



Business as usual at the expense of our planet?

Half-time remarks on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland



Platform
Agenda
2030

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Foreword

A concerted effort for progress

Switzerland is lagging behind. It is already half time, but we have not achieved anything close to half the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set in 2015.

In this report, experts from civil society pinpoint the shortfalls and show what our country must do to satisfy the SDGs. The report published by the Federal Council itself clearly shows how haltingly the 17 SDGs and their targets are being implemented. Switzerland's official Voluntary National Review, which is presented to the United Nations, shares our analysis in many respects, but without proposing any measures or specific strategies to remedy the deficits.

The scientific community, senior figures in business and politics, and civil society must join together in focusing our action on the 2030 Agenda. We must leave no one behind. By ensuring that everyone is involved and heard, we will find ways to resolve conflicting objectives. By making a concerted effort we will achieve the coherence and solidarity to progress with the necessary transformation.

The Swiss government has recognised civil society as the primary driver of sustainable development. Our platform sees this both as an acknowledgement of the pioneering work that has been done, and a responsibility for the eight years that remain. Alongside our member organisations we will continue to seek solutions. We want to join actors together, bringing them onside and motivating them so that we can successfully execute the 'joint plan to improve the world', in the words of former foreign minister and president of the Swiss Confederation Didier Burkhalter.

The spillover effects impacts on the rest of the world. We must reduce Switzerland's ecological footprint. One of the world's leading financial centres, the Swiss financial sector must immediately restructure its investments, away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energies, away from practices that violate human rights and harm the environment and towards companies that protect them.

Our efforts are being held back by current events, wars and pandemics, but we have no choice but to carry on. Reducing poverty and inequality, decelerating climate change and preserving the diversity of plants and animals are the needs that drive us, so that the generations to come can enjoy the best possible life.

Introduction

Create the frameworks needed to make sustainable development a reality

Four years ago, in 2018, we presented the first report from civil society on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in and by Switzerland. Now, in 2022, we present a new report. It adds a civil society perspective to Switzerland's official Voluntary National Review, which will be presented to the UN High Level Political Forum in July.

Our focus is implementation in Switzerland and by Switzerland abroad. Many of our activities and political decisions impact on those living beyond our borders. Switzerland has a responsibility to support sustainable development and the achievement of the 17 SDGs worldwide, be that by our consumption patterns, in our trade policy, or by the fair structure of our tax system. For an overview of the status of implementation at the global level and in other countries, please refer to the various reports published by the UN and its specialised agencies.

This report is the product of a thorough process. Experts from our member organisations and beyond were identified for each of the SDGs. In group interviews we established where we actually stand with implementation, prioritised the areas in which action is needed, and developed approaches which we present in the report as recommendations. Our aim is to give a succinct overview for each SDG to aid understanding of the goal itself and the responsibility that Switzerland holds. We make no claim as to completeness. For those who are interested, our recommendations for further reading point out the more extensive reports, studies and websites that are available.

We believe that politicians have a duty to create the frameworks needed to make sustainable development a reality. Our recommendations are therefore aimed primarily at political decision-makers at all levels, in local authorities, cantonal administrations, and the federal government. Naturally, businesses and every individual must also play their part.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals cannot be seen in isolation. They are interwoven with each other, and each SDG has an effect on other SDGs. For example, a sustainable food system protects biodiversity, ensures good working conditions and living wages, and adapts to climate change. The connections that we have identified in each chapter are indicated by the tabs on the side of the page. The graphic provides an illustration of some of these relationships.

To keep the report easily to read, we have not included footnotes or detailed sources. The 'Further reading' section provides additional underlying data, but we will also be pleased to help you personally if you need information on a particular topic. We look forward to your feedback and to hearing from you directly.

Here's to an informative read!



The 17 SDGs are interwoven with each other. Advances or setbacks with one goal affect the achievement of other goals. The graphic shows the relationships that we address in the chapters on the individual SDGs. These can also be tracked in the coloured tabs on the side of the page in each chapter.

There is not enough space in this report to examine all connections, but the graphic is an impressive illustration of how intertwined the Sustainable Development Goals are. Achieving these SDGs demands a joint effort.

Civil society as an agent of social transformation

Civil society is broad and diverse. It has many faces, from the ad-hoc neighbourhood association to national environmental conservation bodies, and international development organisations.

Outside of formalised processes civil society is also a fount of social innovation. It provides a small-scale test bed – a place to experiment and try out new forms of communal life or the circular economy. With its own studies and analyses it also contributes to a better understanding of the complex interrelationships in society. This knowledge is then put to the test in real-life projects, theory is melded with practical experience, and new solutions are developed. Civil society thereby becomes an agent of social transformation, as called for by the very title of the 2030 Agenda, ‘Transforming our World’.

In its diversity, civil society is also contradictory. Movements and alliances form where too little attention is given to a collective need. In this sense they are an early warning of what is fermenting in society.

Civil society is an important political actor and therefore key to a functioning democracy. Its agents employ petitions and popular initiatives to mobilise the population and place issues on the political agenda. Numerous organisations are committed to compliance with legal frameworks, human rights and international obligations. They hold political and economic decision-makers to account for the promises they make and the undertakings they enter into.

Civil society offers vessels and conduits for discussion and opinion-forming, and is thus able to make voices heard in political processes that have previously been absent from a representative democracy. Civil society also functions as a political corrective. To do this, it depends on structures that ensure access to information, participation, and freedom of expression. These consist of transparency, the rule of law, and media freedom. Many countries do not enjoy such underlying conditions.

Resistance against the political engagement of civil society actors is also growing in Switzerland. With its Responsible Business Initiative, a broad coalition of NGOs challenged centre-right political parties and large sections of the business community. Civil society actors beyond the political mainstream controlled the political discourse and showed their strength. The backlash was immediate. Doubt was cast about the political activities of NGOs advocating transformation, and there were calls to make it more difficult to access funding. In addition to these organisations’ political work, their educational and awareness-raising programmes were also caught in the political crossfire. Political muzzles for unpopular political opinions.

Sustainable development requires a lively and diverse civil society that is able to make a political difference. Inclusive societies with genuine opportunities for participation are what SDG 16 aims to achieve, thereby recognising them as an important element of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda can only be implemented successfully if transparency and the genuine participation of civil society actors are an integral part of the achievement of the SDGs.

Further reading

Una Hombrecher, Christine Meissler, Mads Loftager Mundt (eds): Development needs civil society – the implications of civic space for the sustainable development goals. Synthesis report for ACT Alliance. 2019.

More leadership for sustainable development, please!

When the 2030 Agenda was adopted seven years ago there was talk everywhere that transposing a global reference framework into national policy would be an enormous challenge. While countries in the Global South have for decades aligned their policies with agendas set by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund or the UN, most governments in the Global North have so far been able to determine their policies for themselves.

Yet a global frame of reference was urgently needed in view of the challenges facing the world, be they climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemic or war. The 2030 Agenda lays the foundation for a common, sustainability-centred policy followed by all UN member states.

Now almost half of the set timeframe has already passed. Switzerland's experience clearly illustrates the great difficulty of integrating into a global target framework. Although the Federal Council adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy (2030 SDS) in the summer of 2021, it by no means translates the global SDGs into national goals. In fact, the Federal Council has watered down many of the SDGs. Even if we were to assume, optimistically, that Switzerland is implementing the 2030 SDS properly, it is no way to implement the 2030 Agenda. The latter is considerably more ambitious.

Although Switzerland shows creative drive and commitment in certain areas, the latter is visible only where no appreciable resistance is to be found. The Federal Council otherwise limits itself to coordination mechanisms and to managing consultation processes, but our economy and society will never be transformed if the 'goal' is what is politically feasible in the first place. Instead, this transformation demands strong leadership to do what is politically necessary. Achieving greater policy coherence for sustainable development does not mean finding the lowest common denominator between the federal agencies involved, but rather persuading them to adopt sustainable solutions.

At present, coordination at the institutional level between the many different federal agencies is the task of the 2030 Agenda Steering Committee, with two delegates but no significant resources or scope of action. There is also a strategy, but it is no more than a summary of existing measures and goals. This does not constitute leadership. A further factor is that other civil society actors are not genuinely involved. The present federal government 2030 Agenda Advisory Group did not actually have any meaningful input into the draft of either the 2030 SDS or the Voluntary National Review (VNR).

The Federal Council plans to revise its Sustainable Development Strategy and the accompanying action plan by 2024, and to incorporate the gaps and challenges identified in the VNR. It is vitally important that this is a participatory process that incorporates the knowledge and experience of civil society and the scientific community. It also demands the courage to develop solutions that are truly transformational. Cosmetic amendments that merely throw an SDG-hued cloak over business as usual are not enough. What we need is a real transformation to achieve the move to a sustainable society.

