



Political rights of the Swiss abroad

Since 1 July 1992, Swiss nationals registered abroad have been able to participate in Switzerland's political life. You can therefore vote on federal proposals, which have been submitted to the vote of the Swiss people, and participate in National Council elections without having to travel to Switzerland. The Swiss abroad are permitted under cantonal legislation to participate in **cantonal** votes and elections in a number of cantons.

1. Conditions

You may exercise your political rights by post from abroad if you

- have transferred your residence abroad
- are at least 18 years old and
- are registered with a Swiss embassy or consulate general (referred to below as a 'representation') in another country.

2. Registration

2.1 Procedure

To exercise your right to vote you will need to register with your representation through the [FDFA online desk](#).

You can also register by post or by visiting your representation in person. To register in both cases, you will complete the 'Application to exercise political rights', which you can download here: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/dfa/living-abroad/dienstleistungen-schweizer-ausland/political-rights.html>

The application must include your personal details, your last place of residence and, if different, your last political domicile¹ in Switzerland. If you have never been resident in Switzerland, you can choose one of your communes of origin as your electoral commune.

2.2 Central electoral register

Some cantons maintain a central electoral register for Swiss nationals registered abroad. In these cantons, your vote will not be counted in the electoral commune of your choice but in the commune where the central register is located. Your representation can tell you which cantons maintain a central voters' register.

2.3 E-voting

The option to vote online in federal votes and elections has been on hold since mid-2019.

Adjustments are to be made to the pilot scheme by the end of 2020. The aim is to establish a stable scheme, using the latest technology, and create an accurate and transparent end-to-end voting system that also preserves the secrecy of the ballot. Efforts are also being made to raise levels of public confidence in e-voting by extending independent monitoring, ensuring greater transparency with regard to e-voting systems and how they operate, and involving the scientific community more effectively. The necessary conditions for resuming the e-voting trials will be redefined by 2020.

¹In accordance with Art. 7 para. 3 let. e of the Ordinance on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad

2.4 Confirmation of registration

The electoral commune that has been assigned to you, or that you have selected, will confirm in writing that you have been added to the electoral register.

2.5 Deregistering from the electoral register

Your registration in the electoral register in Switzerland will be valid throughout the period you remain abroad and does not need to be renewed. If you want to deregister from the electoral register, you will need to submit a specific request to this effect in writing to your representation. Your registration may also be deleted automatically if your voting papers are returned as undeliverable to your electoral commune three times in succession.

Once you have deregistered, you can re-register at any time following the procedure set out in 2.1. above.

3. How do I get my voting documents?

Prior to any federal vote or election, your electoral commune will send you the official voting documents, including the Federal Council's explanatory notes, by priority post (A Mail). You can opt to receive these documents in any of Switzerland's four official languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh), even if your preferred language is not the official language of your electoral commune. Please indicate your preferred language when you register.

4. Information

Alongside the Federal Council's official explanatory notes and the election instructions issued by the Federal Chancellery, detailed information on all elections and proposals submitted to the vote of the Swiss people is available in 'Swiss Review', the magazine for the Swiss abroad, and at swissinfo.ch.

5. Participating in votes and elections

5.1 From abroad

Please follow the instructions set out in the voting documents sent to you by your electoral commune. Please ensure that the reply envelope only contains the voting envelope or voter ID for one individual. Reply envelopes containing the voting envelopes or voter IDs of more than one person could be invalidated under the rules of certain cantons. You must send the post-paid reply envelope to your electoral commune.

Please read the instructions provided by your electoral commune carefully, as voting rules vary from canton to canton.

Please note that there is no guarantee that postal services abroad will function reliably. You must therefore accept the risk that you could receive your ballot paper or voting documents too late or that your ballot paper may not be delivered to your electoral commune on time.

5.2 In Switzerland

If you are in Switzerland when a vote or election takes place, you can vote in person at the polling station or by post from within Switzerland. If you wish to vote at the polling station, you must inform your electoral commune that you will be in Switzerland at least six weeks in advance of the election date in order to ensure that your voting papers are not sent to your foreign address, as it will not be possible to issue a duplicate ballot paper due to the risk of double voting. You will need to collect your documents from the electoral commune during office hours.

Signing initiatives and referendums

If you wish to sign initiatives or referendums as a Swiss citizen living abroad, you can obtain the relevant signature/petition sheets directly from the committee concerned, sign them abroad, and return them to the committee. Alternatively, you can download the documents from the following webpages, which are available in German, French and Italian only:

Initiatives: www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis_1_3_1_1.html

Referendums: www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/rf/ref_1_3_2_1.html

You must provide your personal data, electoral commune, canton and exact address abroad (house number, street, postcode, city and country) on the signature sheets. If you are in Switzerland, you may also sign signature sheets in your electoral commune, providing your address abroad.

Please note:

In certain countries, you could incur penalties or, if you are a dual national, be stripped your non-Swiss citizenship by participating in votes or elections in another country. Further information is available from your representation. However, only the authorities in your country of residence can provide binding information on such matters.

Do you have any questions?

The [Swiss representations](#) will be happy to provide further information.

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