

The ABC Switzerland – UN



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

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Introduction

Switzerland has been a full member of the United Nations (UN) since 2002. Even before it joined, Switzerland was involved in numerous UN specialised agencies and programmes, participated in special missions and provided experts. It was the first country to be granted observer status in the UN General Assembly in 1946.

Some 54.6% of the Swiss electorate voted in favour of joining the UN on 3 March 2002. Therefore, Switzerland is the only country to have joined the UN on the basis of a referendum. The UN General Assembly in New York accepted Switzerland as the 190th member state on 10 September 2002. 2016, the UN had 193 member states.

The UN was founded in the final stages of World War II with the aim of avoiding future world wars. It has 51 founding members, and its objectives are set out in its Charter:

- to maintain international peace and security
- to develop friendly relations among nations
- to solve international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian nature through international cooperation
- to promote and strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, regardless of race, sex, language, or religion.



The Swiss electorate voted by a majority of 54.6% on 3 March 2002 in favour of Switzerland joining the United Nations. Sixteen years earlier, the people of Switzerland had rejected UN membership in a referendum with a clear majority.

As an organisation, the UN does not have the powers or the authorities of a world government. It is a voluntary association of sovereign states that are committed to shared values and goals. However, its decisions and resolutions affect the international community – in particular in the area of legislation and international justice. Since the end of the Cold War, the UN has had greater political leeway. More and more frequently it intervenes to mediate in crises and conflicts, carry out peacekeeping operations, and protect civilian populations.

As the only universal political organisation, the UN has various functions. It is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, promoting sustainable development and global well-being, and protecting human rights. It coordinates humanitarian aid and looks after refugees as well as internally displaced people. The UN also collects data and compiles statistics, for example, in the area of public health. It is a universal forum for political debate and for developing solutions to global problems. It is the place where international norms and standards are developed.

The UN's Headquarters are in New York, where its principal organs, the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council, convene. Its second largest office is in Geneva, which houses the United Nations Office at Geneva, as well as the Human Rights Council and numerous UN specialised agencies and organisations. Two-thirds of the UN's global activities take place in Geneva, where international conferences, negotiations, and talks are held in all of the UN's areas of activity throughout the year.

The UN has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize no fewer than nine times. In 2013, it was awarded to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and in 2005 to the International Atomic Energy Agency



The Palais des Nations in Geneva became the headquarters of the League of Nations in 1929. After the League's dissolution in 1946, the building became the seat of the United Nations Office in Geneva – the largest UN office after the headquarters in New York.

(IAEA) in Vienna and its Director General, Mohamed ElBaradei. Previous prize-winners include UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2001, the UN peacekeeping forces in 1988, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1954 and 1981, the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1969 and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 1965.

Why Switzerland is a member of the UN

Switzerland's foreign policy objectives largely coincide with the aims of the UN. To ensure independence and safeguard welfare, the Swiss Federal Constitution demands:

- alleviation of need and poverty in the world
- respect for human rights
- promotion of democracy
- peaceful co-existence of nations and
- preservation of the environment.

Switzerland's UN membership allows the country to represent its foreign policy objectives and interests effectively. In this respect Switzerland benefits from the fact that it pursues issue-oriented politics with no hidden agendas. Within the scope of the UN, Switzerland is able to combine interests, forge coalitions, and pursue plans with like-minded partners.

Switzerland is committed to ensuring a strong, effective, and efficient UN that carries out its mandates in a resource-conscious manner, attaches great importance to coherence and coordination, and strives for transparency and accountability. It campaigns actively for improved working methods within the Security Council and was instrumental in setting up the Human Rights Council in Geneva. In the budget committee of the General Assembly and in the administrative boards of the various funds and programmes, Switzerland advocates increased efficiency and effectiveness. It also specifically campaigns for a strategic focus and more coherence and coordination within the UN development architecture.

The Federal Council wants to strengthen Switzerland's commitment to the UN and has registered its candidacy with the Western European and other States Group (WEOG) for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2023–24 period. The Foreign Affairs Committees of the National Council and Council of States already backed this candidacy in 2010 during the consultation process. The election will take place in 2022.

This edition of the 'ABC' explains UN institutions and bodies, defines key terms in UN vocabulary, and provides an overview of Switzerland's UN policy without claiming it to be exhaustive.

Glossary

A

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda builds on the Millennium Development Goals, which guided international development cooperation efforts between 2000 and 2015. It sets out the priorities of global sustainable development for the period up to 2030. Over 150 heads of government adopted the 17 goals and 169 targets at a New York summit in September 2015.

An integral component of the 2030 Agenda is the framework for financing and implementing sustainable development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. It calls for effective international support with both concessional and non-concessional financing. Public development cooperation efforts and private investment are to complement 'domestic resources'.

The main aim of the 2030 Agenda is to combat the root causes of poverty and inequality, rather than the symptoms. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) not only address social, economic and environmental concerns, the Agenda also recognises that peace and security, the rule of law and good governance are fundamental to sustainable development. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs apply to all countries.

During the preparation and negotiation phase, which lasted some three years, Switzerland made a strong case for an ambitious 2030 Agenda. It campaigned in particular for inclusion of individual goals on water, health, gender equality, peace, and the rule of law. Switzerland also succeeded in ensuring that the new agenda would incorporate important concerns such as migration, disaster risk reduction, and sustainability in production and consumption.

Switzerland will compile a comprehensive country report for the UN by 2018 on the status of SDG implementation. The Federal Administration will determine the areas in which the country will take action and report on how it intends to achieve the 17 global SDGs.

For Switzerland, the 2030 Agenda is an integral part of its international cooperation efforts for the 2017–20 period. Switzerland's Sustainable Development Strategy 2016–19 takes account of the SDGs. The core element is an action plan with nine thematic action areas, each containing a long-term vision that is substantiated with medium-term targets.

- » Millennium Development Goals
- » Summit

ACT group

ACT is an informal cross-regional group comprising more than 20 member states working to enhance the accountability, coherence, and transparency of the UN and the Security Council in particular. The group was launched in May 2013.

The ACT's key demands are:

- more transparent decision-making processes
- better opportunities for involvement for states that are not represented on the Security Council
- closer consultations between the Security Council, states that provide troops, the neighbouring states concerned, and regional organisations
- increased accountability when implementing resolutions
- voluntary suspension of the veto right for the permanent Security Council members in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity
- stricter observance of rule-of-law principles in targeted sanctions.

- » Reforms
- » Security Council

Actors

In the UN there are three major groups of actors: states, civil society, and the UN administration.

The principle of one country, one vote applies for the member states in every UN body. This means that each UN member state – irrespective of its size and significance in global politics – participates in the UN General Assembly on an equal footing. The only exception is the Security Council due to the veto right of the five permanent members.

Although equality in the UN is effectively undercut by political and economic power discrepancies, smaller states can still make their voices heard. They can join forces with other states with which they share interests to form formal or informal groups in order to champion mutually coordinated positions and lend weight to their concerns. The coalitions vary depending on the issues at stake.

Examples of such groups are:

- The five regional groups (the African Group, the Asia-Pacific Group, the Eastern European Group, the Latin American and Caribbean Group [GRU-LAC], and the Western European and Others Group [WEOG])
- The G-77 group, which mainly brings together developing and emerging countries
- The Forum of Small States, which offers a platform to smaller states
- The Groups of Friends, which exist in all of the UN's areas of activity. The ACT group for better working methods within the Security Council, which is coordinated by Switzerland, falls into this category.

Civil society, in particular non-governmental organisations, play an important role in the functioning of the UN, whether as partners to implement humanitarian or development programmes of UN agencies, as suppliers of ideas, sources of information, or lobbyists of UN member states. Non-governmental organisations are granted access to various UN forums if they meet certain criteria.

The UN administration is responsible for UN day-to-day affairs and carries out mandates it receives from member states.

» Security Council
» ACT group

B

Blue Helmets and Blue Berets

The military personnel deployed by the UN – often referred to as 'Blue Helmets' or 'Blue Berets' on account of their blue headwear – carry out peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations worldwide. Depending on the type of mission, troops are unarmed or lightly armed for self-defence. Member states provide military personnel for peacekeeping missions on a voluntary basis.

The UN Security Council makes decisions regarding deployment of peacekeeping troops and duration and scope of missions.

Switzerland participates in UN missions with unarmed UN military observers.

» Security Council
» Peacekeeping mission

C

Charter of the United Nations

The UN Charter of 26 June 1945 is the UN's founding treaty. As an international treaty, it sets out the rights and obligations of member states and defines the UN's responsibilities and organs. It also enshrines the fundamental principles of international relations – from sovereign equality (one country = one vote), to prohibiting threats or use of force in international relations and imposing sanctions in case of violations.

The Charter establishes six principal organs:

- the General Assembly: consisting of representatives of all member states and debates issues of international concern
- the Security Council: composed of 15 member states, including five permanent members (with veto powers); bears the main responsibility for maintaining world peace and international security
- the Economic and Social Council: composed of 54 member states and responsible for coordinating the UN's economic and social activities
- the UN Secretariat: administers the UN and implements resolutions of UN bodies

- the International Court of Justice: the principal judicial organ of the UN and international justice
- the Trusteeship Council: was composed of the five permanent members of the Security Council from 1975 to 1994, when it suspended operations. Its original task was to supervise administration of trust territories (mainly former colonies).

The Charter sets out four main purposes:

- to maintain international peace and security
- to develop friendly relations among nations
- to solve international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian nature through international cooperation
- to promote and strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

- » International organisation
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council
- » Economic and Social Council
- » Secretariat
- » International Court of Justice
- » Veto powers
- » Sanctions

The efforts and activities of nations to attain these common goals are harmonised within the UN. The obligations set out in the Charter (for example to enforce the Security Council's sanctions) take precedence over other international treaty obligations of member states.

Combating corruption

Switzerland ratified the UN Convention against Corruption of 31 October 2003 in September 2009. It contains provisions aimed at preventing corruption as well as promoting and facilitating international cooperation in providing mutual legal assistance and technical assistance to developing and emerging countries. It stipulates that illicitly acquired assets must be repatriated under certain conditions (Chapter V).