The challenge of the monitoring and progress report

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With its 17 SDGs, the 2030 Agenda does more than simply set targets. It also defines how these are measured, and how progress towards the SDGs is reviewed. The review is a voluntary undertaking that will, at best, reflect critically on how the Agenda has been implemented. What we have seen, however, is that given a global stage governments are more interested in shining the spotlight on the progress they have made, and consigning the real need for action to the wings.

A small number of countries, among them Norway and Finland, include the **civil society perspective** directly in their progress reports. Others, such as Austria, include representatives of civil society in the drafting of their reports. Participation was also encouraged in Switzerland. In the summer of 2021 the Federal Council called for a wide-ranging stocktake of progress towards the goals, inviting interested actors to contribute their analysis in what was a complex process. They were not included in the downstream work to interpret this data, however, which raises a number of questions. We expect civil society actors to be actively included in the drafting of Switzerland's next voluntary national review.

Measuring progress in a standardised, internationally comparable and objective way has proven a major challenge. The wording of the SDGs and their targets varies considerably, as does the degree to which they set specific requirements. For certain goals it was therefore easy to determine indicators. What it means to eliminate poverty and hunger is clearly defined, for example. But although indicators have been established for other goals, there is no recognised methodology for how they should be measured. Examples here include 'reduce illicit financial flows' (SDG 16.4) and 'enhance policy coherence' (SDG 17.14).

Switzerland has its **own sustainable development monitoring system, MONET 2030**. It serves the federal administration as a basis for its voluntary national review. Although the system has mapped greater international responsibility and raw materials consumption abroad in recent years, it still displays considerable gaps.

One of the fundamental problems here is that **the SDGs and their targets have not been sufficiently translated into national policy**. The Federal Council watered down many of the SDGs in its 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy. Instead of halving poverty in Switzerland, as SDG 1.2 demands, the Federal Council aims only to reduce it. For other SDGs the chosen indicators are unsuitable for measuring the target concerned. For example, SDG 17 sets out targets for equitable trading systems, knowledge and technology-sharing, enhanced policy coherence and development assistance to support poorer countries. What is measured, however, are Switzerland's debt ratio, the level of development assistance, and direct investment from Switzerland in developing countries. These indicators fail to capture key aspects of SDG 17, such as whether or not trading systems are becoming fairer or policy coherence has improved. Others are no more than navel-gazing, not showing the extent to which private actors from Switzerland contribute to greater indebtedness in developing countries, or whether direct investment is supporting sustainable projects or further warming the climate. MONET 2030 needs to be re-

worked to provide an internationally comparable monitoring system that genuinely measures progress toward the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda promises that nobody will be excluded from sustainable development, according to the **leave no one behind** principle. Yet neither Switzerland nor the international community has had a sufficient basis of data to establish who, exactly, is being left behind. Recognising this, the 2030 Agenda calls for the **data** to be broken down according to income, gender, age, ethnicity, migration status, disability, geographical location, and other relevant characteristics where appropriate. Disaggregating the data like this makes it easier to pinpoint which people or groups of people have so far been excluded from sustainable development and access to basic rights such as education or health. Without this data and the corresponding strategies and action plans, we risk being unable to fulfil the 2030 Agenda promise. Data for Switzerland and its international cooperation work is still insufficiently granular.

Further reading

Monet 2030: The Swiss indicator system

Jeffrey Sachs, Guido Traub-Schmidt, Christian Kroll, Guillame Lafortune and Grayson Fuller: Sustainable Development Report 2021. Cambridge University Press. 2021

UN DESA: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021

Our world in Data: SDG Tracker

Social Watch: Spotlight on sustainable development Report 2021. Demanding justice beyond rhetoric. 2021



SDG 1

Living income for all

According to the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an increase of some 100 million in the number of people around the globe living on less than USD 1.90 per day. In Switzerland, poverty has been on the rise since 2014. Federal Statistical Office figures show that 722,000 people in Switzerland were affected by income poverty in 2020. Single parents, families with several children, single-person households, those with low or zero earned income, and those with few qualifications are the hardest hit. Many people work but continue to live in poverty. The reasons for this are structural. Opportunities in the education system are not equally distributed. People face discrimination on the job market. Employment conditions are precarious. Childcare is too costly. All of these factors make it more difficult to generate enough income.

The high cost of urban housing and high health insurance premiums also place a disproportionate burden on those on low incomes. Large numbers avoid necessary medical treatment because they cannot afford it. This can lead to follow-on health problems or even disability, which in turn present a poverty risk.

Switzerland has a good social security system but it does not guarantee **that everyone is able to cover their basic expenses**. Coverage is poor where care work is concerned, for example, which places women at a particular disadvantage. It is also difficult for those without a Swiss passport to access the system. Instead of closing these gaps, budget cuts to social security and the rule that non-nationals who are dependent on social security may lose their residence rights are increasing the pressure on people living in poverty.

Preventing and combating poverty in the long term demands a proper **strategy** and reliable **data**. Switzerland has neither. That said, a major step has been made at the national level with the new framework to monitor poverty. The active involvement of the cantons will now be crucial to establishing a better overall picture of poverty in Switzerland.

Additional causes of poverty at the **global level** are the climate crisis, humanitarian disasters and conflicts. People in poverty are virtually defenceless against the consequences of climate change. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is also felt most keenly by the poorest in countries with no functioning social security system. With poverty making disability more likely, and disability often leading to poverty, people with disabilities are at special risk.

Swiss development assistance remains at a low level. The **international cooperation** strategy is based on the 2030 Agenda. However, there is no multidimensional concept for tackling multiple discrimination (such as that against women with disabilities) that is based on inclusion and leaves no one behind, in the sense of the guiding principle of the 2030 Agenda.

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Recommendations

- The federal government and the cantons guarantee a minimum subsistence-level income for all, regardless of origin, gender, or disability, etc.
- The federal government draws up a national strategy on poverty. This sets the target of reducing poverty by at least 50% by 2030, formulates specific measures to tackle the root causes of poverty, and delineates the roles played by the federal government, cantons and local authorities.
- The federal government involves stakeholders in a meaningful way in work to draft strategies and measures.
- The cantons contribute to a reliable basis of data on poverty in Switzerland. They report regularly on the poverty situation, identify what needs to be done, and take action.
- Switzerland applies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the national level and in its international cooperation, and must advance the inclusion of disabled people.
- In efforts to combat poverty internationally, Switzerland must endeavour to reach the most disadvantaged people first. It must ensure that political decisions neither exacerbate existing conditions of poverty nor create new ones.
- Switzerland must increase its development assistance to at least the agreed 0.7% of gross national income.

Further reading

Caritas: Armut in der Schweiz (German and French)

Kristina Lanz: “Poverty is a political choice”. Alliance Sud. global #79 autumn 2020.

UNDP and OPHI. Global Multidimensional Poverty index 2020 – Charting Pathways out of Multidimensional Poverty: Achieving the SDGs. Report. United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. 2020.



SDG 2

Participatory sustainable food systems

Switzerland imports around half of its **food and feedstuffs from abroad**. The way we eat impacts farming and society in other countries. Switzerland is a **global trading venue for agricultural commodities and inputs**. It therefore to some degree determines the framework conditions for food systems around the world, and is a contributing factor in extensive, input-intensive and highly technologized agriculture. This further increases the risk to biodiversity and puts the environment under strain. Land grabs and inequitable market structures also ramp up the pressure on smallholders in the South, with devastating consequences for jobs and food security.

Our current food system causes **inequalities** in other countries. The world produces enough calories to sustain even a growing global population, but much of this food is denied to starving peoples and exported instead in the form of animal feed, bioenergy or industrial raw material.

The way to eliminate these inequalities is to improve smallholder incomes. Many farms are also fighting for survival in Switzerland. **Agroecology** offers a tried-and-tested solution here. It protects both biodiversity and ecosystem health, while improving farmers' everyday lives and strengthening not just their legal position but their say in how land is managed. The Federal Council now supports agroecology as an effective approach.

Swiss **trade policy** makes it more difficult for partner countries to establish sustainable food systems. Although the free trade agreement with Indonesia included binding sustainability criteria for the first time in response to enormous pressure from civil society, the agreement with the Mercosur bloc – currently in the final stage of negotiations – provides only for informal dialogue on sustainability. In its bilateral trade treaties Switzerland insists that seeds be subject to strict intellectual property rules. This effectively forces partner countries to violate farmers' rights to seed, even though broad agricultural seed schemes actually ensure food security and biodiversity. These must be recognised and strengthened for the future.

Parliament has suspended consultations on the Federal Council's draft new agricultural policy, known as AP22+. This setback is also an opportunity, however. Switzerland can begin again on a broader, 2030 Agenda-focused basis that includes a **comprehensive food policy**.

