austria and Germany – have similar or lower naturalization rates. The naturalization procedure is burdensome. As naturalization in Switzerland is a bottom-up process that starts at the level of the commune, considerable regional differences are evident, with some communes and cantons pursuing a liberal naturalization policy, and others acting more restrictively. The potentially arbitrary nature of naturalization procedures in municipalities is also regularly discussed.

These regional differences also show up with regard to the issue of political rights. A few cantons and communes – particularly in the French-speaking part of the country – grant political participation rights to foreigners, even though

the federal government does not. Thus, with regard to integration, naturalization and legislation on political rights, we find a bottom-up approach rather than federal standards, which also raises the question of equal treatment and equal opportunities for foreigners.

In Switzerland, as in all contemporary societies, some segments of the population have suffered from globalization, and in particular from the free movement of labor. These “globalization losers” are particularly likely to hold xenophobic attitudes – to insist on “my country first” positions – and, consequently, to vote for right-wing populist parties. The Swiss People’s Party is the political party with the strongest electoral support. It has been particularly successful in mobilizing these segments of society. However, this is a far-from-perfect explanation. In a 2017 survey (MOSAiCH), 59% of all respondents with below-median years of education supported a xenophobic statement, compared to 43% of those with above-median years of education.

About 70% of all prison inmates are foreigners; most of them are nonresident foreigners. For the resident population, the share of foreign prison inmates is 40%, which in part reflects the fact that some groups of foreigners are on average low-skilled, a characteristic that itself correlates with a higher incarceration rate. Human rights NGOs have documented acts of racism and violence from the police against visible minorities, sometimes even resulting in deaths (Amnesty International 2007).

Therefore, on the one hand, there is limited prospect for a more generous and liberal integration policy in the near term given the strength of integration-averse political actors and citizens. On the other hand, as a comparative analysis of European Social Survey data shows, Switzerland numbers among the least xenophobic societies in Western Europe, together with the Nordic countries; for example, the country is much less xenophobic than Austria, the United Kingdom or France (Armingeon/Engler 2015).

Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of
Development
Cooperation by
Partner Country
Score: 7

The Swiss government’s development strategy focuses on reducing poverty, mitigating global risks and promoting a stable international order. It concerns “the needs of populations in partner countries, the promotion of Swiss economic, migration and security interests, and the comparative benefits of Swiss international cooperation (added value, capabilities and innovation)” (Federal Council 2023a). Emphasis is put on “job creation, the fight against climate change, better migration management, and a commitment to the rule of law and peace” (Federal Council 2019). Every four years the government

publishes a report on international cooperation (FDFA 2020), and it shares data and information with international organizations such as the OECD. The activities of the government for global poverty reduction cover different activities ranging from support to Central and Eastern European countries within the framework of the bilateral treaties (i.e., the Swiss compensation paid to the EU for access to the common market) to drinking water supply in mountainous Central Asian regions. Therefore, it is hard to summarize standards, procedures and outcomes. Official development assistance flows for poverty eradication are predictable within the four-year strategy.

In the countries where it supports projects or aid distribution, Swiss development cooperation has a good reputation for maintaining independence from Swiss industrial interests, and for making long-term commitments. Nevertheless, the country is a small donor with limited impact. Swiss development cooperation is well embedded within international development agencies and coordinates its activities with their agendas on issues such as poverty reduction, climate change and sustainable economic development.

III. Environmental Sustainability

Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Climate
Neutrality by
2050
Score: 6

In this area, the most remarkable developments in recent years have been made through the integration of environmental protection and sustainability issues into a wide range of areas that both directly and indirectly concern environmental policy per se. Following the OECD's strategy of green growth, Switzerland has launched several studies aimed at reconciling the goals of sustainability and economic development. Furthermore, Switzerland has in recent years developed several cross-sectoral strategies focusing on issues including climate-change adaptation (Ingold/Balsiger 2015) and forest management (Wilkes-Allemann et al. 2020).

In 2011, the federal government decided to phase out the use of nuclear power over the course of the next several decades, following the Fukushima accident. In 2016, the "Energy Strategy 2050" was adopted by parliament and won a majority in a popular vote in May 2017. It aims to significantly improve national energy efficiency, and to exploit the potential of hydropower as well as other renewable energies (e.g., solar, wind, geothermal and biomass). There will be no permits granted for the construction of new nuclear power stations or for any fundamental changes to existing nuclear power stations. However,

existing nuclear power stations may stay in operation for as long as they are deemed safe. A more radical initiative was rejected in a popular vote on 27 November 2016. It would have led to the shutdown of existing nuclear power plants in the near future. Three of the five nuclear power plants would have been closed down by 2017.

In certain regards, the ecological challenges facing Swiss policymakers have been much less demanding than in other countries. Switzerland never developed significant smokestack industries, and industrialization took place as a decentralized process. Thus, Switzerland has no regions with large concentrations of industries with significant emissions. Nonetheless, the country's record is mixed in terms of environmental policy overall.