Combating crime

The international community created an instrument to combat global criminal organisations and their transnational activities with the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime of 2000 (the "Palermo Convention"). Its parties agreed on a shared definition of a criminal organisation and committed themselves to comply with minimum standards in terms of requirements and measures as well as to engage in international cooperation. The convention is supplemented by three optional protocols on combating human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and firearms.

Switzerland ratified the convention and the two optional protocols on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in 2006. The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, as well as against the illicit trade of such firearms (Firearms protocol) came into force in Switzerland on 27 December 2012.

Switzerland is also actively involved in the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). The Commission focuses on various aspects of international efforts to combat crime – including the fight against human trafficking. Switzerland launched a diplomatic initiative calling for a concrete foundation to combat human trafficking more effectively and to introduce international guidelines.

» Combating
human
trafficking

Combating human trafficking

The UN is committed to fighting human trafficking as part of its efforts to combat crime. In November 2000, the General Assembly adopted two additional protocols in this area. They were adopted at the same time as the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime. The 'guardian' of the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, is the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which is based in Vienna. It coordinates efforts and supports related programmes. The UNODC bases its efforts on the four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution, and cooperation.

Switzerland ratified the Palermo protocol in October 2006 and brought it into effect one month later.

» Combating
crime

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is one of the UN's nine core international human rights treaties. It aims to allow people with disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of life (public, economic, and social), to promote equal opportunities, and to eliminate social discrimination of people with disabilities.

While the Convention does not establish any special rights, it does substantiate the universal human rights from the perspective of persons with disabilities. The signatory states are obliged to submit regular reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the measures taken to implement the Convention and progress made. The Committee reviews the reports and gives opinions and recommendations.

Switzerland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008, in April 2014.

» Human rights
» Conventions

Conventions

This is a standard term used to describe multilateral, legally binding agreements that are usually concluded under the auspices of international organisations and which regulate issues of international relations or international law.

UN conventions are agreements under international law that are binding on UN member states. The UN General Assembly adopts a corresponding draft, which must be ratified by individual states before it becomes binding on the states parties under international law. Some examples of UN conventions are the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the UN Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

UN commissions or committees support and monitor implementation of conventions in contracting states, which must report regularly on the progress and status of implementing the relevant convention's provisions. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) compile 'shadow reports', which are also taken into account in the evaluations.

- » International organisations
- » General Assembly
- » UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- » Committees



The number of people living in extreme poverty, as measured by income, halved between 1990 and 2010 to fewer than 1.2 billion worldwide. The UN's Millennium Development Goal for poverty reduction was reached before the 2015 deadline. The goal is to eliminate extreme poverty worldwide by 2030.

Coordination of Switzerland's UN policy

Swiss UN policy is coordinated in Bern by the United Nations and International Organisations Division (UNIOD) within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

The UNIOD is the main point of contact for Switzerland's permanent missions to the UN, providing them with instructions for interventions, votes, and elections. In collaboration with the other departments, it determines the thematic priorities and mandates for negotiation with various UN bodies. It also serves as a contact point for parliamentarians, non-governmental organisations, and other interested parties. The UNIOD also ensures access to all important information and provides reports on UN activities to Parliament and the Federal Council.

» Mission

Counter-terrorism

While the term 'terrorism' is not defined under international law, activities that characterise terrorism are forbidden in principle, particularly under human rights law and international humanitarian law. Following the attacks carried out in the United States on 11 September 2001, the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted a range of counter-terrorism resolutions and conventions to strengthen multilateral cooperation in this area. The UN launched an action plan to prevent violent extremism in December 2015.

The Security Council adopted Resolution 1373 on 28 September 2001, requiring all member states to implement concrete measures. This was followed by the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2006. The Global Strategy stipulates among other things that the Security Council may impose targeted sanctions against individuals.

Since 2008, Switzerland and 10 other states have been working to ensure stricter observance of rule-of-law principles when determining targeted sanctions against individuals. This has led, for example, to creation of

an Office of the Ombudsperson to examine sanctions against Al Qaeda members and take decisions. Full compliance with obligations under international law in efforts to combat terrorism and its financing is a priority for Switzerland.

The Federal Council adopted its counter-terrorism strategy in 2015. It aims to combat terrorism within the framework of the Swiss Constitution and international law with particular consideration of basic and human rights. The strategy is based on the four-pillar principle of the UN strategy: tackling the causes of terrorism, preventing and combating terrorism, building state capacities to combat terrorism, and ensuring respect for human rights.

This also includes a commitment to fighting violent extremism. Switzerland launched its foreign policy action plan to prevent violent extremism in April 2016. It focuses on women and young people. In order to prevent radicalisation and recruitment in the long term, Switzerland aims to expand its assistance programmes in fragile contexts. These include efforts to provide more young people with future prospects through vocational education and training projects. The strategy also includes measures to reduce poverty, promote human rights, the rule of law, and good governance, include all actors in political processes, and encourage dialogue, mediation, and conflict prevention.

- » General Assembly
- » Conventions
- » Resolutions
- » Sanctions
- » Security Council
- » Human rights

D

Development cooperation

The UN plays a central role in international development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Efforts to reduce disparities between rich and poor contribute to ensuring peace and security as poverty reduction, development, and human rights are closely interconnected. The UN runs aid programmes on the ground, carries out awareness-raising activities, works with national governments to define and implement national development plans, and coordinates international missions. In September 2000 the UN adopted the Millennium Declaration, which gave rise to eight global goals – the Millennium Development Goals – that were to be achieved by the end of 2015. In 2016, the 2030 Agenda replaced the Millennium Development Goals.

Besides the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, a number of specialised agencies and programmes deal with development cooperation within the United Nations system. These include the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Switzerland is one of the largest donor countries to UN programmes. Some 40% of its development aid funds are allocated to projects within the scope of UN development cooperation efforts. 60% are committed to bilateral projects, which are usually coordinated with UN programmes.

- » Humanitarian aid
- » Combating poverty
- » Millennium Development Goals
- » 2030 Agenda
- » United Nations system
- » General Assembly
- » Economic and Social Council
- » UNICEF
- » Food and Agriculture Organization
- » UN Women
- » World Health Organization
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Disarmament

Maintenance of international peace and security is a priority for Switzerland and the UN. Disarmament, limiting global military spending, arms control, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other prohibited weapons are central concerns. The UN is a platform for multilateral negotiations on weapons bans, restrictions on use and export controls. Numerous conventions have been concluded under its auspices, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (1972), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (1996), the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (2001), and the Arms Trade Treaty (2014).

Switzerland is active in numerous multilateral forums and has been a member of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament (CD) since 1996. The CD, which is limited to 65 member states, is the world's sole standing negotiating body on issues of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Although it is formally independent, it is closely linked to the UN: The Director-General of the UN's Geneva Office is also the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

Geneva is also the seat of the permanent Secretariat of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The UN General Assembly adopted the ATT in 2013. For the first time, it sets legally binding international standards for the trade in conventional arms.

- » Non-proliferation
- » United Nations Office at Geneva
- » General Assembly

Drugs

Since its founding, the UN has addressed the issue of drugs. It works at an international level to combat the manufacture, trade, sale, and consumption of illegal substances that cause domestic and transnational problems. These include undermining of state structures by drug cartels, money laundering, financing of terrorism, criminality, and public health risks.

The General Assembly has adopted three drug-related treaties. These treaties require member states to limit production and distribution of controlled substances to medical and scientific purposes, to reduce demand for drugs for other purposes, and to prohibit drug trafficking. They also contain provisions on public health protection.

Switzerland has ratified all three conventions. It also champions its four-pillar policy in the field of drug control – prevention, therapy, harm reduction, and law enforcement – on the international stage.

Within the UN, a number of organs based in Vienna are primarily responsible for addressing drug issues:

- As the principal intergovernmental body on drug-related matters, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) issues guidelines for international cooperation;
- The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) acts as a panel of experts in issues relating to drug control, interprets the drug control conventions, and monitors compliance by member states;
- The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) coordinates drug control activities, carries out projects, and publishes reports. It serves as the secretariat for the CND and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).

- » General Assembly
- » Combating crime
- » Conventions

E

Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), based in New York, is the principal UN organ dealing with global economic matters and social issues. It coordinates cooperation between states in these areas. This includes promoting higher standards of living, solving economic, social, and health problems, and promoting human rights, culture, education, and humanitarian aid.

ECOSOC monitors implementation of resolutions passed at international conferences in the fields of the economy, development, the environment, humanitarian aid, and social affairs. It acts as a link between the UN and the specialised agencies. ECOSOC, which underwent a reform in 2013, is also an election body for numerous subsidiary organs of the UN. It mainly meets in New York. The Humanitarian Affairs Segment meets alternately in Geneva and New York.

The General Assembly elects one third of the 54 Council members for three-year terms every year. Switzerland was a member of ECOSOC in 2011 and 2012 and was able to participate in elections and votes. It became a member again in 2015.

ECOSOC is important to Switzerland, because it is where discussions take place on priority areas of Swiss foreign policy. Some examples of discussion topics include sustainable development, follow-up work on the Millennium Development Goals, implementation of the 2030 Agenda, coordination of humanitarian aid, and challenges facing the UN in supporting development efforts in member states.

- » Millennium Development Goals
- » 2030 Agenda

Emblem and flag

The UN emblem consists of a map of the world centred on the North Pole that extends to 60 degrees south latitude and includes five concentric circles. It is inscribed in a wreath of crossed olive branches in gold on a smoke-blue background. The emblem was adopted on 7 December 1946.

The flag consists of the official UN emblem in white, centred on a light blue background. Use of the flag is governed by the UN flag code and regulations.

Environment

The UN's most important environmental body is the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which is headquartered in Nairobi with a Regional Office for Europe in Geneva. The UNEP collects and evaluates global environment data, develops political instruments for environmental protection, and acts as an advocate for managing the environment wisely. In the 'Rio+20' outcome document ("The future we want"), the UN member states committed to strengthening the role of the UNEP as the leading global authority in environmental matters.

Besides the UNEP, there are other UN environmental bodies, such as the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). Numerous environmental agreements have been concluded under UN auspices. These include the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Switzerland is a state party to all the key international environmental agreements. It works actively with international partners in the area of the environment, campaigning in particular for better coherence and more synergies between institutions and actors, for example between the conventions governing chemicals and hazardous waste on an international level based in Geneva.

