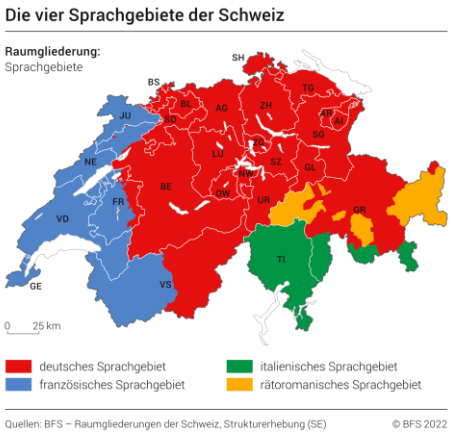
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

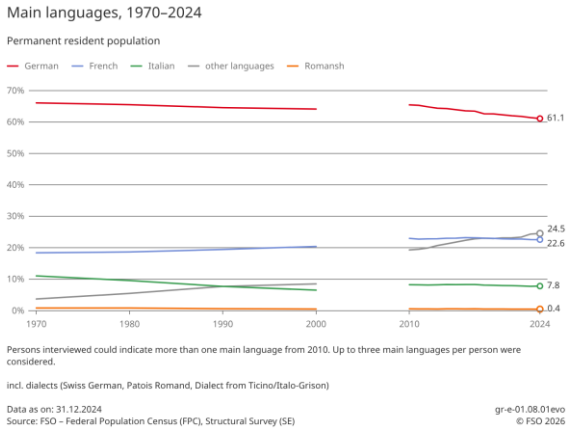
Delegierte des Bundes für Mehrsprachigkeit
Déléguée fédérale au plurilinguisme
Delegata federale al plurilinguismo
Delegada federala per la plurilinguitad

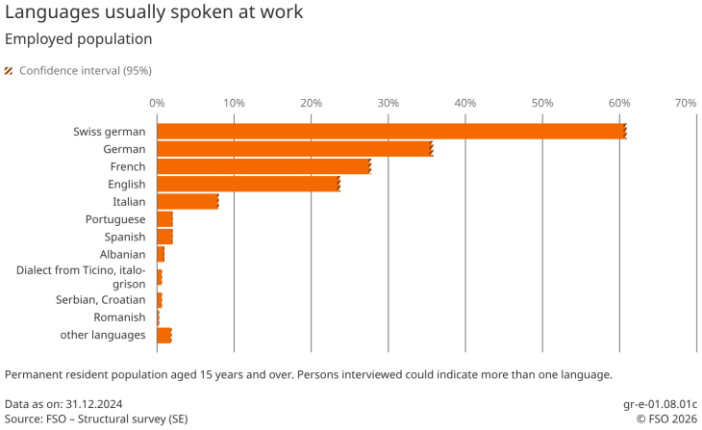
Swiss plurilingualism – a brief guide

The four language regions and the main languages

Cultural diversity and plurilingualism are part of the foundation of Switzerland. The Swiss Confederation is composed of 26 Cantons united by the determination to live together; Switzerland is thus a «Willensnation». Three Cantons are bilingual, one Canton is trilingual. The national languages of Switzerland are German, French, Italian and Romansh. The most spoken language at work in Switzerland is Swiss German (60,8%), followed by German (35,6%), French (27,6%), English (23,6%) and Italian (8,0%). Romansh, the fourth national language, is spoken at work by 0,3% of the active working population.







Plurilingualism and the Federal Administration

Anyone may contact the Federal Authorities in one of the official languages and receive a response in that language. At the federal level, the official languages are German, French and Italian, as well as Romansh when communicating with persons who speak Romansh. The personnel of the Federal Administration must be able to work in the official language of their choice and have language skills required for multilingual communication. For example, senior managers must have good, active knowledge of at least a second official language and passive knowledge of a third official language.
The data relating to the first language of the personnel of the Swiss Confederation shows that overall, the objectives of the representation of the linguistic communities have been achieved in the Federal Administration. However, further action is still needed. Major disparities between departments and administrative units (federal offices) remain. Some administrative units aside, the Italian- and Romansh-speaking communities are particularly under-represented. Furthermore, the data shows that the representation of the linguistic communities is not balanced in the upper salary levels.

Legal bases

Switzerland's cultural diversity and determination to live together are anchored in the Federal Constitution. The plurilingualism policy is based on the Languages Act (LangA) and has four priorities: 1) the use of official languages by the Federal Authorities; 2) the encouragement of understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities; 3) the financial support for plurilingual Cantons; 4) the support for the Cantons of Graubünden and Ticino in their measures to promote Romansh and Italian. The Languages Ordinance (LangO) of 2014 strengthened the policy of multilingualism. Amongst other things, it establishes target values for the representation of linguistic communities in the Federal Administration, in the departments and in the administrative units (Art. 7) as well as the language requirements (Art. 8).

Linguistic communities	German	French	Italian	Romansh
Target values for the representation of linguistic communities (Art.7 LangO), valid until 31.12.2025	68.5-70.5%	21.5-23.5%	6.5-8.5%	0.5-1.0%
Representations of the linguistic communities in the Federal Administration (2025)	69.1%	23.5%	7.0%	0.5%
Target values for the representation of linguistic communities (Art.7 LangO), effective from 01.01.2026	66.5-68.5%	22.5-24.5%	7.5-8.5%	0.5-1.0%

The role of the Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism

The Government appoints the Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism. Her main tasks are to intervene in the key processes to promote plurilingualism, coordinate and evaluate the implementation of strategic objectives, raise awareness and keep the Federal Administration and the population informed, as well as foster collaboration and exchange of best practices on a national and international level.
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