Air quality has improved over the past 25 years, but ozone and other threshold values are frequently exceeded, and legislation for more ambitious norms on CO₂ reduction has suffered setbacks. Switzerland recently updated its national climate-change mitigation policy. A broad combination of voluntary, regulatory and market-based instruments was expected to produce a reduction in emissions by 20 percentage points by 2020 – a goal which was not reached (NZZ 13 April 2021).

The country has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 (measured against 1990 levels). This would include the purchase of international credits associated with the reduction of emissions elsewhere. The targeted domestic reduction amounts to 30%. In 2019, the Federal Council also announced a goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 (including international credits) (BAFU 2022).

In the 2019 national election, the green parties recorded a major increase in votes received. The Green Party increased its share of votes by six percentage points, while the Green Liberal Party increased by three percentage points, while the two largest parties respectively suffered losses of four (Swiss People's Party) and two percentage points (Social Democrats) respectively. By Swiss standards, this was considered a tectonic change, indicating much better prospects for the enactment of environmental policies. However, this enthusiasm had receded by the time of the 2023 federal elections, when the Green Party lost five seats (out of a total of 246 seats in parliament) perhaps driven by the fact that after four years, changes were not really visible. This may in part be due to the pandemic and war in Europe having crowded out policy activity in other fields. For an analysis of the changing climate discourse and its actors, see Kammerer and Ingold (2021). A major challenge for environmental policies in Switzerland remains the adequate and bona fide implementation of federal rules by cantonal and municipal institutions.

A major setback for environmental policies occurred in 2021, when the CO2 law was rejected in a popular vote. This ambitious law combined various comprehensive measures that paired levies with subsidies. It targeted and mobilized various groups, including homeowners, airplane passengers and car drivers, who opposed the new law. In December 2021, the Federal Council opted for a new draft law, which was much less ambitious and avoided any new levies. The rejection of the CO2 law by the majority of citizens emphasizes an important aspect of direct democracy, namely that it is very hard to realize innovative and encompassing policies – even when there is a pressing need for such a policy – given the reform-averse institutional effects. These effects had already been visible in the case of the expansion of the welfare state or women’s suffrage, to name a few important examples of delayed responses to societal or external developments (Kriesi 2005; Linder 1999; Vatter 2018: Chapter 8). Further initiatives aimed at fostering Switzerland’s participation in the global effort against climate change have failed in popular votes, like the initiative on multinationals bearing responsibility for emissions that would have strengthened the ecological and social responsibility of Swiss companies abroad. It was narrowly rejected by the population in 2020. Altogether, the gap between the country’s intentions on paper and concrete actions has been considerable, and the mobilization of Switzerland to fight climate change remains limited.

Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Minimizing
Environmental
Health Risks
Score: 7

The Health2030 agenda recognizes the multifaceted and complex influence of the environment on health, highlighting the importance of reducing environmental health risks. This includes addressing harmful substances in the air, water and soil, as well as the impacts of ionizing and nonionizing radiation, biodiversity loss and climate change. The strategy acknowledges the need for concrete measures to address these risks at both national and international levels, with a focus on evidence-based policymaking (Health2030, 2017).

The strategy details specific objectives and lines of action for implementation, with Objective 7 explicitly focusing on supporting health through a healthy environment. This includes actions to reduce environmental health risks and to preserve and support nature and landscape quality. These measures are crucial for ensuring that current and future generations enjoy optimal health and benefit from biodiversity and landscape quality (Health2030, 2017).

Health2030 is comprehensive in its approach, addressing various environmental factors that impact public health. It not only focuses on reducing direct health risks but also emphasizes the importance of high-quality natural environments for promoting health and well-being (Health2030, 2017).

The strategy is built upon existing federal and cantonal responsibilities, ensuring that the implementation of the various lines of action aligns with the current legal and policy framework. This approach ensures that the strategy is supported by existing policies and structures, enhancing its effectiveness and feasibility (Health2030, 2017).

The strategy's progress is monitored using a system of indicators similar to the predecessor strategy, Health2020. This system tracks the evolving context of the health system, ensuring that the strategy's implementation is effectively monitored and evaluated (Health2030, 2017).

Implementation of Health2030 involves collaboration among federal and cantonal authorities, along with other key stakeholders in public health. The Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Public Health plays a significant role in deciding the implementation approach. This collaborative and multilevel governance approach ensures that policies are effectively implemented and monitored at both federal and subnational levels (Health2030, 2017).

In summary, the government's commitment to protecting the public from environmental health risks is evident in the Health2030 strategy, which outlines a clear, comprehensive and collaborative approach toward reducing environmental health risks and promoting public health. The strategy's implementation is supported by existing policies and legal frameworks, with a structured monitoring system to track progress and ensure effective execution.

Switzerland now has comprehensive legislation on air (LPair), water (LEaux), and soil (LPE) protection. However, this legislation was introduced and has evolved in a rather uncoordinated manner, which led to some monitoring gaps. One recent example is the discovery of serious contamination from dioxins and heavy metals in the city of Lausanne, due to a waste incineration plant placed in an unfavorable topographical site. The belated discovery of the pollution was related to a complex series of factors including the complexity of interaction between levels of governance in monitoring duties (federal-cantonal-municipal), an industrial path-dependency, the lack of independent monitoring agencies at the regional level, the cumulation of planning and controlling activities by the canton, and the institutional uncoupling of health

and environmental issues (Moll-François et al. forthcoming 2024). These factors can be extrapolated to other cases.