Geneva is home to a multitude of convention secretariats, non-governmental organisations, and institutions concerned with environmental issues. International Geneva is therefore an important centre of global environmental policy.

- » Rio Process for sustainable development
- » International Geneva

F

Fact-finding mission

Fact-finding missions are used to ensure that the competent UN organs have all the relevant facts at their disposal when acting to maintain peace and security. Fact-finding missions usually involve independent experts ascertaining the facts of a situation (if possible on the ground), for example in cases of suspected serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. The experts do not render a judgement; instead, they report and make recommendations. UN fact-finding missions can be commissioned by the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, or the Human Rights Council.

Switzerland is committed to truth, accountability, and international law and supports fact-finding missions. Swiss experts can also take part in such missions. One example is former international prosecutor Carla del Ponte, who sits on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which was commissioned by the Human Rights Council in 2011.

- » Security Council
- » General Assembly
- » Secretary-General
- » Human Rights Council
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

Food and Agriculture Organization

The Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was founded in 1945. It works to develop agricultural methods and eradicate hunger. The FAO aims to achieve food security across the world and improve living standards and lives of the population, particularly in rural areas.

Switzerland has been a member of the FAO since September 1946 and plays an active role in its governing bodies. For example, Swiss national Hans Dreyer has been Head of the Plant Production and Protection Division at the FAO since May 2016.

Switzerland's annual contribution amounts to over CHF 5 million or 1.1% of the FAO's budget. Switzerland is also involved in bilateral programmes, for example, in projects aimed at reducing food loss and waste.

- » Food security
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

Food security

Food security means that enough food is produced and/or available at affordable prices in a particular region to ensure that nobody has to go hungry and all people can lead a healthy and active life. The UN is committed to adequate food as a human right and promotes rural development and targeted investment in agriculture.

Around one in eight people around the world is affected by hunger, although there is enough food available to feed the world's population. In addition to political crises and wars, this is also due to lack of education, climate change and population growth, the biofuels boom, and rising prosperity across the globe, which is leading to an increase in consumption of animal products such as milk and meat.

Three Rome-based UN agencies deal primarily with issues related to food security:

- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),
- the World Food Programme (WFP) and
- the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Switzerland campaigns for food security within the scope of UN programmes and agencies. It is also involved in bilateral programmes to support smallholders and family farms to produce healthy food available to all. The aim is to help farmers boost production for themselves, their regions, and for international markets, while preserving natural resources for future generations.

- » Food and Agriculture Organization
- » International Fund for Agricultural Development
- » World Food Programme

Founding of the United Nations

The driving force behind the UN's creation in June 1945 was the call: "No more war; war never again". Two world wars that cost millions of lives led to the belief that a new world order must make a recurrence of such disasters impossible. All states were to assume shared responsibility for peace and contribute to collective security of the international community to repel any future aggression. States were to commit themselves to settling their disputes by peaceful means and to use force only in self-defence (prohibition on use of force).

The UN's indirect precursor was the League of Nations, which was founded after World War I with the aim of strengthening international cooperation and safeguarding world peace. Because the League of Nations failed to achieve this aim, preparations began during World War II to establish a successor organisation.

Referring to themselves for the first time as the United Nations, 26 states signed the Washington Declaration on 1 January 1942. In this declaration, the states undertook to support each other against the Axis powers Germany, Italy, and Japan, which had concluded the Tripartite Pact in 1940.

The plan was given concrete shape in 1944 by China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference (named after the country estate in Washington, DC, where the conference was held). The Charter was opened for signature in the summer of 1945 at an international conference in San Francisco. The UN Charter – signed by 51 member states – entered into force on 24 October 1945. The goal of the new organisation was to promote peace, respect of human rights, and economic and social development as a requirement for lasting peace. The UN has had its headquarters in New York since the end of 1946.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Prohibition on use of force

Functions

The UN is an association of sovereign states and has its own legal personality under international law. It has rights and obligations under international law but is not a supranational organisation like the European Union. UN member states retain full sovereignty in all matters and do not relinquish any decision-making powers to the UN.

The principal UN organs are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice, and the now inactive Trusteeship Council. Each organ has its own rules of procedure. The UN system also comprises specialised agencies, subsidiary organs, organisations, and various funds and programmes.

- » International law
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council
- » Economic and Social Council
- » United Nations Secretariat
- » International Court of Justice
- » Trusteeship Council
- » UN system
- » Specialised agencies
- » Subsidiary organs

Funding

The UN is funded through mandatory contributions from member states and through voluntary contributions. While development cooperation and humanitarian aid are mainly funded through voluntary contributions, mandatory contributions cover the regular UN budget, the cost of peacekeeping operations, the International Court of Justice in The Hague and the international criminal tribunals (e.g., for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda), as well as renovations of the UN headquarters in New York.

The share of the regular budget that each member state has to pay is reassessed by the General Assembly every three years. It takes account of the economic strength, level of development, and indebtedness of individual UN member states. On this basis, Switzerland's mandatory contribution amounts to 1.14% for the period 2016–2018. That puts it in 17th place and makes Switzerland one of the top contributors.

Switzerland is also a member of the Geneva Group, established in 1964 at the initiative of the United States and the United Kingdom to facilitate exchanges on UN budget and management issues. This informal group currently comprises all countries except China and Brazil, which pay more than 1% of the UN's regular budget. Besides Switzerland, the Geneva Group's member countries are Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Countries comprising the Geneva Group contribute approximately 75% of the regular UN budget.

- » Development cooperation
- » Humanitarian aid
- » Peacekeeping operations
- » International Court of Justice
- » International Criminal Tribunal
- » General Assembly

G

General Assembly

The General Assembly (also known as the plenary assembly) is the forum of all UN member states. Under the UN Charter, each state has one vote. The General Assembly oversees and approves the UN budget and reviews reports from subsidiary organs.

It can set standards, stipulate arrangements for summits, and adopt political resolutions that are generally non-binding on member states. Decisions on budgetary and other important issues require a two-thirds majority, for example, recommendations on peace and security, election of non-permanent members of the Security Council, and admission or refusal of members. In practice, consensus is sought.

Six main committees deal with a wide range of issues:

- Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee)
- Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee)
- Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (Third Committee)
- Special Political and Decolonisation Committee (Fourth Committee)
- Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee)
- Legal Committee (Sixth Committee).

The General Assembly meets in annual sessions which begin in mid-September. The President and Office of the General Assembly are elected for a one-year term. The presidency of the General Assembly is formally the highest office in the UN. Former Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss was the first Swiss national to hold the office of President of the UN General Assembly in 2010–2011.

Switzerland has developed a handbook and an app containing the most important information on the General Assembly.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Summit
- » Resolutions
- » Security Council
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

General debate

The General Assembly convenes every September at the UN headquarters in New York for its annual session. It opens with a two-week general debate. Each of the 193 member states has 15 minutes to speak about a topic of its choice. This task is usually performed by heads of state or government as they take precedence over ministers and diplomatic officials under international protocol. No decisions or resolutions are adopted during the general debate.

Switzerland is usually represented by the President of the Confederation. Senior government delegations also use the General Assembly opening as an opportunity to take part in side events on specific issues and bilateral meetings at the highest level.

» **General
Assembly**
» **Resolutions**

Genocide

Prevention and punishment of genocide is set out in a UN convention of 1948. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court established international jurisdiction in 2002 to prosecute those responsible for genocide. Actions that aim at complete or partial annihilation of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group qualify as genocide. These actions include notably:

- killing
- inflicting serious physical or mental injuries
- measures designed to prevent births or physically eliminate a particular group
- forcible transfer of children to another group.

The UN Secretary-General is assisted by the Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect.

» **Secretary-
General**

Global Governance

Global governance can be defined as development of a system of institutions and rules as well as mechanisms of international cooperation to tackle global problems, challenges, and transnational issues. This involves the UN system, international organisations, state and non-state actors, and regional organisations. Global governance is characterised by:

- working together to seek solutions to global challenges
- creating political structures as well as interdisciplinary and cross-cutting networks
- addressing the division of responsibilities at different political levels.

Switzerland traditionally plays a key role in this area. It campaigns at various levels for reform of the UN institutions and increased efficiency, e.g., within the scope of the ACT group or by acting as facilitator of a General Assembly resolution which defines general guidelines for the UN's development activities every four years.

International Geneva is one of the world's most important centres for global governance and for working together to tackle problems. Switzerland uses numerous international organisations that are based in Geneva as an opportunity to build networks, utilise synergies, and work together to seek solutions. For example, it provides relevant platforms and organises think-tank events.

- » ACT group
- » International Geneva

H

Headquarters

The UN has its main headquarters in New York and three other headquarters, which are known as UN offices, in Geneva, Nairobi, and Vienna. The largest UN workforce is at the UN Office at Geneva, where numerous UN agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Human Rights Council are located.

Agreements between the UN as an international organisation and the relevant host country or country where the organisation is located determine the legal status by making provisions for privileges and immunities of the organisation and its staff.

- » United Nations Office at Geneva
- » World Health Organization
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » Human Rights Council
- » International Geneva
- » Switzerland – host state

Health

Health is a fundamental human right and, as a key factor in development, makes an important contribution to social security, peace, economic stability, and thus also reducing poverty. The UN promotes global health. It works to ensure that people around the world have access to healthcare, vaccines, clean drinking water, and adequate sanitation. Health issues have become more important internationally as a result of globalisation and international mobility since diseases and infections do not stop at national borders.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which is headquartered in Geneva, coordinates international public health efforts. It works closely with other UN agencies, such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and UNICEF, as well as governments, institutions, foundations, NGOs, and representatives of the private sector and civil society.

Switzerland is actively involved in the field of health through the WHO and other UN agencies. Health is one of the thematic areas of Switzerland's host state policy.

- » World Health Organization
- » UNICEF
- » Switzerland – host state

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

During its 67th session in 2013, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the format and organisational aspects of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), a steering committee for sustainable development set up in 2012. The Forum replaced the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. It convenes every four years under the auspices of the UN General Assembly and every year under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. The next meeting under the auspices of the UN General Assembly will take place in 2019. It is a universal forum in which all member states have full membership.

