

The Language Services of the Federal Administration



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra



At the entrance to the west wing of the Federal Palace architecture renders democratic values visible in multiple languages.

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Foreword

Large volumes of official texts are being produced at an ever faster pace. There is an increasing need for communication, which is seen both in the old and new media. Topics are of an increasingly complex and technical nature and can only be understood and processed using highly specialised vocabularies. Technological innovations in the tools we use mean that a large degree of flexibility is required. These developments have shaped the way that government does business for some time, and now more than ever. They have a direct impact on the work of the federal administration language services, whose task is made all the more challenging by the fact that the federal government communicates in three official languages – German, French and Italian – and at times also in Romansh and English.

The departmental and Federal Chancellery language services work through a large volume of texts. They help ensure that official texts are published at the same time in German, French and Italian on a weekly basis. They allow the state to communicate directly with its citizens, and also help the federal administration to operate in several languages.

This brochure will give you an insight into the work of the language services. It describes the various activities involved in the production of a text, from drafting and translation through to the final proofreading before it is printed. And it illustrates the high level of cooperation required to produce the desired end product.

Furthermore, the brochure contains practical information, including tips for anyone interested in translation services. It is also intended for colleagues from cantonal, communal or foreign administrations, as well as interested parties from private industry and the academic world.

I hope you enjoy reading the brochure!



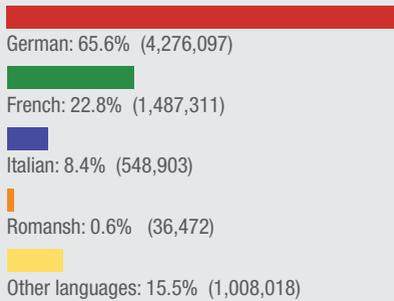
Corina Casanova
Federal Chancellor

Introduction

The language services of the federal administration play a central role in Switzerland at institutional and political level. They ensure that the federal authorities – parliament, the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellery and the departments – are able to communicate among themselves and with the public in all official languages.

Permanent resident population

(15 years of age and older): 6,519,253 (=100%)



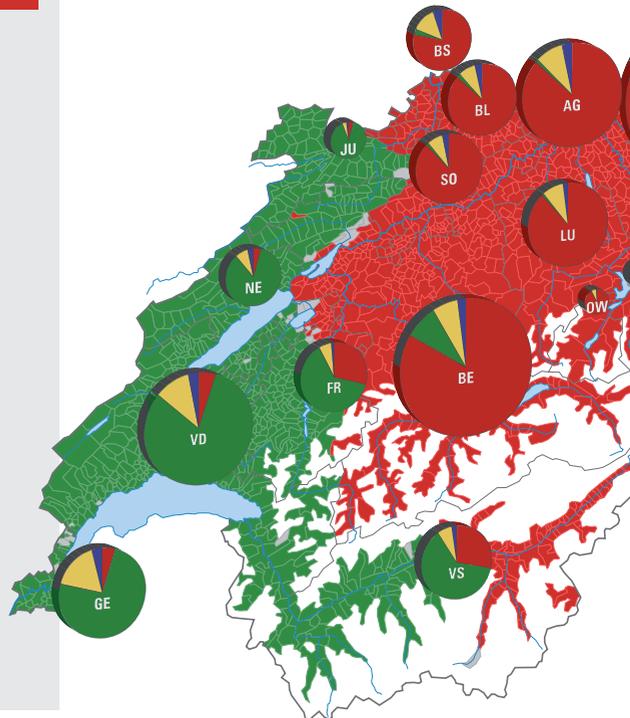
15.8% of the population speak several languages.

Those surveyed were able to list more than one main language; values could therefore exceed 100%.

Source: Structural Survey (RS) FSO 2010

Distribution of official languages and main languages of resident population by canton

Source: UST 2000



The language services ensure that official publications are available in German, French and Italian and that legislation is approved and published simultaneously in all three languages. In addition to actual translation, the language services are also involved in editing work, the aim being to provide texts that are formulated as clearly, appropriately and precisely as possible.