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Recommendations

- With the inclusion of food system stakeholders, the federal government draws up a transformative policy on food that defines interim targets, action, and resources.
- At both national and international levels Switzerland pursues an agroecological approach in accordance with the FAO definition. In doing so it prioritises the political and socioeconomic aspects of participation and farmers' rights. It rejects any 'sustainable' or 'environmental' intensification or calls to use genetically modified organisms.
- Switzerland reduces its dependence on imported inputs such as feed-stuffs and mineral fertilizers. It promotes site-adapted farming.
- The federal government and the cantons encourage sustainable eating habits, specifically a low-meat diet. Public-sector canteens lead by good example. Official support for the sale of animal products is halted.
- The federal government and the cantons fulfil their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity and abolish subsidies and incentives that harm biodiversity.
- Future bilateral trade agreements contain binding sustainability criteria. However, they deliberately do not stipulate how partner countries should govern intellectual property in relation to seed, and in particular how specific varieties are protected.

Further reading

Policy Brief: Agenda 2030 and food systems (German, French and Italian)

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. **The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021**. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all. Rome, FAO. 2021.



SDG 3

Health is more than the absence of disease

Large numbers of people in Switzerland are not assured of the right to health in the broad sense, as defined by the WHO. Those living in poverty, migrants, people in asylum centres, sans-papiers, sex workers, people with disabilities, and others, face considerable obstacles or find services almost **out of their reach**. The out-of-pocket expenses are too high for many people, or the translation services they need – into sign language, for example – are hard to come by.

Mental health and wellbeing are just as much a part of overall health at all phases of life, but our health system continues to neglect them. Switzerland does not have enough psychiatrists or psychiatric nurses, or local or outpatient treatment facilities. Many displaced persons and victims of torture have no way to access treatment and therapies, or specialist interpreters. Far too little attention is paid to mental health in old age, and care homes do not offer the services that are needed.

Switzerland does not have any comprehensive strategy to promote **sexual health and sexual rights**. These are crucially important to self-determination. If you are not able to determine what happens to your own body, you are not able to participate fully in social, economic and political life.

Health promotion cannot be delegated entirely to the individual, or rely on personal responsibility alone. Conditions which make people ill, such as environmental and noise pollution, and discrimination, must be eliminated. The government must create frameworks that support a healthy life, whether in food, housing or asylum policies.

In its **international responsibilities**, Switzerland is answerable in three respects:

- The strict **patent protections** defended by Switzerland prevent billions of people accessing medications and vaccines.
- Recruiting **healthcare personnel** from abroad results in brain drain and shortages in other countries.
- Through the export of tobacco products banned in Switzerland, Swiss **trade policy** endangers health abroad. While the EU forbids exports of tobacco goods that are banned in the EU, Switzerland continues to support these companies.

This undermines development cooperation efforts to strengthen healthcare systems in the Global South.

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Recommendations

- Switzerland guarantees non-discriminatory access for all to a high quality of affordable, barrier-free, accepted healthcare that also includes mental and sexual health. It promotes the same in partner countries as part of its development cooperation work.
- Switzerland runs campaigns to promote good mental health, raising awareness of mental illness and helping to de-stigmatise it.
- Switzerland improves its health-care system. It ensures that it is sufficiently funded and staffed, and invests in rights-based digitalisation.
- The Federal Office of Public Health improves the basis of available data on harmful life situations. From this, it determines what needs to be done and takes the necessary action.
- Switzerland advocates within the WHO and WTO for equal access to medications for all. It relaxes its patent protections to allow people in other countries to enjoy the right to health.
- Switzerland properly implements the WHO Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel and actively supports its more binding application.
- Switzerland bans the export of harmful products that cannot be sold within Switzerland.

Further reading

D. Schuler, A. Tuch, I. Sturny & C. Peter: Mental health. Key figures with focus on Covid-19 (Obsan Bulletin 02/2022). Neuchâtel: Schweizerisches Gesundheitsobservatorium. 2022. (German or French)

FOEN/BAG (Eds.): Environment and Health in Switzerland. A multi-faceted relationship. Federal Office for the Environment and Federal Office of Public Health, Bern. 2019. (German or French)

CBM Switzerland: Inclusive Healthcare Systems. Factsheet. 2020.



SDG 4

Education for equity of opportunity

Education is regarded as one of the **keys to sustainable development**. Experiences gained both in and out of school shape our understanding of society and the world. Hopes and expectations are high here, in that education is believed to be a decisive factor in equality and sustainable patterns of consumption, for example.

Our present education system replicates **social inequalities** rather than reducing them. It discriminates against children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families or those that speak a foreign language at home. Children with disabilities still do not have adequate access to inclusive education in which diversity is the norm and schools adapt to the needs of individual students.

Early childhood development is crucial to genuine equity of opportunity, but many local authorities offer too little in the way of support, parents are unaware of the services that are on offer, and/or cannot afford them. As a result, low-income and disadvantaged families in particular hardly ever make use of existing facilities. Children in the asylum system feel little benefit. Early childhood development is also when lasting prejudices and stereotypes are acquired, so equality and prevention programmes must specifically address this level.

The Climate Strike movement pointedly illustrates the lack of institutionalised means of participation. The **right of children and young people to participate** in society is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Switzerland's children's councils and youth parliaments do not have a big enough say, and their resolutions are generally non-binding.

Teachers are key figures in good **education for sustainable development**. However, at the primary level in particular pay and working conditions do not reflect the social relevance of the profession. Schools at all levels frequently do not have the resources or materials to teach subjects such as children's rights and human rights, civics or sustainable development in an age-appropriate way.

Digital teaching methods were hastily expanded in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but they hold risks. A lack of **digital infrastructure and knowledge** exacerbates existing barriers to educational access. In this respect the opportunities and risks associated with digitalisation must be examined in greater detail to ensure that children are protected and shared minimum standards adhered to in all cantons.

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Recommendations

- The federal government, cantons and local authorities take effective, targeted action to reduce the discrimination that exists in the education system. More early years education programmes ensure inclusive, high-quality and affordable services for all.
- The federal government and the cantons systematically review teaching materials and curricula to identify the prejudices and discriminatory attitudes they convey.
- Education for sustainable development is an integral part of education at all levels and must also be included in extracurricular and informal education. The federal government works with the cantons to define measurable targets and specific implementation plans. It provides the necessary financial and staff resources.
- Teachers receive the specific support and resources they need to deliver education for sustainable development. The corresponding skills are included in the curricula of Switzerland's universities of teacher education, and teaching materials are revised accordingly.
- Children and young people are able to participate more fully in the areas that concern them. Civics programmes encourage them to exercise their right to participate.
- The federal government establishes a legal foundation for digital security. Where education is concerned, this safeguards the individual's right to privacy and safety from (virtual) violence.

Further reading

Child Rights Network Switzerland: [Fourth NGO report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021](#). (German or French)

UNESCO: [Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/22. Non-state actors in education: Who chooses? Who loses?](#) Paris. 2022.



SDG 5

Gender equality for just societies

Gender is a social construct. Individuals occupy different social positions according to their gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, educational opportunities, class, disability, racialisation, age and origin.

Despite slow progress, women in Switzerland still face discrimination on a variety of fronts. There are structural reasons for this, one being the lack of recognition for and unequal distribution of care work. Women shoulder 60% of unpaid domestic and family-related tasks, but account for only 40% of paid employment. This means that they have **lower incomes** and are **more poorly provided for in old age**. Financed by all for all, the AHV state pension in Switzerland is not enough to cover basic expenses. Working only a few hours per week and earning little, many women are insufficiently insured, if at all, by occupational pension schemes.

Women are over-represented as nurses and carers, which are precisely the professions in which pay and working conditions are frequently poor. The employment terms of **migrant care workers in private households** remain especially precarious, as they are often expected to be on call around the clock. In the interests of equality there is an urgent need for sufficient staff to be trained in all roles in the care sector and for better working conditions for nursing and care staff. Having been passed by the Swiss electorate in 2021, the Nursing Care Initiative obliges the federal government and the cantons to improve terms of employment for care roles and to invest more robustly in training.

Compared with neighbouring countries, Switzerland grants a very short period of **maternal and parental leave**, neither have pregnant women in Switzerland enjoyed specific workplace protections to date.

Women are heavily under-represented in senior management, but very much over-represented in low-paid jobs. This naturally also affects what they earn. Yet there is still a pay gap even for work of equal value. This **wage discrimination** cannot be eliminated by voluntary measures alone.

According to a report published in German by Amnesty International, 22% of women in Switzerland have experienced unwanted sexual contact. In 2004 the law was changed so that domestic violence is no longer regarded as a 'purely private matter'. Every second week a woman in Switzerland is killed by her (ex) partner, but the media continues to treat such murders as isolated cases and crimes of passion, rather than a structural problem.