The Forum's remit includes promoting and pursuing coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies within the UN, and reviewing implementation of sustainable development obligations by member states. This includes regular reviews of the 2030 Agenda. The heads of state of UN member states mandated the HLPF to play a central role in these reviews in September 2015.

- » General Assembly
- » Economic and Social Council
- » 2030 Agenda

Human rights

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. They are universal, inalienable, and indivisible. They include civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights.

Human rights are protected by customary international law and numerous international conventions at regional and global levels. Within the framework of the UN alone, the international community has developed nine core binding international human rights instruments, some of which are supplemented by additional protocols:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The treaty bodies (or monitoring bodies) monitor compliance with the agreements. There are also various regional human rights regimes, the significance of which differs by continent. The most important is the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which was adopted by the Council of Europe on 4 November 1950.

Respect for and promotion of human rights is one of Switzerland's five foreign policy objectives. Within the framework of the UN and in cooperation with other states, civil society, and experts, Switzerland works to improve the human rights situation around the world. This is based on Switzerland's long humanitarian tradi-



© Swiss Malaria Group, Lemu Golassa

The UN is committed to ensuring that people worldwide have access to healthcare, vaccinations, clean drinking water, toilets, and sewage disposal. The 2030 Agenda aims to ensure a healthy life for everyone, young and old alike, and to promote their well-being.

tion and the conviction that protection of human rights serves the cause of peace and international stability.

Switzerland campaigns in particular against use of torture, for abolition of the death penalty, and for freedom of expression and assembly. It also works to protect vulnerable groups such as minorities, children, women, refugees, prisoners, and human rights defenders. Bringing perpetrators of human rights violations to justice is also an important concern.

- » Conventions
- » Convention on the Rights of the Child
- » Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Human Rights Council

The task of the UN Human Rights Council, headquartered in Geneva, is to promote and protect human rights. It deals with human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. It makes recommendations to help solve and mitigate problematic situations and to protect victims.

Its mandate is to address all human rights issues – whether thematic or country-specific. It has various instruments at its disposal to do so. For example, it can commission independent experts or fact-finding missions to report on a specific situation and make recommendations.

The Human Rights Council was set up by the UN General Assembly as a subsidiary organ in 2006, replacing the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights. One of the new mechanisms compared with the Human Rights Commission is the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, which all UN member states must undergo every four years. It involves a review of the human rights records of all member states on the basis of a report by the state in question, a report by UNHCR, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a report by civil society actors. During the evaluation, the other UN member states can make recommendations to improve the human rights record of the state under review. The aim is for all UN member states to better implement and respect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Council meets at least three times a year for at least 10 weeks in total. The UN General Assembly elects the 47 members by an absolute majority for a three-year term. In the event of serious and systematic human rights violations, the UN General Assembly can suspend a member of the UN Human Rights Council by a two-thirds majority. It made use of this for the first time in March 2011, when Libya was suspended due to violence used against anti-government protesters.

The Human Rights Council was established in response to a Swiss initiative. Switzerland is a member for the third time for the period from 2016 to 2018 following two previous mandates from 2006 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2013.

- » General Assembly
- » Human rights
- » Fact-finding mission

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian aid targets people in need regardless of race, gender, language, religion, political opinion, or social status. It is based on a series of international agreements such as the Geneva Conventions and the UN Refugee Convention and is guided by the internationally recognised principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

The UN plays a crucial role in coordinating international humanitarian aid. Switzerland is particularly committed to ensuring that aid reaches those in need efficiently and quickly. It supports operations of humanitarian organisations by providing financial contributions, food, and relief supplies, or through the detachment of experts from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

- » Refugee Convention
- » Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » World Food Programme

Within the UN, Switzerland works in particular with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the UN Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

Internally displaced persons

Internally displaced persons or internal refugees are people who have been forced to flee their homes due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters. Unlike refugees, internally displaced people stay within their own countries and are therefore not protected by the UN Refugee Convention.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of 1998 contain recommendations on how governments and NGOs can best protect the rights of internally displaced people. A UN special rapporteur monitors implementation of these recommendations. Between 2004 and 2010, Swiss legal scholar Walter Kälin was UN special rapporteur for the human rights of internally displaced persons.

- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » Refugee Convention
- » Swiss nationals at the UN



Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, considers the 2030 Agenda to be one of the UN's most significant documents, indeed a new social contract. The overall goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to leave no one behind.

International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague began work in 1946 and is one of the UN's six principal organs. It replaced the Permanent Court of International Justice, which was established in 1922. Its main function is to settle disputes between states that have accepted its jurisdiction. It also gives advisory opinions on legal questions at the request of the General Assembly and Security Council. Individuals and non-state entities cannot refer matters to the ICJ. The court has its own statute, which is an integral part of the UN Charter and regulates its functioning.

The 15 judges who make up the Court are elected for nine-year terms by both the General Assembly and the Security Council. They must be of different nationalities.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council

International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, which began its work in 2002, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. The ICC can only intervene if the competent national authorities are unwilling or unable to lead investigations or to punish the crimes committed.

The ICC was established on the basis of the Rome Statute, which sets out the court's structure and procedures. It was adopted in early summer 1998 in Rome. Switzerland ratified the statute in 2001. The working relationship between the ICC and the UN is regulated by a relationship agreement.

- » International justice

International Fund for Agricultural Development

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) works to promote agricultural development and reduce poverty in rural areas of developing countries. The Fund is both a UN specialised agency and an international financial institution. It aims to raise the incomes and improve food security for poor rural populations by helping them adapt to changing environmental and economic conditions.

Switzerland has been a member of the IFAD, which is based in Rome, since its foundation in 1977. It is a member of the executive bodies and supports IFAD with an annual contribution of CHF 9.5 million as well as additional bilateral contributions, for example, to help farmers adapt to climate change.

Swiss national Michel Mordasini has been vice-president of IFAD since 2013.

- » Food security
- » Swiss nationals at the UN



The former Swiss foreign minister, Joseph Deiss, was president of the UN General Assembly in 2010–2011. The presidency of the General Assembly, which is limited to one year, is the highest formal office within the UN.

International Geneva

After New York, Geneva is the most important centre for international cooperation, multilateral negotiations, international dialogue, and mediation. Two thirds of the UN's global activities in these areas take place in Geneva, which means the city plays host to some 2,700 international conferences and meetings every year. The UN and the UN Office at Geneva employ some 9,500 staff, more than any other UN location in the world.

More than 30 international agencies, programmes, funds, and institutes are headquartered in Geneva, and more than 170 states are represented in Geneva by a permanent mission, including Switzerland as member and host state. On top of this, some 250 NGOs have consultative status at the UN. All together, they provide 45,000 jobs. Geneva's international community (including family members) comprises over 47,000 people from all over the world.

Every year, around 200,000 delegates and experts take part in international conferences and meetings – particularly in the fields of human rights, humanitarian engagement and international law, peace, security and disarmament, economy, trade and development cooperation, health, labour, intellectual property, the environment, science, research, telecommunications, and global governance.

- » International organisation
- » Mission
- » Switzerland – host state
- » United Nations Office
- » Human rights
- » Disarmament
- » Development cooperation
- » Health
- » Environment
- » Global governance

International justice

The international justice system is underpinned by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to which states can submit cases in the event of legal disputes with other states.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the central institution for trying individuals charged with war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Unlike the ICC, the ad hoc tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, have limited mandates and jurisdictions and can only deal with crimes committed in a certain place at a cer-

tain time. From 1999 to 2007, former Swiss Attorney General Carla del Ponte served as chief prosecutor at the UN international criminal tribunals for war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia and genocide carried out in Rwanda.

Mixed criminal tribunals with national and international members are also possible. They deal with crimes committed in specific conflicts or under certain regimes. Examples of such tribunals are the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for prosecuting perpetrators of Khmer Rouge crimes.

At global level, there is no universal court that can deliver binding judgments in cases of human rights violations. At regional level, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg monitors compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Ten independent treaty bodies monitor implementation of the core international UN human rights treaties. They consider states parties' periodic reports and individual complaints. Although they are not courts in the literal sense, they promote clarity and understanding of the standards. Besides these monitoring mechanisms, other Charter-based policy enforcement agencies (notably the Human Rights Council) have been formed.

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is based in Hamburg and began its work in 1996. It is open to all contracting parties of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982. Its 21 judges can be invoked to settle disputes in the fields of shipping, seabed use, fisheries, and the marine environment.

When Switzerland ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 2008, it declared that it recognised the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea as the sole competent body for maritime disputes.

- » International Court of Justice
- » International Criminal Court
- » Human rights
- » Human Rights Council

International law

International law consists of rules and principles governing relationships between states. It is the foundation of peace and stability for the benefit and protection of all people. International law covers various topics, such as prohibition on use of force, human rights, protection of people in armed conflicts (international humanitarian law), and combating terrorism and other serious crimes. It regulates cooperation at intergovernmental level in the areas of the environment, trade, development, telecommunications, and transport.

On account of the sovereignty of states, the provisions set out in international agreements only apply to each state once the legislation has been expressly adopted by the state in question. This not only applies to the mandatory rules of international law (i.e., basic rules that no state may override) but also to rules based on customary state practice that are deemed to be customary international law. For example, prohibition of genocide is a mandatory provision of international law.

In Switzerland, Parliament and the electorate – by means of a mandatory or optional referendum – decide on international-law obligations. In certain areas, this power has been transferred by law to the Federal Council. International law takes precedence over national legislation.

- » Prohibition on use of force
- » Human rights
- » Counter-terrorism
- » International justice



© UN Photo, Eric Kanaistein

The UN supports sport as an instrument to promote development and peace. Games and sport are acknowledged throughout the world as a means to nurture healthy development and as a practical training ground for fair conduct.

International Law Commission

A subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly, the International Law Commission consists of 34 recognised experts in international law, each elected by the General Assembly for a five-year period. It meets in Geneva.

The Commission develops and codifies international law. It prepares draft treaties for submission to the General Assembly, which can then recommend that the UN member states finalise and conclude an international treaty (convention) based on these proposals. The most important treaties concluded in this way are the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic and Consular Relations, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

- » General Assembly
- » Convention
- » International Criminal Court
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

Lucius Caflisch, a Swiss national, was a member of the International Law Commission from 2011 to 2016.

