



# MIGRANTS REFUGEES

## Migration Profile

### SWITZERLAND

#### A. Executive Summary

A landlocked and neutral European mountainous country with a 8,453,550 strong population and a thriving economy, Switzerland is a federal country, home to many international organisations, international non governmental agencies and companies, and has the second GDP per capita in the world, making it particularly attractive to people from all walks of life, looking for better standards of living or fleeing poverty and hardships of all sorts. With a substantial part of its resident population being born abroad, Switzerland is both a country of emigration and immigration. Endowed with a deeply rooted humanitarian culture, Switzerland hosts many poverty alleviation, advocacy and social justice initiatives that have a voice at the US Organisation Bureau in Geneva. The country also takes part in the Dublin Regulation for refugees not to undergo asylum processes in more than one state, making it less likely that asylum seekers reach Switzerland before being declared in the other surrounding European countries. Unfortunately not immune to human trafficking, Switzerland nonetheless acts against the modern forms of exploitation that can be found on its territory.

#### B. Country Profile

##### I. Basic Information

The Swiss Confederation is a Central European landlocked and mainly mountainous Federal State, sharing a 41,277 sq km border with Austria, France, Italy, Liechtenstein and Germany. The main natural hazards due to its topography are avalanches, landslides and flash floods. The country's 8,453,550 population can be divided as follows: Swiss 69.3%, German 4.2%, Italian 3.2%, Portuguese 2.5%, French 2.1%, Kosovo 1.1%, Turkish 1%, other 16.6%. Switzerland's biggest cities are Zurich (434,335 inhabitants), Geneva (203,951), Basel (180,000), while the Federal institutions are based in Bern (121,631), the capital. Language repartition is as follows: German (or Swiss German, official) 62.1%, French (official) 22.8%, Italian (official) 8%, English 5.7%, Portuguese 3.5%, Albanian 3.3%, Serbo-Croatian 2.3%, Spanish 2.3%, Romansh (official)

0.5%, other 7.9%<sup>1</sup>. Religious affiliations are reported as follows: Roman Catholic 34.4%, Protestant 22.5%, other Christian 5.7%, Muslim 5.5%, other 1.6%, none 29.5%, unspecified 0.8%. Switzerland has the second highest GDP per capita in the world with over 87,000 USD in 2020 according to the world bank.

## **II. International and Internal Migrants**

With 2.2 million residents being born outside the country as per 2021 figures, Switzerland is the third OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) country in terms of the share of immigrants in its global population, as they account for 29.9% of the total population, a 27% rise since 2010 according to this organisation. No data on ethnicity could be found; however, most foreigners residing permanently in Switzerland are European and mostly come from the European Union (EU) or from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) area, amounting to 1.4 million people. In 2017, 43% of the permanent resident population born abroad said that they immigrated to Switzerland for family reasons. 32% of them reported they came to Switzerland for work, and 5% for studies, and 12% for other reasons. As many foreigners mostly come for work reasons due to the higher level of salaries, it is only normal that as per 2020 figures, 34.8% of them are aged 20-39, as opposed to 23.4% of the Swiss population. The top five nationalities of immigrants in 2019 were Germany (12.1%), Italy (10.3%) and France (9.7%), followed by Portugal (4.6%) and Spain (3.4%). 533,800 people migrated internally as per 2020 figures, meaning from one canton to another.

## **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

As per 2020 figures, there were 25,800 Swiss nationals who left the country to settle abroad and 83,600 foreign permanent residents who did the same. 59% of them moved to Europe, 2.7% to Africa, 4.5% to America, and 10.2% of them to Asia and Oceania. The top 5 countries are Germany 11%, Portugal 9.2%, Italy 7.4%, France 6.8%, and Spain 2.9%. Due to the high proportion of skilled people in Switzerland and to the presence of many international diplomatic organisations in Switzerland attracting international workers, one can expect that a high number of migrants should be considered skilled.