Women of irregular residence status (sans-papiers) and women whose residence status is dependent on their husband are at a particularly high risk of exploitation and violence.

Sex education is an important means of preventing sexism and sexualised violence because it questions stereotypical gender roles and encourages self-determination and diversity. It also teaches students about their sexual

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Recommendations

- Switzerland pays living retirement pensions that cover basic costs. These factor in the care obligations fulfilled during a person's working life. The solidarity-based approach to financing social security is expanded.
- The federal government, cantons and local authorities extend care services of a high standard and ensure that the necessary funding is in place. Pay and working conditions in the care sector are improved.
- Work in private households (migrant carers) is subject without exception to the Employment Act.
- Switzerland introduces antenatal maternity leave. It extends maternal and paternal leave after the baby is born and introduces a new system of parental leave that is shared equally between the mother and father.
- The federal government defines effective action to eliminate wage discrimination by 2030, and also introduces checks and sanctions.
- To identify the exact scale and trend in femicides, crime statistics report attempted and actual gender-related murders separately.
- Switzerland implements the Istanbul Convention and draws up an action plan to eliminate gender-based and domestic violence.
- The federal government and the cantons take action to protect female sans-papiers and women whose residential status is dependent on their husband. Switzerland extends accessible, low-threshold health services to ensure sexual health for all. It works towards such access in partner countries as part of its humanitarian aid and development cooperation work.
- The status of equal opportunities offices is raised and they are given greater powers of influence as well as adequate long-term funding.
- The federal government conducts an analysis of the impacts of its fiscal policy on women's rights.
- The federal government undertakes to meet in full its international obligations to protect women against discrimination and violence. Working from an intersectional perspective, it takes targeted action to protect women who are displaced or who do not have regular residence status, as well as women with disabilities.

health and rights. The curricula taught in Swiss schools do not always meet recognised professional quality criteria, however.

Sexual health is not guaranteed for everyone. Displaced women and sex workers, as well as members of the LGBTIQ+ community, for example, can find services difficult to access.

Women also face structural discrimination where **spending policy** is concerned. So far, the Federal Council has not conducted any analysis of the impact of our tax system on women's rights, as required by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Further reading

Swiss CSO Platform Agenda 2030. Policy Brief: [Agenda 2030 & Gender](#). Juni 2020. (German, French or Italian)

NGO-Koordination post Beijing Schweiz: [The Implementation of the Women's Rights Convention in Switzerland. CEDAW Shadow Report](#). May 2021.



SDG 6

Right to drinking water and intact aquatic ecosystems

Some 2 billion people do not have regular access to clean drinking water. While access to drinking water remains an urgent problem around the world, in Switzerland the major challenge is **protecting aquatic ecosystems**. Switzerland has enshrined protections for its waters and riverine environments in law. These apply to lakes, rivers and streams, as well as their banks and shores, which are needed to allow these waters to perform their natural functions as habitats and recreation areas, as well as flood defences. Under the law, these spaces may be used only for extensive farming, the use of pesticides is banned, and no new buildings may be given planning permission.

Water protections in Switzerland have come under **considerable pressure** in recent years. Exemptions have been defined for the sake of agriculture, and the implementation of the Waters Protection Act of 2011 has been delayed. A German-language study conducted by the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (EAWAG), part of the ETH Domain, found high levels of pesticides in Switzerland's lakes and rivers. Fertilizers and a high animal population result in extensive pollution with nitrogen and phosphorus, and the push to expand hydropower is an additional stress factor. Even today there is scarcely a water system left in Switzerland that is not impaired in some way by hydroelectric power generation. There are also signs that protections for biodiversity are being pushed back because operators have not met their legal obligation to upgrade existing facilities, for example by making them passable for fish.

Through its imports of food and feedstuffs, consumer goods and power, Switzerland infringes the right to water of people living in countries affected by permanent water stress or even water shortages. While water consumption per person, per day in Switzerland has fallen to just under 300 litres, our imports of consumer goods take that figure to 4,400 litres daily, and if electricity imports are included to as much as 14,000 litres of virtual water. In many cases, populations that are the victims of water theft are not aware of the condition of their groundwater, neither do the companies that use that water – drinks manufacturers, plantation owners and mine operators – disclose their consumption figures. This further weakens these people's already poor negotiating position.

Switzerland has enormous expertise in **water governance** at cantonal and local authority level. It could make better use of this knowledge and experience in public-public partnerships internationally.

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Recommendations

- The cantons define the riverine environment for all of their lakes, rivers and streams and implement the Waters Protection Act with immediate effect.
- As part of the follow-up project to its agricultural policy from 2022 onwards (AP22+), the federal government defines benchmarks for the greening of agriculture. It reduces the animal population and determines milestones for the reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus. It promotes site-adapted, organic farming.
- Work continues to upgrade hydropower plants to environmental standards. As required by law it is completed by 2030.
- The federal government and the cantons abolish subsidies that harm biodiversity.
- Before free trade agreements are signed, a review is conducted of their impact on rights to water. If these impacts are negative, the agreements are amended accordingly.
- Switzerland works with scientists and local civil society actors to improve data-gathering in the Global South and to establish systems to monitor water availability.
- Cities and local authorities enter into public-public partnerships to defend rights to water. The federal government encourages these partnerships as part of its international cooperation work, to establish local public water management systems and to ensure water access for all.

Further reading

The Council of Canadians:
Blue Communities

UN Water: SDG 6 Progress
Report: www.sdg6data.org



SDG 7

How much energy is sustainable?

Around the world more than 750 million people have no access to electricity. This compromises their education, health and economic development. How we close this gap – using fossil fuels or renewables – has an enormous impact on the climate and on health. The great challenge is to support the mainstreaming of renewable energies while combating energy poverty in the Global South.

The effects of the war in Ukraine have also increased heating and ancillary costs in Switzerland, which hits those on low and very low incomes disproportionately hard. Alleviating their situation is a task for social rather than energy policy, however. Blanket state subsidies for fossil fuels miss the opportunity to accelerate the transformation to sustainable energy supplies.

Switzerland is making progress with **expanding renewables**, and has met its energy policy targets to date. That said, these targets are not sufficiently ambitious, and the take-up rate for renewable energies is nowhere near fast enough to achieve the 1.5°C goal. To meet the additional demand for power as a result of electrification, and to offset the shutdown of nuclear power plants, solar power in particular must be expanded four times as fast as is currently the case. Since solar panels can be fitted to buildings and other structures, this can often be done without interfering additionally with the natural environment. It therefore sits better than hydropower with the conservation ethos. In any case, Switzerland has virtually exhausted its potential for hydroelectric power generation.

Solar energy also has its advantages in the Global South. Facilities can be set up locally and do not require any existing grid infrastructure. They can be scaled as required, generating energy for a single household or an entire business location, and providing local value creation and jobs.

By agreeing targets with industry and business, Switzerland has succeeded in improving its **energy efficiency**. However, it is not clear what additional action should be taken to achieve the ambitious efficiency gains targets that are set out in the Energy Perspectives 2050+ report.

More and more people are adopting the philosophy of **energy sufficiency** as an important part of their outlook on life. Both locally and at city level, 2,000-watt societies have been experimenting with low-energy forms of housing and living. They demonstrate that home comforts do not mean consuming power.

The war in Ukraine is an uncomfortable reminder of just how much we depend on other countries for our energy supplies. Three quarters of our energy is imported over long distances. This includes all oil-based products, gas and nuclear fuels.

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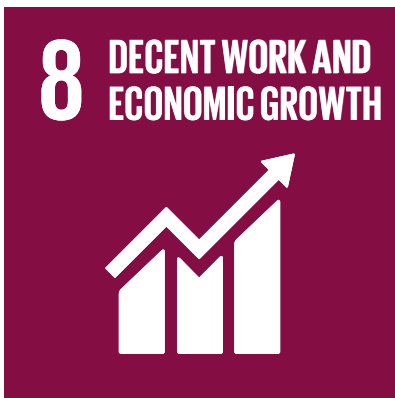
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Recommendations

- Switzerland accelerates the expansion of renewable energies. Energy supplies must be decarbonised before 2040 to achieve the Paris climate targets.
- Switzerland invests primarily in solar power, fitting panels to existing buildings and other structures. It creates a framework that supports local energy communities.
- To achieve its efficiency targets, the federal government applies regulations and bans in addition to voluntary measures. It ensures that targets are implemented in a socially acceptable way, and takes action on the social policy front to alleviate energy poverty.
- The Federal Council actively incorporates and addresses the issue of energy sufficiency in its strategies and action plans.
- Internationally, Switzerland steps up its advocacy of renewable energies around the world. It consistently taps into the potential of solar energy in its development cooperation work.
- In its multilateral development cooperation efforts, Switzerland insists that the environmental and social dimensions of major infrastructure projects such as dams and hydroelectric power plants are also considered, and that human rights and the rights of indigenous communities are safeguarded.