International organisations

Under international law, an international organisation is a permanent association of at least two states dedicated to supranational tasks across national borders. International organisations are usually established on the basis of a multilateral constituting agreement (charter) that defines the organisation's tasks, rights, and obligations. They must also have at least one organ which has the power to act. International organisations have their own legal personality; however, the individual states retain their sovereignty and do not surrender any rights to the higher authority.

In addition to the UN, the world's most comprehensive alliance of states, there are some 250 other international organisations. These include the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

M

Mediation

Mediation is an instrument of diplomacy. Modern mediation is understood to be the constructive support for peace processes by third parties with the aim of developing long-term sustainable solutions with all those concerned. Mediation is a process undertaken voluntarily by conflict parties, and in international peace processes may be complex and take months or years.

Within the UN framework, Switzerland contributes both financial and human resources to various mediation projects. For example, it makes contributions to specific missions and mediation mandates.

Since 2005, Switzerland has been working closely with the UN to establish uniform standards and guidelines for mediators. It was one of the first countries to advocate creation of a permanent mediation support unit within the UN Secretariat.

» United Nations
Secretariat

Migration dialogue

The international dialogue on migration is important to Switzerland. It promotes cooperation and builds bridges between countries of origin, transit, and destination. Switzerland is working to integrate the issue of migration more effectively within the UN system. During preparations for the 2030 Agenda, Switzerland played a leading role in ensuring inclusion of goals on migration.

It champions migration issues within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council and works with the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants. Switzerland also works closely with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for International Migration, for example, at the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants, held in September 2016.

At ministerial level, the 61st session of the UN General Assembly discussed issues of international migration and development for the first time in 2006. This gave rise to the Global Forum on Migration and Development

(GFMD), a platform for sharing information and experience and for promoting closer cooperation between states and other actors. The Forum is held once a year, with the role of chair rotating between its members. Switzerland chaired the GFMD in 2011. It is also a member of the Steering Group.

Delegates at the 68th session of the UN General Assembly addressed international migration and development for the second time in 2013. They adopted a declaration comprising 34 points, setting out the most urgent action points and stressing their commitment to cooperate in all migration matters.

The 2030 Agenda is a further step towards mainstreaming migration within the UN system. It recognises the positive contribution of migration to sustainable development. It also underscores the importance of planned and well-managed migration policies to facilitate safe migration while setting clear goals to protect the human rights and working rights of migrants.

Switzerland also works closely with the UN system on migration issues. The Global Migration Group (GMG) is an association of 14 UN agencies (including the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, UNESCO and UN Women), as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank. The Group aims to promote wider application of all relevant international and regional instruments and norms relating to migration. It also aims to encourage adoption of more coherent policies to deal with international migration and to work together in tackling related challenges.

- » Human rights
- » Secretary-General
- » Summit
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- » World Health Organization
- » 2030 Agenda
- » UNICEF
- » UNESCO
- » UN Women



The United Nations System

UN Principal Organs

General Assembly

Security Council

Economic and Social Council

Secretariat

International Court of Justice

Trusteeship Council⁵

Subsidiary Organs

Main and other sessional committees
Disarmament Commission
Human Rights Council
International Law Commission
Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Funds and Programmes¹

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

- UNCDF** United Nations Capital Development Fund
- UNV** United Nations Volunteers

UNEP⁸ United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT⁸ United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
WFP World Food Programme (UN/FAO)

Subsidiary Organs

Counter-terrorism committees
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT)
Military Staff Committee

Functional Commissions

Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
Narcotic Drugs
Population and Development
Science and Technology for Development
Social Development
Statistics
Status of Women
United Nations Forum on Forests

Regional Commissions⁸

ECA Economic Commission for Africa
ECE Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Departments and Offices

EOSG Executive Office of the Secretary-General
DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DFS Department of Field Support
DGACM Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
DM Department of Management
DPA Department of Political Affairs
DPI Department of Public Information
DPKO Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSS Department of Safety and Security
OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLA Office of Legal Affairs
OSAA Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
PBSO Peacebuilding Support Office
SRSG/CAAC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
SRSG/SVC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
UNISDR United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Research and Training

- DIR** United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
- ITAR** United Nations Institute for Training and Research
- UNSC** United Nations System Staff College
- UNU** United Nations University

Other Entities

- ITC** International Trade Centre (UN/WTO)
- UNCTAD**^{1,8} United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- UNHCR**¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNOPS** United Nations Office for Project Services
- UNRWA**¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- UN-Women**¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Related Organizations

- CTBT Preparatory Commission**
Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
- IAEA**^{1,3} International Atomic Energy Agency
- ICC** International Criminal Court
- ISA** International Seabed Authority
- ITLOS** International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
- OPCW**³ Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
- WTO**^{1,4} World Trade Organization

- Peacekeeping operations and political missions
- Sanctions committees (ad hoc)
- Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Advisory Subsidiary Body

Peacebuilding Commission

HLPF High-level Political Forum on sustainable development

Other Bodies

- Committee for Development Policy
- Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
- Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- UNAIDS** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UNGEGN** United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Research and Training

- UNICRI** United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
- UNRISD** United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Specialized Agencies^{1,5}

- FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- ICAO** International Civil Aviation Organization
- IFAD** International Fund for Agricultural Development
- ILO** International Labour Organization
- IMF** International Monetary Fund
- IMO** International Maritime Organization
- ITU** International Telecommunication Union
- UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNIDO** United Nations Industrial Development Organization
- UNWTO** World Tourism Organization
- UPU** Universal Postal Union
- WHO** World Health Organization
- WIPO** World Intellectual Property Organization
- WMO** World Meteorological Organization
- World Bank Group**⁷
 - **IBRD** International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
 - **IDA** International Development Association
 - **IFC** International Finance Corporation

Notes:

- ¹ All members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).
- ² UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) is the UN's focal point vis-à-vis the United Nations Foundation, Inc.
- ³ IAEA and OPCW report to the Security Council and the GA.
- ⁴ WTO has no reporting obligation to the GA, but contributes on an ad hoc basis to GA and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) work on, inter alia, finance and development issues.
- ⁵ Specialized agencies are autonomous organizations whose work is coordinated through ECOSOC (intergovernmental level) and CEB (inter-secretariat level).
- ⁶ The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994, as on 1 October 1994 Palau, the last United Nations Trust Territory, became independent.
- ⁷ International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) are not specialized agencies but are part of the World Bank Group in accordance with Articles 57 and 63 of the Charter.
- ⁸ The secretariats of these organs are part of the UN Secretariat.

This Chart is a reflection of the functional organization of the United Nations System and for informational purposes only. It does not include all offices or entities of the United Nations System.

Millennium Development Goals

The international community adopted the Millennium Declaration at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. This gave rise to the Millennium Development Goals, a catalogue of measures with eight specific goals and dates for achieving them to tackle extreme poverty by 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the subsequent years were set out in the 2030 Agenda.

By the time the Millennium Development Goals expired in 2015, significant progress had been made: the number of people living in extreme poverty and having to survive on less than USD 1.25 a day was halved between 1990 and 2015. Income poverty declined in all developing regions between 2010 and 2015 – including in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the proportion is highest. Targets regarding access to clean drinking water were also achieved, and the target relating to improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers was exceeded. In other areas (e.g., maternal mortality and biodiversity), the goals were not fully achieved.

According to the Federal Council Dispatch and Switzerland's Strategy on International Cooperation for the period 2013–2016, Switzerland's efforts focused on combating poverty, education, gender equality, health, and water. Swiss programmes have provided 370,000 people with better access to drinking water and sanitation facilities every year, enabling some 30,000 people every year to benefit from improved irrigation systems.

Switzerland also stepped up its efforts to develop and improve healthcare services to reduce infant and maternal mortality. It contributed to improved food supply in poor countries, greater environmental sustainability, safeguarding biodiversity, and better water management.

- » 2030 Agenda
- » Combating poverty
- » Food security
- » Health
- » Rio Process for sustainable development

Mission

A mission is the term used for a representation of a state abroad or in an international organisation. Like the majority of member states, Switzerland maintains an official diplomatic representation ('Permanent Mission') to the UN offices in Geneva, New York, and Vienna.

The tasks of a Permanent Mission include:

- safeguarding Switzerland's interests
- liaising and developing networks
- participating in negotiations and votes
- reporting and communication.

The Permanent Mission in Geneva also represents Switzerland as the host state and is a key point of contact for questions relating to International Geneva.

- » Switzerland – host state
- » International Geneva

N

Neutrality

The law of neutrality was codified in the Hague Convention of 18 October 1907 and is also part of customary international law. It sets out the rights and obligations of neutral states.

The law of neutrality can only be applied to conflicts between states and does not apply to internal conflicts. It does not apply to military operations authorised by the UN Security Council. The law of neutrality does not prevent neutral states from supporting such operations, as the Security Council works on behalf of the international community to restore international peace and security. However, UN member states are at no time obliged to participate in military operations or armed peacekeeping missions.

The policy of neutrality is not defined in law. It represents all measures that a neutral state takes to safeguard the credibility and predictability of its permanent neutral status. Implementation of a neutrality policy relies on analysis of the respective international environment.

- » Security Council
- » Peacekeeping mission

Non-proliferation

Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other banned weapons is a key aim of both the UN and Switzerland. Switzerland seeks comprehensive, world-wide elimination of all weapons of mass destruction (disarmament). It is also imperative to prevent such weapons from falling into the hands of armed non-state actors.

From a Swiss perspective, disarmament and non-proliferation are two mutually complementary and related objectives. Switzerland has ratified all relevant international treaties and is working in numerous multilateral forums, such as the World Disarmament Conference and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to ensure their universal validity and to close any loopholes they may contain. It also supports international control measures (export controls) and implements the UN Security Council's non-proliferation measures.

» Disarmament



Observer status

The General Assembly can grant observer status to states, state-like entities, and international organisations. For example, as non-member states with observer status, the Vatican and Palestine can participate in UN General Assembly negotiations but cannot propose or vote on resolutions. They also have the right to be represented at the UN headquarters in New York by a permanent observer mission. Switzerland was also a non-member state with observer status from 1946 until it joined the UN in 2002.

