

## Switzerland country profile

22 May 2018



**A landlocked, mountainous country, Switzerland's geographical position in central Europe and studied neutrality have given it the access and political stability to become one of the world's wealthiest countries.**

Switzerland has for centuries been a neutral state, which means that it cannot take part in armed conflict unless it is attacked. Its forces can only be used for self-defence and internal security.

It joined the United Nations only in 2002. Surrounded by the European Union, it has vacillated between seeking closer engagement with its powerful neighbour and other international organisations, and preferring a more isolationist course.

The people are given a direct say in their own affairs under Switzerland's system of direct democracy, which has no parallel in any other country. They are invited to the polls several times a year to vote in national or regional referendums and people's initiatives.

## FACTS

---

### Swiss Confederation

Capital: Bern

---

**Population** 8.3 million

**Area** 41,284 sq km (15,940 sq miles)

**Major languages** German, French, Italian, Romansch

**Major religion** Christianity

**Life expectancy** 81 years (men), 85 years (women) **Currency**  
Swiss Franc

## LEADERS

**Federal President (rotating): Alain Berset**

Switzerland is unusual in having a collective head of state, the seven-member Federal Council, which doubles up as the country's cabinet.

The council was set up by the constitution of 1848, which is still in force today. Members are elected for four-year terms by a joint session of both houses of parliament, although in practice changes in membership are rare, making the Federal Council one of the world's most stable governments.

The election of a new female minister to the Federal Council in September 2010 gave the cabinet a majority of women for the first time in the country's history.

Each year, by tradition, a different member of the council fills the largely ceremonial post of federal president on a rotating basis. The office does not confer the status of head of state, which is held jointly by all the councillors.

Alain Berset - the president for 2018 - was the country's vice-president for 2017 and has led the Federal Department of Home Affairs since 2012. He is a member of the Social Democratic Party (PS).

## **MEDIA**

Broadcasting is dominated by the public Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG/SSR). Most of its funding comes from licence fee revenues; a smaller proportion comes from TV advertising.

About 87% of the population was online by the end of 2015.