## **IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)**

Internally displaced people are virtually non-existent in Switzerland; as a matter of fact, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported only 13 of them for the year 2020. However, the mountainous nation should be ready for a small scale of internal displacement moves, as the average expected number of displacements per year for sudden onset hazards is 987 people due to earthquakes and 3,452 people due to floods.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Switzerland is

---

<sup>1</sup> German, French, Italian, and Romansh are all national and official languages; shares sum to more than 100% because respondents could indicate more than one main language (2019 est.)

home to approximately 126,000 refugees and other persons of concern. As the host country for UNHCR's headquarters, Switzerland is one of UNHCR's key governmental partners, and the country's total contribution in 2021 is reported to be USD 41.7 million. Detailed statistics are published on a yearly basis by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). According to the European Union Asylum Information Database (AIDA), there were 11,041 applicants in 2020, of which 3,852 were pending at the end of 2020. 5,409 of them were granted asylum (40%), 4,630 were granted temporary admission (34%) and 3,626 were rejected (26%). As per application figures only, the top five countries of origin were Eritrea (1,917), Afghanistan (1,681), Turkey (1,201), Algeria (988), and Syria (904). The gender/age breakdown of the total number of applicants for 2020 is as follows: men amount to 7,399 (67.01%) and women to 3,642 (32.99%). Accompanied children amount to 5,034 (45%) and unaccompanied children to 535 (4.85%).

53% of migrants are Christian (37.7% Catholic), 28.6% have no religion, 13.4% are Muslim and 9.1% belong to new Christian communities. The Christian religion is strong because of the fact that Switzerland hosts many migrants coming from European countries, where Christian faiths are predominant.

Switzerland has adopted the Dublin regulation, whereby asylum seekers should be processed in the first country they have been declared to by the authorities, making it less likely for people to reach Switzerland first, as it is a landlocked country surrounded by other countries that are part of the same Dublin regulation mechanism.

## **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

As per the 2021 trafficking in persons report's chapter on Switzerland, both Swiss and foreign human traffickers continue exploiting domestic and foreign women, transgender victims including children in Switzerland, while the Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated various situations of vulnerabilities. In a country where prostitution is legal, sex traffickers are nonetheless reported to be increasingly difficult to be tracked in Switzerland, as they use online platforms to recruit and exploit victims, and book apartment rentals for illicit activities. The pandemic also put victims even more under the grip of traffickers, as they were not able to work and earn money. Traffickers can frequently be family members, so called friends or romantic partners, as well as agencies displaying fake offers related to employment, travel and marriage in order to attract vulnerable profiles.

As per the 2021 report, the vast majority of traffickers are male, but it is not uncommon to find female traffickers, especially from Nigeria and Thailand. Victims are mostly from these two countries, as well as from Eastern Europe, China, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic. It is worth noting that Nigerian victims are often coerced into sex trafficking, after swearing a "voodoo oath" they find themselves compelled to abiding by. Swiss girls and women have also reportedly increasingly been the victims of young male traffickers known as "loverboys", coercing them into sex trafficking often through a sham romantic relationship.

People from Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Nigeria are reported to be more vulnerable to

commercial sex coercion and domestic servitude, as more than one third of female victims are asylum-seekers.

Lastly, labour trafficking also takes place in the country as traffickers exploit all kinds of people in domestic service, health care, agriculture, hospitality, catering, postal courier services, construction, tourism and in forced criminal activities. If male victims come primarily from Afghanistan and Eritrea, forced begging among the Roma community has increased recently in Switzerland, as was the case throughout Europe.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

Switzerland is a signatory to the Geneva Conventions' four treaties and additional protocols, establishing international legal standards for humanitarian treatments in war, as the international conventions were held on Swiss territory.

The main legislative acts relevant to asylum procedures, reception conditions and detentions are the Asylum Act, the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, the Federal Act on Administrative Procedure, and the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation.

The main implementing decrees, administrative guidelines and regulations relevant to asylum procedures, reception conditions and detention are the Asylum Ordinance No. 1 on procedural aspects, the Asylum Ordinance No. 2 on financial matters, the Asylum Ordinance No. 3 on the processing of personal data, the Ordinance on the Enforcement of the Refusal of Admission to and Deportation of Foreign Nationals, the Ordinance on Admission, Period of Stay and Employment, the Ordinance of the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports, the Directive III on the Field of Asylum, and the Ordinance on Measures Taken in the Field of Asylum due to Coronavirus.

In 2019, Switzerland launched the Swiss Integration Agenda, whose purpose is to ensure immigrants' integration in the country. Refugees also receive language and labour market related skills training. Cantonal Integration Programmes (PIC) are supported by the Confederation with the donation of CHF 18,000 per refugee. The right of asylum seekers to access to UNHCR is not specifically regulated in Swiss national law.