Some 70 intergovernmental organisations – including the European Union (EU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – also have observer status as entities with fewer rights than non-member states.

» General Assembly

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) was set up in Geneva in 1994. It leads global human rights efforts and promotes and encourages respect for human rights. It speaks out in the face of human rights violations, irrespective of where they are committed and by whom. It compiles specialist reports and is committed to human rights education and training to ensure that people are aware of their own rights and can uphold their rights and those of others. It helps develop international standards, monitors compliance with existing provisions and helps governments implement them.

UNHCHR works with a wide range of different partners. These not only include governments but also NGOs, national human rights organisations, other UN bodies, and international organisations. In order to reach all those most affected by human rights violations, the UNHCHR is constantly expanding its presence in the field. It also serves as the Secretariat of the Human Rights Council. In this function it supports the independent human

rights experts commissioned by the UN, as well as independent investigation and monitoring committees.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for all the UN's human rights activities. He is appointed by the UN Secretary-General, and the appointment must be approved by the General Assembly.

» Human rights
» Human Rights Council

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is based in Geneva, commenced operations in 1951. It aims to protect refugees all over the world and to find long-term solutions to their problems. The UNHCR works closely with governments, international as well as regional organisations, and NGOs in doing this. Its mandate and activities are based on the UNHCR statute, the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, and the related protocol of 1967.

The UNHCR safeguards the refugee status, grants protection, and provides humanitarian aid. It advocates long-term solutions – voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, local integration or resettlement in a third country. Today it can also assist other groups, such as stateless people, persons with disputed citizenship, and in certain cases internally displaced people. The UNHCR is also involved in drafting national and international legislation to protect refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons.

Three previous UN High Commissioners for Refugees have been Swiss nationals: August R. Lindt (1956-1960), Felix Schnyder (1960-1965), and Jean-Pierre Hocké (1986-1989). Since 1958 Switzerland has had a seat on the Executive Committee, which advises the High Commissioner for Refugees, approves programmes, and oversees the finances and administration of the UNHCR.

As part of its humanitarian aid budget, Switzerland contributes around CHF 40 million a year to the UNHCR. In addition to a basic contribution, Switzerland funds UNHCR programmes through its humanitarian aid efforts. It also provides experts to the UNHCR. Therefore, the UNHCR is one of the four main beneficiaries of Switzerland's multilateral humanitarian aid.

- » Refugee Convention
- » Humanitarian aid
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

Official languages

The official languages of the UN are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. At every formal meeting, simultaneous interpretation into and out of these languages must be provided. All official UN documents must be available in these languages within a reasonable time frame.

The most important UN documents are translated into German by the UN's German translation service. This service is funded by Germany, Liechtenstein, Austria, and Switzerland.



As UN Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace between 2001 and 2007, former Swiss Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi supported countless projects, including the International Year of Sport and Physical Education in 2005.

P

Palais des Nations

The building complex of the Palais des Nations has housed the United Nations Office at Geneva (or UNOG) since 1946. The Palais was built between 1929 and 1936. It was initially the seat of the League of Nations. It will be completely renovated for the first time, and an additional new building will be built on the site between 2017 and 2023. The General Assembly adopted the Strategic Heritage Plan project for the historical building in December 2015.

The plan will create a modern working environment for staff and conference delegates with office space for an additional 700 staff in the Palais des Nations. It will also ensure access for disabled people. The total costs are estimated at just under CHF 837 million. Switzerland (the Confederation as well as the canton and city of Geneva) is supporting the project by providing interest-free loans of CHF 400 million.

Modernisation of the Palais des Nations is of utmost importance to Switzerland as the host state. Ensuring that the UN has modern, functional headquarters is essential to strengthen International Geneva as a location for international negotiations and talks. As the UN's largest conference centre, the Palais des Nations hosts more than 10,000 meetings every year and receives more than 100,000 visitors.

- » United Nations Office at Geneva
- » General Assembly
- » International Geneva

Paris Agreement

The Paris climate agreement was signed at the UN headquarters in New York in April 2016. It will enter into force once it has been ratified by the 55 states which together account for 55% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels with the aim of halting rising temperatures. The states agreed to set a reduction target that would be reviewed every five years.

Following years of negotiations, representatives from 195 states achieved the agreement at the 21st Conference of Parties on climate change (COP21) in December 2015. Under the agreement, greenhouse gas emissions, which are responsible for the rising temperatures and therefore for climate change, are to be reduced as quickly as possible. The agreement takes account of the economic strength and level of development of individual countries. Weaker countries should receive more financial and technological support to help them achieve the climate targets and reduce their CO₂ emissions.

The Federal Council aims to halve Switzerland's emissions relative to 1990 levels by 2030. It is also working to expand the donor base – both the number of donor countries and private funds.

Peacebuilding Commission

The General Assembly and Security Council adopted a joint resolution for a Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in 2005. The PBC aims to prevent failure of peace processes. Around half of post-conflict countries relapse into armed conflict within five years. The PBC advises and supports states in post-conflict situations, promotes dialogue between actors, coordinates security, development, and humanitarian efforts, and helps mobilise resources.

The Commission is made up of 31 members who are each elected for a two-year term. At the end of 2015, a total of six country-specific configurations were dealing with Burundi, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Central African Republic. Switzerland has led the Burundi Configuration since 2009.

- » Resolutions
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council

Peacekeeping mission

Peacekeeping missions (peacebuilding missions) are an important UN instrument for conflict resolution and crisis management. Peacekeeping missions are approved by the UN Security Council and are based on three principles:

- impartiality
- the consent of the conflicting parties to deployment of peacekeeping troops
- use of force exclusively in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

Peacekeeping operation mandates often comprise a variety of tasks. These may include measures to protect civilians, to disarm fighters, to support organising elections and protecting and promoting human rights and the rule of law.

Switzerland contributes observers, civilian experts, demining experts, and police staff to peacekeeping missions.

- » Security Council

Poverty reduction

Combating poverty and need worldwide is one of the core tasks of the UN and a priority of Switzerland's foreign policy. The UN's long-term goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and to significantly reduce poverty and hunger worldwide through international development cooperation.

Within the scope of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN committed itself to the goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015, in other words, the proportion of the world's population who lives on less than USD 1.25 a day. This goal was met ahead of the deadline: the number of people living in extreme poverty measured by income fell from 47% to 22% between 1990 and 2010. Since 2010, income poverty has been in decline in all developing regions – including in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the proportion is highest.

Eradicating poverty in the long term requires jobs, access to education and healthcare, land and loans, technology and markets. Human rights must be respected. Protecting the environment and natural resources as well as ensuring political participation and stability are equally important. These aspects carry a great deal of weight in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- » Development cooperation
- » Millennium Development Goals
- » 2030 Agenda

Prohibition on use of force

The prohibition on use of force is set out in Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph 4 of the UN Charter and prohibits member states from using military force: "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations". States also commit to settling their disputes by peaceful means and restrict use of force to self-defence.

The Security Council monitors compliance with the prohibition on use of force and intervenes by deploying peacekeeping operations and imposing mandatory measures (sanctions) to avoid conflicts. Enforcement primarily depends on the willingness of member states to implement decisions of the Security Council. The UN has neither a police force nor an army. While the Security Council can authorise military interventions or commission peacekeeping operations, no member state is obliged to provide troops to the UN for military operations. The deployment of national armed forces is always voluntary.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Sanctions
- » Security Council
- » Peacekeeping mission

Protection architecture

Civilian populations suffer particularly severely in modern conflicts that not only involve armies but also private and semi-private armed groups. Children and women, the most vulnerable groups within the population, are particularly affected by such conflicts. Children are forced into military service, and women are systematically humiliated and raped.

In light of the increasing violence and violations of international humanitarian law, since 1999 the Security Council has adopted resolutions to protect children and civilian populations in armed conflicts. Since 2000 it has adopted resolutions to promote greater attention to the role of women in peace and security policy. Taken in their entirety, these resolutions form the basis of a politico-legal 'security architecture'.

- » Security Council
- » Resolutions

R

Reforms

Switzerland is committed to ensuring a strong and efficient UN that can rise to global challenges. Therefore, it is an active and pragmatic participant in key reform processes such as founding the Human Rights Council. In terms of reforming the working methods of the Security Council, it proposes, among other things, that states that are not represented on the Security Council should be more closely involved in its deliberations. It also calls for the five permanent members of the Security Council to voluntarily renounce their power of veto in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The Security Council took on board one of Switzerland's key concerns in December 2009 when it decided to set up an Ombudsperson's Office to remove (de-list) individuals from the Al-Qaida/Taliban Sanctions Committee List. In doing so, it made an important step towards a fair and transparent process that takes greater account of the fundamental principles of the rule of law.

As the UN's remit has grown considerably since its founding, Switzerland also campaigns for fundamental reforms of the UN administration. It calls for more streamlined processes and structures, a more efficient budget process and greater transparency. It also wants the Secretary-General to have more powers. In return, it seeks strengthened internal and external supervisory mechanisms and increased general accountability of management to member states. In order to lend weight to these demands, Switzerland worked with a cross-regional group of states to develop a set of reform proposals for the UN budget process.

- » Human Rights Council
- » Security Council
- » Secretary-General
- » Sanctions

Refugee Convention

Those forced to leave their home country out of a justified fear of persecution meet the official definition of 'refugees', whether the cause is their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political convictions. Since their home state can no longer guarantee protection, refugees are protected

under the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 protocol, which govern the status of refugees. The principle of non-refoulement is particularly important. This prohibits repatriation of individuals to states where their lives or freedom are in danger.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) based in Geneva works to protect refugees all over the world and to find long-term solutions. Switzerland ratified the Refugee Convention in 1955 and its protocol in 1968.

- » Conventions
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Related organisations

Related organisations work closely with the UN. Such cooperation is based on an international agreement, not on Article 63 of the UN Charter, as is the case with the specialised agencies. Examples of related organisations are the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Specialised agencies

Resolutions

Decisions taken by international organisations and international conferences are called resolutions. They usually begin with a preamble followed by a number of operative paragraphs.

UN resolutions contain evaluations and demands that refer to the UN Charter. Depending on the body, the procedures and legal force differ:

Security Council resolutions require a nine-vote majority and approval or abstention of the permanent members China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Security Council resolutions may contain measures that are binding under international law and non-binding measures.