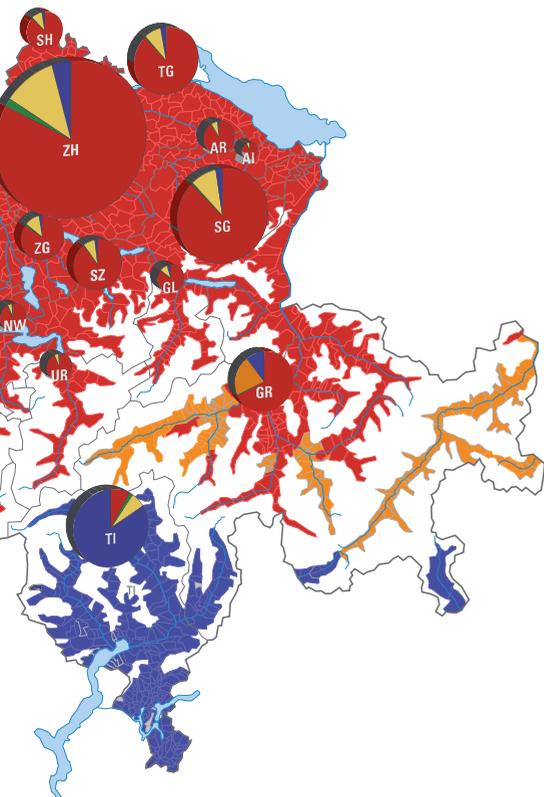
Switzerland, a multilingual country

Article 4 of the Federal Constitution establishes that German, French, Italian and Romansh are the national languages of Switzerland, thereby making it clear that all four languages are an essential part of our culture and crucial to Switzerland's identity.

German, French and Italian are also the official languages of the Confederation. The federal authorities must use the three official languages to communicate with the public, and thus draw up and update official texts of the Confederation in three languages. Romansh, on the other hand, is only considered an official language for communication with native Romansh speakers.

Each canton determines its own official language based on which language is spoken in a canton overall, or is customarily spoken by the majority in individual parts of a canton. The geographic distribution according to this territoriality principle is shown in the diagram by the coloured areas. A look at the languages actually spoken by the population presents a different picture. The pie charts show the main languages spoken by the resident population by canton.

People whose mother tongue is not a national language make up around ten per cent of Switzerland's resident population.





What language is he writing in? Statue near the entrance of the Federal Palace (bronze by M. Reymond; Paris, 1902).

Organisation

The language services of the central federal administration are organised as follows:

- Central Language Services of the Federal Chancellery;
- departmental language services;
- translation services in individual federal offices.

Each service is generally divided into sections according to language. These sections operate independently, but certain activities are coordinated by the Central Language Services of the Federal Chancellery.

The linguistic composition of the federal administration is such that the vast majority of translation work is into French and Italian. There are significantly fewer positions for translation into German, English and Romansh.

In addition, a large volume of assignments is sent to external translators. These assignments are directly commissioned by the departments and federal offices. The number of external assignments is constantly increasing. The Confederation also has a pool of interpreters that it can call upon if necessary.

Other federal language services

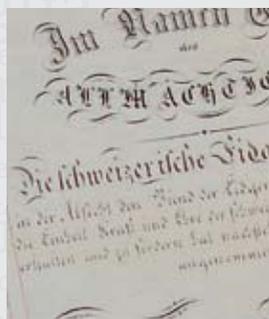
In addition to the central federal administration, other federal institutions, such as parliament, the federal courts and the federal institutes of technology, work in the official languages and have their own language services.

Organisations in which the Confederation is the majority shareholder (SBB, Swiss Post, Swisscom, etc.) are not required to observe the terms of the Languages Act. However, they also work multilingually, the languages used varying from company to company depending on the clientele.

Historical development of institutional multilingualism

Until 1798, the old Confederation was made up solely of officially German speaking cantons; French and Italian were only used in official statements and legal texts that were addressed to the authorities and the public in the subject territories. For a short time during the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803), German, French and Italian were equally important as official languages. Multilingualism was, however, no longer explicitly mentioned in the Act of Mediation (1803) or the Federal Treaty (1815).

The Federal Constitution of 1848 reintroduced institutional multilingualism (Art. 109), and further strengthened its effect with



the following revisions: representation of the three national languages among Federal Supreme Court judges (1874); differentiation between official and national

languages and recognition of Romansh as a national language (1938); recognition of Romansh as an official language when communicating with native Romansh speakers (1996); and the fundamental right to freedom of language (1999).



The 'Revised Compilation of Federal Acts and Ordinances' (1848–1947), published in the three official languages, is a milestone in the history of multilingualism.

Services

The federal administration language services provide many different services in a wide range of fields:

- **Translation of federal administration texts into all official languages, and certain texts also into Romansh and English, and revision of translations:**
These texts include drafts of federal acts and ordinances, consultation reports, Federal Council dispatches, parliamentary procedural requests and reports, press releases, texts for the Internet, official speeches, explanatory statements on votes and referendums, rulings, letters to citizens, instructions and forms.
- **Writing, editing and correction of texts:**
Some official texts (such as explanatory statements on votes and referendums) are written jointly by several people. In the case of laws, the different language versions are checked and revised (co-edited) at the same time.