As per the 2021 Trafficking in People Report published by the US State Department, although Article 182 of the penal code criminalizes sex trafficking and labour trafficking and prescribes penalties of up to life imprisonment and/or a fine, it does not include a demonstration of force, fraud or coercion as an essential element of the crime. Additionally, the report says, both adult and child sex trafficking crimes could be prosecuted under Article 195 of the criminal code ("exploitation of sexual acts" and "encouraging prostitution"), which prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment or fines. Trafficking investigations and prosecutions fall strictly under the jurisdiction of individual cantons, except for cases involving organised criminal networks, which fall under Federal Police (FedPol) jurisdiction.

Switzerland signed the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Palermo Protocol. Switzerland also signed and ratified the 1930 ILO's Forced Labour Convention 29 and its 2014 Protocol, ratified in 2017, as well as the 1957 ILO's Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 105.

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

The main State actor involved in migration issues in Switzerland is the Federal Department of Justice and Police' State Secretariat for Migrations (SEM), which is handling the federal reception centres for asylum seekers, as well as a 24 hour hotline. Following the 2019 Asylum Act, Switzerland's revised organisation was divided into six asylum regional structures where asylum applications are processed by SEM, while asylum seekers receive free legal protection and are accommodated in federal centres. The airport and border police are responsible to welcome the applicants in their respective areas of work.

Although not the capital city, Geneva is a unique place, as it is home to the European office of the United Nations and as a result hosts 181 permanent representations, as well as headquarters of many NGOs and international organisations. Geneva is, therefore, a location for many Catholic institutions to voice their interests and concerns to a wide audience and make their voice heard.

### *NGOs and Other organisations*

The Swiss Refugee Council, as the non-governmental and religiously independent umbrella non-profit organisation of NGOs working in the field of asylum, provides legal and country-of-origin advice, critically monitors the work of authorities, raises awareness and informs the public. It is also a point of contact for politicians and experts. As per its 2020 annual report, the Swiss Refugee Council provided 419 personal cases of expertise, published 65 researches and 14 detailed reports on over 50 countries, and has been active in 21 cantons through 103 training sessions. Caritas and RBS Bern (*Berner Rechtsberatungsstelle für Menschen in Not*) are the NGOs mandated to provide asylum seekers with legal representation at first instance at the airport.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is in charge of monitoring the implementation of international standards, engaging with local Swiss partners in advocacy activities, and also responsible for public information and awareness-raising.

The International Organisation for Migration (OIM) in Switzerland, as part of the European Economic Area, partners with SEM and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, as well as the competent cantonal agencies and relief organisations, which in some cases is the Red Cross, to implement assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR). The Swiss administration specified that during the Covid pandemic, about 70 persons returned to their

country of origin per month with individual return assistance.

### *The Catholic Church*

The Conference of Swiss Bishops (CES) and its Commission on Migration (*Migratio*) follows up and publishes recommendations for cooperation between allophone communities and local parishes. In order to constantly respond to migration challenges, *Migratio* promotes the formation of pastoral workers and raises awareness on the pastoral care of migrants and refugees, while also providing pastoral assistance in asylum centres. Together with the Central Roman Catholic Conference of Switzerland (RKZ), they launched a new pastoral program aimed at the 3 million Swiss Catholics, of whom 40% are immigrants, including more intercultural dialogue and more autonomy for local Catholic initiatives. To act on this project, specific guidelines were developed, and *Migratio* committed to help local churches to translate the provisions and recommendations of the document into concrete actions.

The *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* has a location in Switzerland, as they have been accredited to the UN office in Geneva as part of the ECOSOC for the work they have been doing on behalf of social development, justice and peace.

In 2006, the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) opened a representation office to the UN in Geneva. The International Scalabrini Centres also run in Solothurn an International *Formation Centre GB Scalabrini* open to young people interested or involved in the phenomenon of human mobility.

*Talitha Kum* manages RENATE's (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation) presence in Switzerland, and also publicises the similar work done by other agencies, like the *Centre Social Protestant* in Geneva, *Astree* in Lausanne, *Antenna Mayday* in Viganello, and *FIZ* in Zurich.