By contrast, resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are not legally binding in principle but have the character of recommendations. If they are adopted by consensus or with an overwhelming majority by the General Assembly, they may still have significant political weight, depending on the context.

General Assembly resolutions that concern internal organisational or budgetary matters are legally binding on the Secretariat. The budgets and distribution formula for member state contributions decided on by the General Assembly have a legally binding character to the extent that payment default can lead to voting rights being suspended.

- » International organisations
- » Charter of the United Nations
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council
- » United Nations Secretariat

Rio Process for sustainable development

The UN and its agencies focus on issues related to sustainable development. Some of the key milestones of international sustainable development policy are:

- the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972
- the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (the 'Earth Summit')
- the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 and
- the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 held again in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

The definition of sustainability adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit is still valid: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Rio+20 Conference laid foundations for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- » 2030 Agenda

S

Sanctions

Sanctions are an important instrument for the UN to ensure peace and security. Sanctions may be of a diplomatic, economic, or military nature and can be taken against a state, against individuals, or against organisations that jeopardise international peace.

According to the UN Charter, only the Security Council is authorised to impose binding sanctions, and only as a means of safeguarding or restoring international peace and security.

As a member of the UN, Switzerland is obliged to adopt and implement any sanctions imposed by the Security Council.

- » Security Council
- » Charter of the United Nations

Secretary-General

The Secretary-General is the highest-ranking official in the UN administration and represents the organisation to the outside world. He is head of the Secretariat at the UN headquarters in New York and the three UN Offices at Geneva, Nairobi, and Vienna. He coordinates the daily activities with the Secretariat and participates in meetings of the principal UN organs. He is responsible for the UN's budget and financial accounts and reports annually to the General Assembly on the UN's administrative activities.

The Secretary-General is also responsible for drawing the Security Council's attention to any problems or conflicts that threaten international peace. He can offer his good offices and appoint special representatives to mediate on his behalf on the ground and to coordinate the UN efforts.

The General Assembly appoints the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five-year renewable term.

- » United Nations Secretariat
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council
- » Special representatives

Security Council

The Security Council is one of the principal organs of the UN and bears the main responsibility for maintaining international peace and security under the UN Charter. The Council deals with specific conflict situations and issues that may jeopardise world peace or international security, or concern protection of civilians ('protection architecture'). It is the only UN organ that can impose measures that are binding on all member states. Switzerland has been working consistently since 2005 towards improving the working methods of the Security Council.

The Security Council is composed of the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), and 10 non-permanent members. The Council presidency is held by each of the members in turn for one month, following the English alphabetical order of member states' names. Every year, the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members for two-year terms.

Switzerland seeks a seat on the UN Security Council in 2023-24. The two parliamentary foreign affairs committees approved the candidacy during the consultation process in 2010.



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According to UN estimates in 2015, some 41 million people were displaced by conflicts, terrorism, violence, or environmental disasters in their own country. UN agencies and non-governmental organisations seek to improve the situation of internally displaced persons. Switzerland provides financial support to UN agencies and NGOs and also assists people in need on the ground.

Security Council decisions on all procedural matters require affirmative votes of nine members. Other resolutions must also be approved by nine members, which must include the five permanent members (veto powers). Sanctions imposed against a state that endangers world peace and international security are usually binding on all UN member states.

- » Resolutions
- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Protection architecture
- » Veto powers
- » Sanctions
- » Reforms

Special envoys, special representatives and special advisers

UN special envoys, special representatives, and special advisors are respected experts or senior figures entrusted with special tasks by the Secretary-General. They often represent the Secretary-General in conflict situations and conduct investigations or negotiations on behalf.

The first Swiss national to hold such a position was Johannes Manz, who was the special representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara from 1990 to 1991.

- » Secretary-General
- » Swiss nationals at the UN

Specialised agencies of the United Nations

The UN's specialised agencies are international organisations that are legally, organisationally, and financially autonomous and have signed international agreements with the UN. They perform international tasks in the fields of economic affairs, social affairs, culture, education, health, and related fields. The agreements are



In Jordan and Lebanon, Switzerland is rehabilitating 120 schools during the crisis, enabling over 60,000 refugee and local children to attend school under safer conditions.

based on Article 63 of the UN Charter. The Economic and Social Council coordinates the agencies' cooperation with one another and with the UN. It carries out consultations and makes recommendations.

The UN currently has 17 specialised agencies. Of these, five are based in International Geneva: the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

In addition to the specialised agencies, the UN works closely with other related organisations based on international agreements. These include the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, the Office for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, and the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Economic and Social Council
- » International Geneva
- » Related organisations
- » World Health Organization

Subsidiary organs

Besides the specialised agencies, the UN system also comprises a multitude of subsidiary organs. These include the funds and programmes that make up a large part of the UN's operating activities. They include, for example, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The subsidiary organs also include the Human Rights Council, the Conference on Disarmament, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), as well as the three research and training institutes: UNITAR (the UN Institute for Training and Research), UNIDIR (the UN Institute for Disarmament Research), and UNRISD (the UN Research Institute for Social Development). All are based in Geneva.

Subsidiary organs are usually established by the principal UN organs (General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, or the Security Council) and are financed for the most part through voluntary contributions.

- » Specialised agencies
- » UNICEF
- » UN Women
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » Human Rights Council
- » Disarmament
- » General Assembly
- » Security Council
- » Economic and Social Council
- » International Geneva

Summits

UN summits are conferences at which heads of state or government represent their states. The high-level events always focus on specific current issues. A final declaration summarises political goals and action programmes.

Summit meetings differ markedly from the General Assembly, not only in procedure but also during the preparatory phase. Regional actors and NGOs play an important role in this respect. They present their positions and demands at events parallel to the conferences.

Examples of past UN summits:

- the UN Conference on Environment and Development, which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 ('Earth Summit') and the follow-up climate conferences such as the World Climate Summit (COP21) in Paris in 2015
- the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995
- the Millennium Summit held in New York in 2000 (Millennium Development Goals).

- » General Assembly
- » Millennium Development Goals

Swiss nationals at the UN

Around 1,000 Swiss nationals work at the UN. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) supports Swiss candidates with election campaigns for the governing bodies of international organisations.

Swiss nationals have consistently held top positions – for example (in alphabetical order):

- Hans-Jörg Bannwart: Member of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment from 2013 to 2016
- Manuel Bessler: Member of the Advisory Group of the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)
- Lucius Cafilisch: Member of the International Law Commission from 2006 to 2016
- Pascal Clivaz: Deputy Director-General of the Universal Postal Union from 2013 to 2016

- Hans Dreyer: Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Plant Production and Protection Division
 - Thomas Gass: Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs at the Department for Economic and Social Affairs within the UN Secretariat (UNDESA)
 - Monique Jametti Greiner: Member of the Governing Council of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) from 2014 to 2018
 - Pierre Krähenbühl: Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
 - Philippe Lazzarini: Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL); UN Coordinator and Representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP)
 - Nicolas Michel: Special Adviser, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria/Under-General-Secretary
 - Michel Mordasini: Vice-President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
 - François Xavier Putallaz: Member of the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee (IBC) from 2014 to 2017
 - Serge Rumin: Member of the panel tasked with reviewing the UN's Police Division
 - Christoph Schelling: Member of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters from 2013 to 2016
 - Flavia Schlegel: Assistant Director-General for the Natural Sciences at UNESCO
 - Patricia Schulz: Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) until 2018
 - Gaudenz Silberschmidt: Director for Partnerships and Non-State Actors and Director a.i. for Coordinated Resource Mobilization at World Health Organization (WHO)
 - Jean Ziegler: Member of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee from 2013 to 2016.
- » Food and Agriculture Organization
 - » Special adviser
 - » United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
 - » Human Rights Council
 - » UNESCO
 - » World Health Organization

Switzerland – host state

Switzerland has been home to international organisations for over a century. It is also a host state of the UN, which has its European headquarters in Geneva. Like foreign embassies, the office of the UN and its institutions enjoy diplomatic immunity under international law. A 1946 bilateral agreement on the privileges and immunities of the UN governs relations between Switzerland as the host state and the UN, as well as the associated rights and obligations.

The permanent mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the other international organisations in Geneva represents Switzerland as the host state. Under the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961, the Swiss Mission is the diplomatic channel between the permanent missions and the Swiss authorities at federal, cantonal, and communal levels.

Switzerland's host state policy is focused on five key thematic areas:

- peace, security, and disarmament
- humanitarian affairs and human rights
- health
- labour, the economy, and science
- the environment and sustainable development.

Through International Geneva, Switzerland has a long tradition as host to international conferences and as the seat of international organisations and diplomatic representations. This tradition dates back to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva in 1863.

The privileges, immunities and facilities as well as the financial subsidies granted by Switzerland as a host state are set out in the revised Host State Act of 2008 and in the related ordinance.

- » International organisations
- » United Nations Office at Geneva
- » International Geneva

U

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that sets out all the rights of children. It is based on the principle that children are subjects, not passive objects, with a distinct set of rights. Under the Convention, the child's welfare must be the primary consideration in any decisions affecting a child. 194 states parties have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (as of 2016), albeit in some cases with restrictions. This makes it the most widely ratified UN human rights treaty.

The first two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child protect children from involvement in armed conflicts and from the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography. A third optional protocol sets out a complaint procedure whereby individual children can submit a complaint to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child if they believe their rights have been violated.

The states parties are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on how this convention and the optional protocols are being implemented. The committee examines the reports, and makes comments and recommendations.

Switzerland ratified the convention in February 1997. The first two optional protocols came into force in Switzerland in July 2002 and October 2006 respectively.

» Conventions

UN days, weeks, years, and decades

The UN dedicates days, weeks, years, and decades to particularly important political, social, cultural, humanitarian, and human rights issues. This allows it to focus global attention on the issues and to organise themed activities. Some examples are World AIDS Day on 1 December, World Refugee Day on 20 June, the International Year of Water Cooperation 2013, and the International Year of Family Farming 2014 as well as the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty 2008–2017 and the Decade on Biodiversity 2011–2020.