Further reading

IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO: [Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report](#). World Bank, Washington DC. 2021.



SDG 8

What economy do we want?

A sustainable economic system offers good work and living wages, and allows time for unpaid commitments, specifically care work. It is based on equity in the distribution of resources, incomes and wealth. It discriminates against nobody and does not destroy the basis of our life on earth. It thinks in cycles and gives employees a say. Costs such as damage to the environment and to health, and climate and noise emissions are not externalised.

Switzerland has work to do on all of these points. The usual metric, gross domestic product (GDP), does not adequately capture the dimensions of sustainable economic activity.

Structural injustices persist in the **labour market**. While top CEOs in some sectors are paid millions, people live in poverty despite having full-time jobs, their circumstances vulnerable as members of the working poor. Wages in the nursing, care and early years sectors are low and do not reflect the importance of those roles to society. Women are paid less for work of equal value. Employment is particularly precarious for care workers in private households, for those providing courier services, and in social entrepreneurship.

Access to the labour market is not set up to be non-discriminatory. People with disabilities are at a disadvantage when looking for work, face violence and discrimination in the workplace, and are too often forced to work in sheltered employment. Depending on their residence status, migrants are forbidden to work or have difficulty finding a job. Foreign qualifications are not sufficiently recognised, and migrants are not given enough support to earn new qualifications by learning a new language, for example. Childcare places are in scarce and expensive, which keeps too many women out of the workforce. In view of their irregular status, *sans-papiers* are at particular risk of exploitation.

Active trades union members risk repression, and not just in far-distant parts of the world. Switzerland also fails to protect active union members adequately against losing their jobs.

Switzerland is also highly globalised, importing the lion's share of its consumer goods. In **global supply chains** too many people suffer under exploitative working conditions, as well as child and forced labour and modern slavery. Swiss trade policy misses an opportunity to demand fair working conditions and compliance with the ILO's core labour standards as a strict criterion in free trade agreements, for example.

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Recommendations

- The federal government and the cantons draw up a long-term strategy to make the sustainable business revolution fair and socially acceptable. They invest in continuing education and retraining, and look into reducing working hours in a way that does not result in a loss of income for low wage earners.
 - Switzerland invests more in the care sector and creates good jobs in healthcare, nursing and childcare.
 - Regulations prohibiting discrimination by private-sector employers
- against people with disabilities are enshrined in law, and binding targets are set for the employment of people with disabilities in the primary labour market.
- Switzerland dismantles structural barriers to labour market access. It introduces living minimum wages, counters gender-specific pay differences and discrimination with audits and sanctions, and protects active trade union members against dismissal.
 - The Federal Council directs grant and research funding towards sustainable business. This raises
- the visibility of alternatives to conventional business models.
- Switzerland is an advocate for decent work along the entire value chain. It holds Swiss-based corporate groups to their word, introduces a specific duty of care to ensure that human rights and the environment are respected, and makes the eight fundamental conventions of the ILO an integral part of its free trade agreements.
 - Switzerland works alongside civil society stakeholders to develop an alternative metric to GDP.

Further reading

C. Bader, S. Moser, S. Neubert, H. Hanbury, A. Lannen: [Free Days for Future? CDE Policy Brief, No. 18. CDE. 2021](#)

[ILO 2019 : Time to act for SDG 8. Integrating decent work, sustained growth and environmental integrity](#), International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. 2019.



SDG 9

Sustainable infrastructure is built on human rights

In addition to emissions and climate footprint, the key issues with sustainable infrastructure are accessibility and respect for human rights. Affected groups must be involved directly in the planning and design of infrastructure projects both in Switzerland and abroad.

Upon its accession to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Switzerland undertook to guarantee people with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, and to information and communications (Article 9). The federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is intended to create general conditions that make it easier for people with disabilities to participate in society and to cultivate social contacts independently. It is too narrow in scope, however. The provisions on barrier-free and **accessible buildings and structures** for all apply only to newbuilds and renovations, and in the case of residential buildings only to those of a certain size or larger. Access to existing buildings is not covered by the law.

Access to public transport, and thus to **self-determined mobility** is the only area in which the DDA sets a clear deadline. Accessibility must be assured by the end of 2023. There are already signs that this target will be missed by some margin.

Greater collaboration at the European level will further exacerbate the situation where train travel is concerned. The Federal Council is adopting EU directives that do not guarantee the independence of people with disabilities. There are also plans for EU authorities increasingly to authorise Swiss rolling stock. This will make it impossible for organisations for the disabled to exercise their right to lodge a complaint. The importance of this right as part of the system of checks and balances was most recently demonstrated in proceedings concerning the SBB's double-deck trains.

Internationally, many countries need to expand their infrastructures in terms of energy, adaptation to climate change, and for transport. This has repeatedly resulted in violations of human rights in both the past and the present, however. The Amazon is one example. The Brazilian government is planning to build huge dams and dozens of small hydroelectric power plants. In doing so it will flood more than 78,000 hectares of land, some of which is currently protected for the country's Indigenous communities. Railways and waterways are also being extended right across the Amazon region to get soya and other commodities to market fast. While such schemes will slash transport costs, they will dramatically accelerate the exploitation of the Amazon and its people. Indigenous communities' right to a say in such megaprojects has been ignored, but if they go to court, they risk violent retribution. Brazilian courts regularly place the interests of the government and corporate sector above the rights of those who are affected. Meanwhile, banks and

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Recommendations

- The federal government, cantons and local authorities apply the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in full.
- The federal government extends the scope of the federal Disability Discrimination Act. Where it can reasonably be achieved, all buildings and structures – not just newbuilds and renovations – must offer barrier-free access
- Switzerland promotes *inclusive design for all*. In its projects, it considers the needs of people with disabilities right from the start.
- The Federal Council ensures that the adoption of EU directives does not leverage out national standards for people with disabilities, or the right of their organisations to take legal action on their behalf.
- Switzerland draws up statutory minimum standards for investment in Switzerland and abroad relating to duties of care for people and the planet. This includes upholding the right of Indigenous peoples to be heard.
- Switzerland ratifies ILO Convention 169 and enacts the right of Indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. It ensures that Swiss companies and investors respect this right.

investors from Switzerland are investing billions in companies that have expressed an interest in realising these very projects. These investors include UBS, Credit Suisse and Zürcher Kantonalbank.

Further reading

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: [Concluding observations on the initial report of Switzerland.](#) 13 April 2022. CRPD/C/CHE/CO/1.

Society for Threatened Peoples: [Voices from Tapajós: Indigenous views on planned infrastructure projects.](#) September 2021.



SDG 10

Leave no one behind

While inequalities between countries are tending to narrow, they are expanding domestically. Income and wealth inequality in Switzerland has increased over the past 20 years.

At the same time, **tax reforms** have made the system less progressive in nature. While high incomes rose faster than the average, high earners now contribute much less to public finances than they did in the mid-1980s. Swiss fiscal policy is also exacerbating inequality around the world. *Economists Without Borders* estimates that conglomerates move more than 100 billion dollars in profits to Switzerland each year, meaning that it is not taxed in the countries where those groups actually produce.

A lack of revenues and the resulting austerity policies mean that basic services are not guaranteed for all, whether in Switzerland or in the Global South. Contrary to the promise that it would **leave no one behind**, our current political system accepts that certain sections of the population will simply be refused basic human rights such as access to education or healthcare. For example, deaf people in Switzerland rely on the support of sign language interpreters to live a self-determined life or to access the labour market, education or politics. However, a lack of funding limits the use of these interpreters in a professional context, and requests are decided on a case-by-case basis. This is no way to ensure effective inclusion.

A distinction is also made according to potential where the **integration of temporarily admitted foreign nationals and recognised refugees** is concerned. By contrast, the ‘leave no one behind’ principle would allow everyone the freedom to determine their lives for themselves. Too little is done to understand and provide for the needs of those facing multiple discrimination, including women caring for families, or people with disabilities. Not enough effort is being made to promote social integration or provide the necessary financial support.

The **COVID-19 crisis** accentuated inequalities in Switzerland. Sans-papiers in particular found themselves in a precarious situation, without assured access to government assistance. The same was true of migrants, especially those in temporary employment or paid by the hour. In many cases, they did not claim the social security benefits due to them for fear of losing their residence status. The pandemic threw inequality into sharp relief around the world. In states without functioning social security systems there is no safety net to cushion loss of income, and individuals and groups that already face discrimination were – and still are – hit especially hard by the crisis.