- **Preparation of texts for publication:**

The official texts of the Confederation are published on a weekly basis in the Federal Gazette and in the Official Compilation of Federal Legislation, and online texts are updated continually.

- **Terminology work:**

Terminologists collect, prepare and publish specialist vocabulary in the online database TERMDAT. They also coordinate assignments and advise and support the federal offices, departments and other agencies, and thus provide the authorities with multilingual terminology of the required quality.

- **Language policy:**

The language services are involved in defining, implementing and developing language policy and monitoring compliance with the language policy (monitoring the official languages).

The legal basis of institutional multilingualism

At international level, Switzerland approved the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1997, the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1998 and the Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2008.

The Federal Act on National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities (Languages Act) of 2007 and the related Ordinance of 2010 specify the task set out in the Federal Constitution: to promote the four national languages as a characteristic of Switzerland, strengthen the country's inner cohesion, encourage individual and institutional multilingualism among the national languages, and preserve and promote Romansh and Italian culture and language.

Further efforts are needed to ensure that these provisions are more than hollow words. Although the principles are clear and undisputed they have not always been fully implemented.



The Swiss passport: Out into the world multilingually.

- **Language consultancy:**
The language services analyse and discuss selected issues and developments (new words, foreign words, new media language forms) and inform federal employees and the public about language issues.
- **Drafting of editorial standards:**
This includes general language guidelines and instructions on writing official texts, recommendations on how to write using gender-sensitive language and on how to deal with anglicisms, and templates for legislative procedures and official correspondence.

Translation adds value

Translators and editors can only start work once the original text has been completed. This can lead to a clash between various requirements in this first phase. Some authors are intent on publishing their text as quickly as possible and feel the translation process creates a delay. Translators and editors, however, read the text with a critical eye, and thereby check the clarity and consistency of the original text. When a text has already been translated into another language, it can be checked even more carefully. Quality control of official texts before printing always involves comparing the three language versions.

To tap the full potential of the translation process, clients and language services need to cooperate closely and maintain a climate of trust and transparency. In this way, translation creates added value by producing better texts for the readers in all language versions.

Ground rules

The departmental and Federal Chancellery language services can only provide a good service if they are given sufficient time. The work they do is closely linked to the particular step in the text creation process, so specific procedures have to be followed. Since various actors are often involved in the translation process, close cooperation between all concerned is required. Only if these conditions are met can the work be adequately planned and the deadlines be met.

Tips on sending a text for translation

- From the outset, schedule the time necessary for the translation of your text.
- If necessary, set a realistic budget for the translation.
- Notify the language service responsible of your translation request as early as possible and agree on a deadline and on how you would like to have the translation delivered.
- The completed source text should not exceed the agreed word count.
- Send the text to the language services only once it has been revised and checked. However, you should remain open to suggestions for improvement which the translator may make.
- Include any useful reference documents with your text.
- Provide a contact person who the translator may contact with any questions.



The Confederation is visibly multilingual.

Resources and working methods

The following five elements are important in the work of the federal administration language services:

- qualified employees with an academic background who attend continuing training classes;
- an active and institutionally enshrined role at every stage in the development of a text;
- use of new technologies in translation, lexicography and terminology plus the use of traditional tools;
- cooperation within the Confederation (interdepartmental working group on translation, Internal Drafting Committee, the Parliament Drafting Committee, etc.) and externally (universities, cantons, associations);
- training and continuing training events where participants can enhance and share their expertise (seminar on legislation in Murten, seminars in Bellinzona, Language Day).

Italian on the road to de facto equality with German and French

Although Italian is an official language of the Confederation, in practice it has a considerably different role compared to German and French. Due to the multilingual composition of the Confederation, texts are drafted mainly in German, sometimes in French, but hardly ever in Italian. In the legislative process, preliminary texts are drafted in two languages, and only the final product is produced in three languages. During this process, the Italian version therefore sometimes follows a different path to that of the German and French versions.

This is where the Italian Section of the Federal Chancellery Central Language Services play an important role. The Italian Section was created out of the Secretariat for the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, and was established as the first language service in 1917. It is responsible for the Italian version of a law from the first draft of a bill to the adoption of the act by the Federal Council and the final vote in the Federal Assembly to publication. It cooperates closely with the departmental language services in carrying out its work.

Internal Drafting Committee

The Internal Drafting Committee makes sure that federal legal texts are clearly and simply worded and linguistically correct at all levels (from draft legislation down to federal office ordinances). It examines and revises drafts from the specialist offices and sometimes from parliament or the courts. The Committee is an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental body, made up of language specialists from the Federal Chancellery Central Language Services and legal experts from the Federal Office of Justice, thus combining linguistic and legal knowledge. The Internal Drafting Committee normally examines and revises the German and the French versions of the draft in parallel (co-editing process), thereby ensuring that both language versions are consistent in terms of content and form.