Caritas Switzerland looks after asylum seekers, temporarily admitted persons and recognised refugees. It provides accommodation and offers courses, advice and help with repatriation. In addition, Caritas considers equal opportunities and participation as central concerns, and focuses on young people, mutual understanding and the prevention of female circumcision.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Switzerland is based in Basel and for its activities cooperates with other national organisations. JRS offers German language classes, advocacy activities and visits to jails and to irregular refugee camps, as well as spiritual support and reflection for around 100 people, especially those forgotten by all and ordered to leave the territory.

The ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission), whose headquarters is in Switzerland with an active presence at the UN bureau, serves and protects refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of faith, ethnicity or nationality.

The *Community of Sant' Egidio* is also involved with migrants in many ways. They organise weekly French classes and regular visits to undocumented migrants and asylum seekers.

The Order of Malta has a Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, where it tirelessly advocates in favour of a better consideration of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, as well as against human trafficking, through webinars offered on the NHT No Human trafficking Christus Liberat website.

The Dominicans for Justice and Peace are representing the Order of Preachers to the UN with headquarters in Geneva as well, and so does Franciscans International which particularly focuses on environmental justice, development and human rights.

**December 2021**

## C. References

CIA, The World Factbook, Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/switzerland/>

Office Fédéral de Statistiques, Nationalité étrangère, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/population/migration-integration/nationalite-etrangere.html>

World Population Reviews, Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/switzerland>

NCCR, Switzerland, Combien de migrants s'installent en Suisse ? 2021. Retrieved from

<https://nccr-onthemove.ch/indicators/combien-de-migrants-s-installent-en-suisse/?lang=fr>

UNHCR, Switzerland Statistics, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.unhcr.org/dach/ch-fr/en-bref/statistique>

Secrétaire d'État aux Migrations, 2021, Tradition humanitaire. Retrieved from:

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/asyl/asyl/humanitaire-tradition.html>

Secrétaire d'État aux Migrations, 2021, Étrangers, statistiques 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/sem/medien/mm.msg-id-84680.html>

Secrétaire d'État aux Migrations, 2021, Dublin . Retrieved from:

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/asyl/dublin.html>

Signatories to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime and its Protocols,

2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/signatures.html>

UNHCR, Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/donors-switzerland>

OECD, International migrations outlook 2020, Switzerland. Retrieved from:

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/29f23e9d-en/1/3/6/37/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/29f23e9d-en&csp=a9da7d4f182770aaa63ad86232529333&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book>

Asylum Information Database, 2021, Country Report Switzerland. Retrieved from:

[https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AIDA-CH\\_2020update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AIDA-CH_2020update.pdf)

Refugee Council Switzerland, Annual Reports, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.refugeecouncil.ch/publications/annual-reports>

IDMD, Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/switzerland>

Conference of Swiss Bishops, 2021, Commission de migration. Retrieved from:

<https://www.eveques.ch/groupes-dexperts/commission-de-migration/>

Cath.ch, Les évêques suisses et la RKZ réorientent la pastorale des migrants, 2020. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cath.ch/newsf/les-eveques-suisses-et-la-rkz-reorientent-la-pastorale-des-migrants/>

APG23, 2021, Switzerland. Retrieved from: <https://www.apg23.org/it/svizzera/>

Scalabrinian International Migrations Network, Support for Scalabrini programs in Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://simn-global.org/serve/support-for-scalabrini-programs-in-switzerland/?lang=fr>

Migratio.ch, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.migratio.ch/>

RENATE Europe, 2021, Switzerland. Retrieved from:

<https://www.renate-europe.net/contact-renate-in-switzerland/>

IBZ Solothurn : Scalabrini, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://scala-centres.net/fr/ibz-solothurn>

Caritas Switzerland, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.caritas.ch/en/what-we-do/in-switzerland.html>

Jesuit Refugee Service, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://jrs.net/fr/pays/suisse/>

Order of Malta, Christus Liberat Journal, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://christusliberat.org/journal/>

NASDAQ, The world's 5 richest nations by GDP per capita, 2021. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/worlds-5-richest-nations-by-gdp-per-capita-2021-05-20>

OIM, Return and Reintegration, 2018. Retrieved from:

<https://returnandreintegration.iom.int/en/resources/report/monitoring-2018-ras-reintegration-assistance-switzerland>

SEM, Return and Reintegration, 2022. Retrieved from:

<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/international-rueckkehr/rueckkehrhilfe.html>