During the crisis insufficient attention was paid to the needs of people with disabilities. Federal Council press conferences were not translated into sign language until disability organisations intervened. Initial triage guidelines discriminated against people with disabilities. And there is still

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Recommendations

- Swiss tax and financial policies reduce inequalities in Switzerland. Internationally Switzerland helps to establish a progressive approach that redistributes wealth within countries and between regions.
- Switzerland draws up a strategy and action plan to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities comprehensively in Switzerland and in its international cooperation work, and provides sufficient resources to achieve this. People with disabilities play an active part in drafting and implementation.
- Switzerland recognises and promotes the three Swiss sign languages.
- Switzerland aligns its integration policy with the needs of the individual. It specifically considers the needs of those affected by multiple discrimination.
- Barriers along the path to naturalisation are lowered. People who do not have Swiss citizenship and those under a general deputyship are given more opportunities at all levels to help shape and determine political action.
- Switzerland supports the UN Global Compact for Migration. It creates more safe and legal emergency routes into Switzerland.
- The federal government and the cantons analyse the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on inequality. They identify those population groups who were most affected and focus in particular on multiple discrimination. An inclusive process draws lessons for the future.

no data available on the situation of people with disabilities during the pandemic.

The underprivileged are often excluded from decision-making processes. Compared with other countries, it is very difficult to gain Swiss citizenship, so one quarter of the population is effectively **disenfranchised**. Individuals who are under a general deputyship are currently denied all political rights at federal level and in the majority of cantons. Only a few cantons and local authorities offer those who do not have a Swiss passport or who are under wardship the right to vote and be elected.

The UN **Global Compact for Migration** is an effort by the international community to create safe and legal migration paths. Switzerland has so far stood on the side lines, instead making its asylum and migration policy ever more restrictive. Swiss embassies stopped accepting asylum applications in 2012, and humanitarian visas are issued only in isolated cases. Too little use is made of opportunities to participate in resettlement programmes. Although persons displaced from Ukraine were quickly offered ways of coming to Switzerland and working here under a special protected status, the Swiss authorities continue to take a hard line against those fleeing other countries.

Further reading

World Inequality Lab: [World Inequality Report 2022](#).
Coordination: Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman. 2021. wir2022.wid.world

Anu Lannen, Sabin Bieri, Christoph Bader: [Inequality: What's in a Word? CDE Policy Brief, No. 14. 2019.](#)



SDG 11

Who does the city belong to?

A sustainable city is adapted to climate change. Green spaces and facades are cooling on hot days. They act as sponges, the soil absorbing enormous volumes of water during heavy rain and storing it for dry days ahead. They do not fuel climate change and do not emit more greenhouse gases than they themselves are able to remove from the atmosphere. Existing building elements are re-used and raw materials kept within the cycle. A sustainable city reconciles its roles as a place to live, work, enjoy leisure time and get around, puts everyone within easy reach of where they want and need to be, and is accessible to all. Its urban development plans and new projects involve residents and take their needs seriously. Its population reflects the diversity of society as a whole, and is able to find affordable housing that suits its requirements. The sustainable city does not depend on a small number of large companies as taxpayers or employers.

In 2015 more than 80% of the Swiss population lived in urban areas, but the reality of their lives is far removed from the vision described here. Sealed soils, tarmacked roads and too little green space become real heat islands on hot days. Some 60% of traffic areas are reserved for private motorised transport, thereby favouring people who can afford a car. Yet in many cities, the majority of people are not car-owners. In an urban setting, distances can be covered by low-emission alternatives such as public transport, cycling and walking, which must be promoted more heavily and designed to be accessible to all.

Many **low-income households** can no longer afford city life. Their rents exceed 30% of household income and they are being crowded out. They are not alone. The middle classes are also increasingly being forced to move. Without effective protections for tenants, there is the risk that landlords will abuse the justified climate action argument and need to renovate to lower-energy standards to raise their revenues, terminating the leases of everyone in the building and then re-letting at an unsubstantiated higher rent.

Today **competition between cities** as places to live and work creates false incentives. Cities are specialising, and trying to attract new companies in their target sectors. However, concentrating jobs to such an extent on just a few locations actually increases the number of work-related journeys. A better distribution of companies and jobs across a number of (smaller) towns and cities would help to keep these journeys short.

Urban development must tackle the **imbalance of power**. Although the public does have a say in participatory processes, these work best for smaller neighbourhood projects. As soon as major investments – and major profits – are on the line, residents and those affected by construction projects find themselves holding the short straw in the political process.

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Recommendations

- Cities develop their own climate strategies. They set themselves the target of becoming climate-neutral by 2040, and take the necessary action.
- The federal government, cantons and cities create frameworks that increase the number of buildings being refurbished to energy-saving standards. They use effective measures such as tenant protections and rent controls to ensure that affordable housing is protected, and that this does not result in mass evictions and excessive rent hikes. They preserve the identifying character of individual neighbourhoods.
- The cantons and cities promote a circular economy in the construction sector. They define targets to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions throughout a building's life cycle, and take grey energy into account.
- Cities invest in unsealing the ground and creating more green spaces. When road surfaces are replaced and the traffic infrastructure reconfigured, as much surface area as possible is left unpaved.
- Cities promote mobility systems that make efficient use of the land area they occupy. They are space-saving, environmentally friendly and accessible.
- The federal government, cantons and cities ensure that underprivileged population groups have access to affordable housing. Their needs are established at the very start of planning processes.
- Those whose daily lives are affected by changes are involved from the beginning in effective participatory processes. Their voice is heard in planning and implementation decision-making.

Further reading

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat): [World Cities Report 2020](#). [The Value of Sustainable Urbanization](#). 2020.



SDG 12

No sustainable consumption without sustainable production

As a heavily import-dependent country, **the impact of consumption in Switzerland is felt to a large extent abroad.** Many of the world's biggest multinationals are registered in Switzerland, from where they directly influence production around the globe. Some of them regularly feature in headlines about violations of human rights or ecocide in other countries. Yet the Federal Council fails to hold these huge corporations to account. Within the United Nations, Switzerland has so far been reticent in negotiations on a binding treaty on **business and human rights**.

Switzerland is a long way away from being a resource-efficient **circular economy**. Our present, linear economic model consumes resources and raw materials and produces waste. It accrues some 780,000 tonnes of plastic waste every year, while around 2,800,000 tonnes of food is simply thrown away. Although certain companies are showing the way, the Federal Council does not yet have a clear strategy for the necessary framework.

Instead, subsidies today still too often encourage farming practices, damaging air transport and meat consumption that harm biodiversity. The Federal Council unilaterally prioritises voluntary action, but what is needed are binding measures. In addition to educating consumers and raising their awareness of the issues, external costs such as negative impacts on the environment and society must be internalised. Products that reach the shelves must meet minimum **environmental and social sustainability standards**.

Meanwhile, the public sector itself is a major economic actor. The federal government, cantons and local authorities purchase goods worth around 40 billion francs annually in the shape of uniforms, IT infrastructure, kerbstones, or coffee and chocolate for public-sector canteens. Parliament made a clear commitment to greater sustainability with the new Federal Act on **Public Procurement** that entered into force in early 2021. It states that suppliers may be required to satisfy much more far-reaching sustainability criteria than was previously the case. When it came to the relevant secondary legislation, however, the administration ignored the will of the legislators and significantly walked back the minimum social standards that can be applied.

Adopting a sustainable lifestyle means reducing our consumption. This will cost jobs in the Global South. Fair solutions are needed here to help expand regional markets and to preserve or create earning opportunities.

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Recommendations

- The federal government bans the manufacture and sale of products that violate basic environmental and social standards.
- The federal government drafts an effective law to ensure greater corporate responsibility. It draws on the EU directive on corporate sustainability due diligence.
- Switzerland supports the international process towards a binding UN treaty on business and human rights.
- The federal government promotes the circular economy. It creates the legal framework to cut resource consumption massively, and to close and decelerate materials cycles. This specifically includes a right to repair.
- The federal government and the cantons abolish subsidies that harm biodiversity and the climate. Subsidies and incentives are re-configured so that they accelerate progress towards the SDGs.
- The federal government reforms the Public Procurement Ordinance so that it reflects the Public Procurement Act, and closes the loopholes concerning minimum social standards.
- Public procurement agencies use the scope afforded by the Act to consistently apply environmental and social sustainability criteria in their invitations to tender.
- The federal government supports consumer information initiatives with its partnership and financial assistance.