TERMDAT

TERMDAT is the federal administration's multilingual terminology database (national languages and English). It was created in 1987 in collaboration with the European Commission. In addition to Swiss terminology, it also contains selected terminology from the European Union. The database contains a total of 1.5 million entries, 400,000 of which are specifically Swiss. www.termdat.ch



'Confoederatio Helvetica' which appears on the facade of the Federal Palace, is Switzerland's neo-Latin name and refers to the Helvetii, an ancient Celtic people who settled in the region of Switzerland's central plateau in pre-Roman times.

Romansh: in a class of its own

Romansh has been recognised as a national language since 1938, and as an official language for communication with native Romansh speakers since 1996. Romansh speakers may contact the federal authorities in any of the five Romansh language variations; however, all government texts are published exclusively in Romansh Grischun.

The most important federal acts are also published in Romansh; however, the Romansh versions have translation status and are not legally binding. The Federal Chancellery decides which texts are translated in consultation with the Chancellery of the Canton of Graubünden and the interested federal offices. At the present time, the Federal Constitution, the Swiss Civil Code, the Swiss Criminal Code and the Languages Act are available in Romansh.

The new Languages Act led the Federal Chancellery to create a position in 2010 to coordinate Romansh translations for the Federal Administration.

Additional information: www.bk.admin.ch > Documentation > Languages > Publications in Romansh

What about English?

English is not one of Switzerland's official languages, but is nonetheless very important to our country. This holds true first and foremost for private industry, which is heavily export-oriented and in which the financial centre and tourism play a central role.

At the proposal of the Federal Chancellery or the Conference of Secretaries-General, official texts of particular importance or international interest are also translated into English. Some legislation (such as the Federal Constitution, the Swiss Civil Code and the Swiss Criminal Code) is also available in English, although the English versions are not legally binding.

The Federal Chancellery coordinates translation into English. The translation of texts is handled by a team of in-house translators or sent out to external translators.

Additional information: www.bk.admin.ch > Topics > Languages > Translation > English

Legal basis of the work of the language services

Federal Constitution: the principles relating to the national and official languages, the freedom to use any language and promotion and support measures are established in Articles 4, 18 and 70.

Languages Act and Languages Ordinance: regulate the use of the official languages and thus also the multilingualism of the federal authorities.

Publications Act and Ordinance: official texts are simultaneously published in German, French and Italian versions. In the case of legal texts, the three language versions are all legally binding.

Ordinance on Translation within the General Federal Administration: stipulates how the language services are organised in the individual departments and in the Federal Chancellery and how tasks are distributed. It also serves as the legal basis for the interdepartmental working group on translation services.

Federal Assembly Ordinance on the Drafting Committee and Regulation on the Internal Drafting Committee: regulate the composition, tasks and procedures of the Parliamentary Drafting Committee and Internal Drafting Committee.

Federal Council Directives to promote multilingualism in the Federal Administration: contain regulations on the working languages and organisation of translation and editorial work in the Federal Administration.



Multilingualism and new technologies

The continuous and rapid development of information technologies has an effect on the way the authorities communicate with the population and on the relationship between the state and the public. This development raises a number of practical questions.

Electronic media and their interactive nature make texts and information from the authorities directly accessible to the public. They also make administrative procedures increasingly easier for private individuals and companies. The new media also have an impact on the way people exercise their political rights. These technological changes require employees at the language services to become accustomed to new information technology on an ongoing basis. They need to deal with both the technical aspects of new IT and the impact it has on the way

Multilingualism means greater impact.

of working and on the volume of work. The department websites have changed the way information is disclosed to the general public, and this also poses a challenge for the language services. The increasing speed of communication calls for a new clear and concise writing style, and requires efficient cooperation among all those concerned.