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Preserving
Ecosystems and
Protecting
Biodiversity
Score: 7

The Swiss government has established a strategy to safeguard ecosystem vitality and prevent biodiversity loss. This strategy includes goals and a framework to achieve these objectives. The strategy is binding to some extent, as it is based on existing legal frameworks and mandates from federal and cantonal authorities (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The strategy has been operationalized through individual action plans targeting specific ecosystems in the air, water and on land. These include pilot projects that ensure the implementation of complex and demanding measures. Examples include initiatives to support sustainable use of moors to mitigate climate change and to enhance biodiversity and landscape qualities in urban areas (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017).

The strategy and policies are comprehensive, addressing various facets of biodiversity and ecosystem protection. They include the creation of ecological infrastructure, prevention of genetic impoverishment, and building ex situ collections for endangered species and genetic resources (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017). Additionally, there is a focus on sector-specific strengthening of biodiversity in education and against illegal wildlife trade (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017).

Existing policies support the strategic efforts focusing on the protection of ecosystem vitality. The strategy is integrated into all environmentally relevant activities pursued by the federal, cantonal and municipal governments, as well as by private entities. The legal foundations on which these policies are based have proven effective, although they may require periodic adjustments to align with the strategy's evolving needs (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The Swiss government monitors biodiversity changes through a coherent system involving various existing programs. Important data sources include Biodiversity and Landscape Monitoring Switzerland, the National Forest Inventory, and others. New selected key metrics are defined as indicators, and the system ensures international comparability of data (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012). Regular reports are prepared to assess progress, and a midterm report was planned for 2017 to adjust implementation strategies as needed (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The Federal Office for the Environment (BAFU) oversees the implementation of the biodiversity strategy. Implementation is carried out by responsible federal departments, with the involvement of cantonal agencies and, where applicable, the private sector. These bodies are required to report periodically on the state of implementation, ensuring effective execution of government policies. The strategy emphasizes a shared responsibility for biodiversity conservation among federal, cantonal and municipal governments, as well as civil society (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

However, beyond programmatic strategies, concrete measures are difficult to adopt in a country in which both conventional agriculture and the chemical industry are strong. In 2021, for instance, the Swiss population rejected two initiatives related to pesticides and biodiversity: the Pesticide Initiative and the Drinking Water Initiative. Arguments against the initiatives included the prospects of weakening domestic food production, increasing dependency on food imports and reducing farmers’ incomes (Finger 2021).

Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Global
Environmental
Policy
Score: 6

The Swiss Federal Council has embedded sustainable development as a state objective in the federal constitution, illustrating a deep-rooted commitment to balancing economic, social and environmental responsibilities. The 2030 SDS, a guiding strategy for federal policy, demonstrates Switzerland’s approach to sustainable development, emphasizing the need for policy coherence and the importance of considering the spillover effects of its national policies on the global environment. This approach ensures that the environmental impacts of Swiss policies – particularly those affecting developing countries – are taken into account and addressed in an integrated manner.

At the heart of Switzerland’s strategy is the focus on three priority areas: sustainable consumption and production, climate energy and biodiversity, and equal opportunities and social cohesion. These areas are interlinked and underscore the necessity of a balanced consideration of sustainability dimensions. The Swiss government recognizes that its actions in these areas have both domestic and international implications. For instance, the commitment to sustainable consumption and production involves not only domestic measures, but also the promotion of sustainable and transparent supply chains globally.

Furthermore, Switzerland’s strategy includes goals and strategic directions for both national and international implementation. These goals, derived from the SDGs and adapted to Switzerland’s national context, are monitored and

evaluated regularly. The country engages in international programs to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns and is active in initiatives such as the UN Ten-Year Framework of Programs on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. This international engagement reflects Switzerland's commitment to collaborative efforts in achieving global environmental sustainability.

On paper, the Swiss approach to environmental protection also involves the corporate sector, particularly multinational corporations headquartered in the country. Switzerland advocates for responsible corporate governance along the value chain, emphasizing the importance of due diligence processes and the sustainability of products and production processes. This approach aims to minimize the negative social, economic and environmental impacts of business activities, both nationally and internationally. However, the rejection of the initiative that would have imposed stronger rules on multinational companies to follow environmental standards, and the strong involvement of economic groups to fight it, shows the gap between the intentions claimed and the concrete contribution of Switzerland to global efforts on protection regimes (see P17).

Global environmental policy is given moderate weight among Switzerland's foreign policy priorities, and the country has played a role in designing and advancing global environmental-protection regimes. However, as a small country, Switzerland has limited independent influence. The European Union has taken a leading role in this area. Thus, Switzerland's impact depends in large part upon efficient collaboration with the European Union.

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