Further reading

Circular Economy Switzerland: www.circular-economy-switzerland.ch

Swiss coalition for corporate justice: <https://corporatejustice.ch>

Solidar Suisse, [Swiss municipality rating for sustainable procurement](#)



SDG 13

Fair climate action

In its Long-Term Climate Strategy, the federal government sets Switzerland the target of net-zero emissions by 2050. This is not ambitious enough. To limit global warming to 1.5°C, industrialised countries like Switzerland must **decarbonise their economies and societies before 2040**. What's more, there is currently no plan that sets out specific and sufficiently far-reaching interim targets. Switzerland has already fallen short of the target for 2020, which was to reduce carbon emissions by 20% compared with their 1990 level.

Switzerland is one of the world's biggest per-capita greenhouse gas emitters. Since many of our consumer goods are produced abroad, **around 60% are generated by production in other countries**. Historically, our responsibility is significantly greater, however, because these emissions have been accumulating since the very beginning of industrialisation.

When calculating the Swiss contribution to **international climate financing**, the Federal Council disregards these historical emissions, just as it does those produced abroad. It deliberately underestimates Switzerland's climate responsibility, and thus the fair share that we should pay towards the global target of mobilising 100 billion dollars annually to support climate action and adaptation in poorer countries. It is also appalling that it takes this contribution almost entirely from the development cooperation budget, instead of increasing government spending or usage-based levies in a socially acceptable way to fulfil its UN obligations.

Our greenhouse gas emissions cannot be reduced to zero across the board. Indeed, to limit global warming we will need negative emissions, but we cannot rely on technology alone to provide the solution here. The focus must therefore be on **transforming our economy and the way we live**.

The **international offsets** that the Federal Council is planning are short-sighted and unjust: short-sighted because they unnecessarily delay the reform of damaging subsidies, as well as urgent investment in renewable energies, and unjust because poor countries cede easy action on the climate to rich countries, who use it to offset their hugely excessive emissions. In addition, they limit the scope of these poorer countries to achieve their own reduction targets at a later date. Ultimately, all countries must get to net zero.

Investments in fossil fuels via Switzerland's **financial centre** are co-funding a catastrophic increase in temperature of between 4 and 6 degrees Celsius. Neither public nor private-sector financial institutions or investors currently have any specific plans for how to finance ambitious climate targets. There must be a rapid withdrawal from fossil fuels and financing found for an innovative and climate-friendly economy.

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Recommendations

- Switzerland takes action domestically to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least half by 2030 and to net-zero by 2040 at the latest. It drafts a binding plan with specific interim targets that also takes account of the emissions caused abroad by our consumption at home.
- Switzerland doubles its contribution and pays at least one billion francs per year towards international climate financing. It accounts for at least one per cent of the total that is agreed internationally for after 2025.
- Climate financing is not charged to the development cooperation budget, but is funded as an additional item in accordance with undertakings to the UN.
- Switzerland defines usage-related and new sources of revenue to finance the just and socially acceptable transformation of the economy and society.

Further reading

Swiss CSO Platform Agenda 2030. [Policy Brief: Agenda 2030 & Climate. November 2019.](#) (German, French and Italian)

Alliance Sud: [Switzerland must step up its game post-Glasgow.](#) December 2021.



SDG 14

Switzerland's responsibility for healthy oceans

The oceans produce over half of the world's oxygen, while at the same time absorbing significant amounts of carbon dioxide. They are a vital source of income for coastal communities. But marine ecosystems are under threat from a wide range of human activities.

Overfishing is depleting marine fish stocks, impacting biodiversity and threatening the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide, primarily small-scale fisheries and family firms. In 2017, 34% of marine fish stocks were considered overfished. Bycatch of juvenile fish or non-targeted species (including endangered species) are thrown back overboard. The use of marine fish as feed for aquaculture adds to overfishing. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing account for roughly one in five catches worldwide.

Non-sustainable shrimp aquaculture is partly responsible for the loss of mangrove forests. Meanwhile, open ocean salmon farming is contributing to the **pollution** of the oceans. The same is true of our agricultural system, in which intensive animal farming and use of fertilizers is generating massive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus. In Basel, more than 40,000 tonnes of nitrogen per year is exported via the Rhine to the North Sea.

The increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is resulting in the increasing **acidification** of the world's oceans. This impacts particularly on corals and shellfish, as it reduces their ability to harden their shells, skeletons or other calcium carbonate structures.

At the international level, for the first time in history a UN **high seas treaty** is to provide a global framework for protecting the seas beyond national jurisdictions. While negotiations are still ongoing, big commodities companies are pushing to open up the deep seas to mine metals such as manganese and cobalt. This threatens a barely understood ecosystem. In negotiations on marine genetic resources and equitable benefit-sharing, Switzerland risks one-sidedly protecting the interests of big pharma and raw materials producers.

Switzerland can apply various forms of leverage to better protect the oceans. As a nation we are one of the highest per-capita users of plastic in the world. And we are still home port to some 20 merchant vessels.

Switzerland must also play a role in international **trade negotiations**, be it in the WTO to work towards an end to harmful subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, or at the bilateral level.

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Recommendations

- Switzerland blocks market entry to all fish and seafood from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and consistently implements the Ordinance on the Inspection of the Lawful Origin of Imported Marine Fishery Products. The Ordinance must be extended to include inland and freshwater fish, as well as fish and seafood destined for aquaculture feed.
- By digitalising catch certificates, existing regulations are strengthened and modernised, and brought into line with the new European system.
- As part of the follow-up project to agricultural policy in the post-2022 period, the federal government defines the benchmarks for environmentally friendly farming. It cuts the number of livestock and defines a reduction path for phosphorus and nitrogen.
- Switzerland supports a strong and ambitious high seas treaty which provides for a Conference of Parties that is responsible for establishing marine reserves.
- Switzerland supports a moratorium on deep sea mining.
- In coastal areas, development cooperation projects include marine ecosystem conservation targets in addition to their basic remit of alleviating poverty.
- Switzerland supports efforts towards a global, legally binding treaty on plastic pollution by 2024.
- The federal government drafts a tough law requiring greater corporate responsibility that also includes the protection of marine ecosystems.
- In WTO trade negotiations, Switzerland actively supports an end to harmful subsidies for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Its free trade agreements contain binding sections on sustainability that set out criteria for sustainable fishing and aquaculture.

Further reading

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The APPOLL-Forum: Avoid Plastic Pollution in Switzerland. www.appollforum.ch



SDG 15

Protect irreplaceable species and ecosystems

More than a third of all animal and plant species in Switzerland are endangered. We might also lose 40% of our songbirds. A quarter of all mammals worldwide **are threatened by extinction**. The insect population has shrunk by up to 75% over the past 30 years. Internationally, there are plans to counter the drivers of this biodiversity loss with a comprehensive array of targets. Switzerland is a member of the High Ambition Coalition, which aims to protect 30% of all land and sea area by 2030 – the 30x30 target. Protections currently extend to only 15% of global land area and 7% of the world's seas. The figure for Switzerland is just 6.8%.

There is more to protecting biodiversity than square metres, however. Protected areas must be valuable, interconnected, and managed with a participatory approach. With the Ecological Infrastructure initiative the Federal Council and the Cantons want to produce an inventory of areas of high biodiversity quality that merit conservation, and to create corridors connecting them.

In the interests of biodiversity, **space used by humans** for activities such as agriculture must also increasingly be managed extensively in a way that encourages biodiversity. As major landowners, government actors such as the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) and the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) have a duty to lead by example.

More **resources** are needed to conserve biodiversity effectively. Switzerland has 37 Emerald Network Areas of Special Conservation Interest. The Emerald Network aims to preserve those species and habitats that are concentrated in European states and that are under threat here. Yet only one of those 37 areas has a management plan that incorporates it fully into local society and politics and determines what action is to be taken to maintain its value.

Ecosystems are also always habitats. Conserving them means protecting human rights and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. This includes aspects such as the equitable distribution of advantages from the application of traditional knowledge and genetic resources, as laid down in binding international law in the 'Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization'. As home to major pharmaceutical companies, Switzerland is under obligation here.

The pressure on the **forest** ecosystem will increase globally in future. Not only does it supply a renewable raw material in the form of timber, but afforestation projects around the world offset our emissions of greenhouse gases. However, going out and planting trees is not the same as creating a forest. Afforestation initiatives for the climate must be planned and executed so that they create diverse habitats for domestic species and avoid monocultures.

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Recommendations

- Switzerland designates the most valuable 30% of its land area as protected by 2030, and ensures that these protected areas are interconnected. It guarantees their equitable and effective management in line with the country's international commitments, and provides appropriate staff and financial resources.
- The cantons factor the conservation of biodiversity into all of their spatial planning measures, and satisfy the standards laid down by the federal government.
- The federal government and the cantons reduce the harmful effects on biodiversity that are associated with their subsidies and incentives. Where such harmful effects cannot be eliminated, aims that are at odds with biodiversity are disclosed transparently, and the external costs of biodiversity are met according to the producer pays principle.
- Switzerland properly implements the Nagoya Protocol and is an active proponent of earnings from the use of genetic resources and traditional knowledge being shared equitably.
- Development cooperation projects also pursue biodiversity conservation objectives in addition to their basic remit of alleviating poverty. This work is integrative wherever possible, and additional funding is provided for new projects. These projects pursue a human rights-based approach at all times.
- Switzerland takes care that the afforestation projects it supports at home and abroad create habitats for domestic species, and contribute to both conserving biodiversity and protecting the climate.