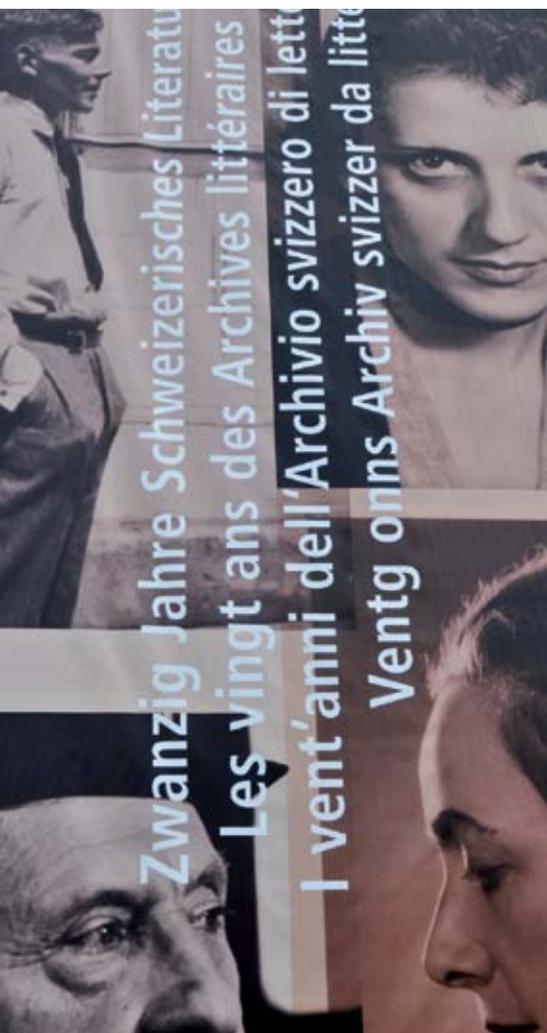
Most of the Confederation's websites are now available in three languages, some even in five. This makes it easier to communicate with the general public and makes the activities of the state more transparent. The language services' work is an important contribution to putting the Federal Council's information society strategy in Switzerland into practice.

E-government

The aim of Switzerland's e-government strategy is for the population and the business world to conduct transactions with the authorities electronically and for citizens to exercise their political rights electronically at federal, cantonal and communal level. Services are being expanded on an ongoing basis. The following tools are currently available:

- electronic publication of official texts (the Official Compilation of Federal Legislation and the Federal Gazette)
- virtual public service counter (ch.ch)
- E-voting.





Linguistic and cultural diversity: The Swiss Literary Archives at the Federal Office of Culture.

Cooperation

The federal administration language services are involved at national and international level in bodies and institutions that deal with translation, multilingual editing and drafting of legislation and government language.

At national level

- Swiss Association for Applied Linguistics (VALS-ASLA)
www.vals-asla.ch
- Swiss Association of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters (ASTTI)
www.astti.ch

- Cooperation with multilingual cantons, large companies and other Swiss organisations (Computerm).
- Délégation à la langue française Committee of the Intercantonal Conference of the Cantonal Ministers of Education of French-speaking region of Switzerland and the Ticino
www.dlf-suisse.ch
- Swiss Society of Legislation (SSL)
www.sgg-ssl.ch

Research projects

Swiss National Science Foundation's 'Linguistic Diversity and Language Competence in Switzerland' National Research Programme (NFP 56)

The Federal Chancellery's Central Language Services have provided information for the following studies: 'Wie wird Mehrsprachigkeit in der Bundesverwaltung gelebt?' (Multilingualism experienced within the Federal Administration) and 'Zur Gleichwertigkeit von Rechtstexten in verschiedenen Sprachen' (Equal status of legal texts in different languages).
www.nfp56.ch

Computational linguistics

The German Section of the Federal Chancellery Central Language Services collaborates with the Institute of Computational Linguistics of the University of Zurich on the development of computational linguistic methods for editing and drafting legislation.
www.cl.uzh.ch



A sign at the entrance of the Parliament Building greets visitors in several languages.

At international level

- Conference of Translation Services of the European States (COTSOES): COTSOES fosters the exchange of information and promotes cooperation between translation and terminology services in public administrations at European level.
www.cotsoes.org
- Editorial staff at the German Federal Ministry of Justice in Berlin: Working exchange in the editing of legislative texts in German.
www.bmj.de
- Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale (REI): The REI network brings together representatives from institutions of the European Union, Italian and Swiss public administrations, universities and other institutions. The REI's aim is to make Italian 'officialese' clear, easy to understand and accessible to everyone.
www.reterei.eu

- Commission générale de terminologie et de néologie (General Commission on Terminology and Neology)
www.dgjf.culture.gouv.fr
- Rat für Deutschsprachige Terminologie (Council for German Language Terminology)
www.radt.org
- Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung
www.rechtschreibrat.com

Institute of Multilingualism at the University of Fribourg and the University of Teacher Education, Fribourg

The Institute of Multilingualism set up the Research Centre on Multilingualism and the accompanying documentation centre when the Languages Ordinance came into force. The Institute works with the federal administration and carries out studies on themes of common interest.

www.institut-mehrsprachigkeit.ch
www.centre-multilingualism.ch

Additional information

www.bk.admin.ch/languages