UN Women

UN Women is a UN agency for gender equality and women's empowerment. It was set up in 2010 as the result of a merger of four UN agencies that campaigned for equality. The agency is based on the concept of equality enshrined in the UN Charter. It aims to give a voice to women and girls at the global, regional, and local levels. Its main activities are:

- eliminating discrimination against women and girls
- empowering women
- achieving equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, peace, and security.

Switzerland supported the creation of this new agency. It campaigned to ensure that it does not merely issue international standards for equality and the advancement of women. It also links them to its work on the ground in developing countries and requires making efforts to promote gender equality in UN development programmes and projects.

UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, whereby the UN's operations are to be streamlined and made more efficient. Switzerland has been campaigning for reform in the General Assembly and specialised agencies for a number of years. UN Women is one of the tangible results of this commitment.

- » Charter of the United Nations
- » Reforms
- » Women

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialised agency of the UN based in Paris. It was founded in 1945. The organisation currently has 195 member states, including Switzerland, which joined in 1949. The primary objective of UNESCO is to preserve peace through international cooperation and understanding in the fields of education, science, and culture. It is also committed to poverty reduction, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue.

Central to UNESCO's mandate is promotion of fundamental values such as justice, solidarity, tolerance, participation, fairness, respect of human rights, cultural diversity, pluralism, and democratic principles – which are identical to Swiss values.

UNESCO is the only specialised agency in the UN system with a specific mandate in the area of culture. Its main tasks include protecting and maintaining tangible and intangible cultural heritage and preserving and promoting diversity of cultural expressions. Its normative work in this area is particularly important. Within the framework of UNESCO, numerous conventions, declarations, and recommendations have been adopted, including the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Switzerland works to respect and promote the convention at both the international and national levels.

The liaison body between UNESCO and Switzerland is the Swiss Commission for UNESCO, which has an advisory function and is composed of 20 experts appointed by the Federal Council. Its secretariat is attached to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

» Conventions

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was founded in New York in 1946 as a children's relief fund to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in countries that had been devastated by World War II. Today, UNICEF mainly works in developing countries, where it provides support to mothers and children in the areas of health, family planning, hygiene, nutrition, and education, and provides humanitarian aid where needed. Its efforts focus on five main strategic areas:

- child survival and development
- basic education and gender equality
- HIV/AIDS and children
- protecting children from violence, exploitation, and abuse
- implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF also campaigns internationally at a political level against use of child soldiers and child abuse but for protection of child refugees.

UNICEF is a key partner for Switzerland. UNICEF Switzerland contributes to financing UNICEF programmes together with 36 other national committees.

» UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



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The former Attorney General of Switzerland, Carla del Ponte, is a member of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011. From 1999 to 2007, del Ponte served as Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

United Nations Office at Geneva

The UN's European headquarters are in Geneva. The United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) housed in the Palais des Nations is the second-largest UN office after the headquarters in New York. With more than 1,600 staff, the office services over 8,000 high-ranking international meetings, sessions, and conferences every year. It provides financial, administrative, and logistical support to affiliated organisations, agencies, programmes, and funds of the UN that are based in Geneva.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, the office cultivates relations with its host country Switzerland (Confederation, canton and city of Geneva), the permanent missions of UN member states in Geneva, other intergovernmental organisations and NGOs, and Geneva's academic institutions. The UNOG is headed by a Director-General, who reports directly to the UN Secretary-General. The UNOG Director-General also serves as Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

Geneva is home to, among others, the UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- » Palais des Nations
- » Disarmament
- » Human rights
- » Combating poverty
- » Health
- » Environment
- » Humanitarian aid
- » Switzerland – host state
- » Secretary-General
- » Human Rights Council
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- » World Health Organization

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was set up in 1949 as a temporary aid programme. Its aim was to support Palestinian refugees and persons displaced by the Arab-Israeli conflict until the Palestine refugee issue is solved. The agency's mandate has since been repeatedly renewed.

Today, the work of UNRWA focuses on the areas of education and training, medical care and humanitarian measures, infrastructure and job creation. The agency looks after over 5 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Switzerland supports the work of UNRWA with an annual contribution of several million CHF. Since March 2014 Swiss national Pierre Krähenbühl has been Commissioner-General of the agency with the rank of Under Secretary-General, the second-highest rank within the United Nations system.

- » Swiss nationals at the UN
- » United Nations system

United Nations Secretariat

The Secretariat – which is headquartered in New York with regional offices in Geneva, Nairobi, and Vienna – is one of the UN's principal organs. It is headed by the Secretary-General and provides administrative support to the other UN organs, including organising conferences, compiling reports, and preparing budgets.

The Secretariat comprises various departments and offices, such as the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The five Regional Commissions based in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, and Santiago de Chile are also part of the Secretariat. At the end of 2015, 44,000 staff worked in the Secretariat.

- » United Nations Office at Geneva
- » Secretary-General

United Nations University

The United Nations University (UNU) was founded in 1973 as a subsidiary organ of the UN. It is represented by institutes in more than 12 countries, but it is not a traditional university with fixed teaching staff. Its various institutes work together with local partners and usually have a 'twin institute' in the Third World. UNU conducts interdisciplinary and international research within research communities on global issues such as development economics, sustainable development and food. The Rector reports directly to the UN Secretary-General.

Konrad Osterwalder, former Rector of ETH Zurich, headed the University from 2007 to 2013. Jakob Rhyner has been Vice Rector in Europe and Director of the UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security in Bonn since 2010. He previously served as Director of the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research.

- » **Subsidiary organs**
- » **Swiss nationals at the UN**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights. The General Assembly adopted the general principles as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations" on 10 December 1948. This is commemorated every year by International Human Rights Day on 10 December.

The resolution sets out, for the first time, in an international document negotiated by states, the rights that apply to all people – irrespective of their race, gender, religion, or nationality. The list of human rights includes the right to life, prohibition of slavery and torture, fundamental legal rights in judicial proceedings, and civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and religion, the right to property, and the right to marry, as well as a range of economic, social, and cultural rights. These include the right to social security, work, food and health, education, and the right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

As a resolution of the UN General Assembly, the UDHR is not binding under international law, in accordance with the UN Charter. Some parts of it are still considered an integral part of customary international law.

- » Human rights
- » Resolutions
- » General Assembly
- » Charter of the United Nations
- » International law



Pierre Krähenbühl of Switzerland, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), visiting Gaza. The UNRWA provides relief to over 5 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

V

Veto powers

The five veto powers are the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Each permanent member has the veto power and can thus block or prevent resolutions being passed. There have been around 200 vetoes since 1946.

Discussions on reform of the Security Council have revolved around increasing the number of members as well as restricting the veto right. Switzerland is campaigning with like-minded states for the five permanent members of the Security Council to voluntarily renounce their veto rights in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

» Reforms

W

Women

Gender equality and inclusion of women in all key areas are important UN concerns. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 provides the UN with a legally binding instrument to implement women's rights. Switzerland ratified the CEDAW in 1997 and the optional protocol in 2008.

Every four years the signatory states are required to submit a report on their gender equality policies, which is then supplemented by NGO shadow reports. The CEDAW committee of 23 experts has been monitoring implementation of the convention and making recommendations since 1982. It convenes twice a year. Since 2010, the UN agency UN Women has been working to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The World Conference on Women in 1995 called on countries to protect the rights of women and girls in the same way as those of men and boys. It condemned the killing of women, girls, and female embryos because of their sex. It also spoke out in favour of sexual self-determination for all people.

» Women, Peace,
and Security
» UN Women

Women, Peace, and Security

Women are important actors in peace processes and in the reconstruction phases following wars and armed conflicts. Just like men, they have the right to participate in political decision-making processes and are also responsible for shaping the future of their countries. The UN Security Council resolution 1325 of 2000 and subsequent resolutions require all actors in conflicts and fragile situations to take into account and implement the following points:

- greater participation of women in peacebuilding
- protection of the rights of women and girls during and after armed conflicts and prevention of gender-specific violence
- incorporating gender perspectives in emergency aid, in reconstruction during and after armed conflicts, and in dealing with the past
- incorporating gender perspectives in conflict prevention.

Switzerland has been implementing UN Security Council resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions since 2007 through a National Action Plan. It focuses on the political involvement of women in civilian and military peace policy.

» Women
» Resolutions

Working at the UN

Some 90,000 people, including around 1,000 Swiss nationals, work at the UN. Swiss international civil servants come from all walks of life and are deployed around the world. They range from the Representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to an irrigation specialist seconded to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Jordan, to a human resources specialist at the UN's New York headquarters, to the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) supports well-qualified Swiss nationals who apply for positions and jobs within the UN and other international organisations. For example, the FDFA funds various junior positions at the UN through the Junior Professional Officer Programme (JPO) and organises the annual International Career Day. It also issues a newsletter listing job opportunities.

- » Swiss nationals at the UN
- » Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- » United Nations Secretariat
- » United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East



As a member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women from 2011 to 2018, Patricia Schulz works to protect the economic, social, and cultural rights of women.

World Food Programme

The World Food Programme (WFP) – founded in 1961 and headquartered in Rome – provides emergency aid in the wake of natural disasters and during droughts and conflicts. It also provides long-term assistance to people in regions beset by food insecurity. The WFP was established by the UN General Assembly and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The WFP, which maintains a liaison office in Geneva, is Switzerland's most important partner in the area of food aid. Switzerland is one of the WFP's major donors: in 2015 it allocated CHF 76.8 million to the organisation.

- » General Assembly
- » International Geneva

World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO), which is headquartered in Geneva, is the most important UN body for public health. Its vision is to ensure "health for all in the 21st century". This policy framework was adopted in May 1998. The WHO's main tasks are steering public health at an international level, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to states, and monitoring and assessing current public health trends.

Some of the WHO's major successes include eradication of smallpox in 1980 and unanimous approval of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Among other things, the framework governs taxation of tobacco products, prevention, and tobacco advertising, and provides for measures to combat illegal trade in tobacco. In the fight against infectious diseases, the WHO has committed to eradicating polio, measles, onchocerciasis (river blindness), and leprosy, among others.

The WHO currently has 193 member states. Switzerland, which joined in 1948, is one of the founding members. It has since been represented twice on the executive board, from 1999 to 2002 and from 2011 to 2014. The executive board is composed of 34 government representatives elected for three-year terms.

- » Health
- » International Geneva

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