Further reading

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SDG 16

Strengthen participation and enlarge scope for action

The 2030 Agenda understands **peace** as the absence of all forms of violence, be it direct, cultural or structural.

Participation and the right to a say are the foundations of peaceful and inclusive societies. When those who are affected are involved on an equal footing in decision-making processes, power really is shared. A quarter of the population in Switzerland is excluded from political processes. In addition to those who do not hold Swiss citizenship, other groups such as women, young people, people who have experienced migration and people with disabilities are often heavily underrepresented. Development projects around the world rarely involve local and Indigenous communities in their design and realisation. In most peace processes there will be few, if any, women at the table.

Participation requires **scope for action**. As studies by CIVICUS and others show, this is shrinking all the time for civil society actors around the world. The limitations range from administrative barriers and restricted access to financing to intimidation and criminalisation and even physical violence. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) are used in an attempt to dissuade individuals and organisations from making a particular statement or from being critical in their reporting. At least 358 human rights defenders were killed in 2021. Even in Switzerland, the political pressure on civil society actors is intensifying.

Peacebuilding and work to establish a culture of peace are an underfinanced element of **international cooperation**. It is important, however, to strengthen civil society as a development actor in its own right, to promote NGO networks and to protect those involved against violence.

The war in Ukraine has made preventing violence a more pressing issue than ever. At the same time, the war has kicked off a **huge arms race and militarisation campaign**. There is the risk here that funding which is urgently needed for action on social and climate policy will be shelved. For the first time, the 2021 report on Swiss security policy recognised the climate crisis and the dangers of a pandemic as factors of relevance to security. This recognition must now be followed up by realigning Swiss security policy with collective and human security.

This is not possible today as a result of **direct and structural violence**. A look at Switzerland's migration and asylum policy and practice shows that return centres are often run under degrading conditions that make people ill. People are subject to racial profiling, stopped by the police far too often purely on the basis of racialised or ethnicised characteristics, in particular their skin colour or (assumed) religion. One woman in ten in Switzerland is affected by psychological, physical or sexualised violence by her husband or partner.

Internationally there is also a need to prevent violence and conflict by monitoring flows of money and weapons. *Suisse Secrets* showed that Credit

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Recommendations

- The federal government, cantons and local authorities consistently involve affected parties in political decision-making. They provide sufficient resources to permit effective participation. Marginalised groups receive special support.
 - Switzerland establishes a strong national human rights institution. It works independently and is properly funded.
 - Switzerland actively combats repression and develops guidelines to protect NGOs and the media from SLAPPs.
 - Authorities identify practical preventive action to end structural, institutional, cultural and direct violence such as racial profiling and gender-specific violence. They create effective monitoring and control systems. Misconduct is investigated and punished.
 - Switzerland respects, protects and encourages civic participation at home and abroad. It encourages political education so that a diverse civil society can participate in political processes actively and on an equal footing. In its international cooperation work,
- Switzerland also engages with autocratic regimes and in sensitive contexts. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs increases the funding available to protect human rights defenders and peace activists.
- Switzerland aligns its security policy strategy, including the Swiss armed forces, with collective and human security, and instead of investing in re-arming itself turns its attention to combating security risks such as climate change and pandemics.

Suisse is still managing the **assets** of dictators and instigators of conflict and their families. According to the Swiss National Bank, in the years prior to the pandemic **raw materials** worth between 60 and 110 billion francs were being bought from Russia and sold on around the world. Switzerland **exports weapons** to countries that violate human rights and suppress civic participation. Thanks to the Corrective Initiative, rules have been toughened up again that previously would even have allowed exports to countries under civil war.

Further reading

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SDG 17

Align all policy fields with sustainable development

The last of the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda sets out the framework conditions that must be in place to achieve all of the SDGs. Alongside financing through tax revenues and a reduction in public debt in the countries of the Global South in particular, it formulates targets for trade policy, policy coherence for sustainable development, and partnerships.

All countries should generate sufficient **tax revenues** for themselves, yet there is a vast difference at present between government coffers around the world. While Norway has a budget of USD 20,000 per capita, per year, annual per-capita public spending in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not even USD 20. Swiss fiscal policy does not help to reduce this inequality. The opposite is true, in fact. Economists Without Borders estimates that conglomerates move more than 100 billion dollars in profits to Switzerland each year, so it is not taxed in the countries where those groups actually produce.

Debt significantly restricts the financial room for manoeuvre of many low and middle-income states. This became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Swiss Federal Council approved an additional budget of over CHF 50 billion in 2020/21, 83 countries had to cut public spending in the midst of the pandemic so that they were able to pay their debts. Even during this extraordinary crisis, rich creditor nations and private-sector lenders such as Swiss banks and commodities dealers were not willing to defer or cancel debt appropriately.

Foreign direct investment can help to finance certain SDGs, but it can also limit a country's scope to enact laws protecting its people and natural resources. For example, Glencore recently sued Colombia, invoking non-compliance with the investment protection agreement between Colombia and Switzerland. The Colombian Constitutional Court had halted the expansion of the Cerrejón coal mine because insufficient consideration had been given to its negative impacts on the local population and environment.

As long ago as 1970 rich countries pledged to increase **development assistance** to 0.7% of their economic output. As things stand they have still failed to honour that pledge. The Swiss share has stagnated for years at just under 0.5%. A growing proportion of that is being invested in climate conservation projects, thereby reducing the funding available for direct action to combat poverty.

Partnerships with the private sector and international companies have not yet been studied enough to determine whether they really do offer wide-ranging support for sustainable development, and whether profits are taxed where value is actually created.

Furthermore, Swiss **trade policy** is not geared sufficiently to sustainable development. While free trade agreements have contained sections on sustainability for some years now, these are not generally binding. Rather, the

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Recommendations

- The federal government analyses the impact of Swiss tax laws on the countries of the Global South.
- The federal government publishes country-by-country reporting on conglomerates' global structures and key performance indicators, creating transparency where this can help to identify illicit financial flows.
- Switzerland amends its trade policy so that it fulfils its human rights obligations to people in other countries, with particular regard to their rights to health and to food.
- Switzerland renegotiates its investment protection agreements. It ceases to protect investments against new and important regulations to protect the environment, health and other human rights obligations.
- Future bilateral trade agreements contain binding sustainability criteria. They may not stipulate how partner countries must govern intellectual property rights, in particular how specific varieties are protected.
- Switzerland increases its development assistance to at least the agreed 0.7% of gross national income.
- Switzerland plays an active and constructive part in a sustainable debt relief process in highly indebted countries of the Global South.
- Switzerland makes public-private partnerships conditional upon effective due diligence processes for human rights, environmental risks and tax practices. It puts measures in place that genuinely prevent competition with local companies in the Global South, or their being crowded out of their markets.

Federal Council demands that partner countries agree to strict intellectual property rights to seed, for example, thus violating farmers' own rights to the seed they produce.

Switzerland defends rigid patent protections for Covid vaccines and medications, thus preventing people around the world protecting their health. The Federal Council has, however, agreed to conduct sustainability assessments on free trade agreements in the future. In doing so, it is consenting to a review of not just their effects on the environment, but also their impact on human rights. No findings have yet been delivered.

Change is needed in all of these policy fields – tax, finance and trade – to enhance **policy coherence for sustainable development**. This key target under SDG 17 requires all policy decisions to facilitate sustainable development globally. The Spillover Index published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) measures the extent to which policies in one country have negative effects on others. Switzerland takes the inglorious fifth-last place, with only the United Arab Emirates, Luxembourg, Guyana and Singapore judged worse.

Further reading

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Platform Agenda 2030

Swiss CSO Platform Agenda 2030 is a network of around 50 associations, federations, NGOs and trades unions from Switzerland. We connect civil society organisations from the environmental, development, human rights, sustainable business, gender, peace, housing and labour fields. Platform Agenda 2030 is committed to seeing Switzerland implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, both nationally and internationally. Our economy and politics, the Swiss financial centre, our consumption patterns and our integration in global supply chains have impacts beyond our own borders. That is why all of these areas must play their part in sustainable development

- **We inform and sensitise.**
- **We encourage dialogue with public and private-sector actors.**
- **We draft recommendations for action.**
- **We take a stand.**

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