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USA: Global Entry programme

Following a decision by the Federal Council on 11 January 2017, Swiss citizens at home and abroad are able to apply for enrolment in the Global Entry programme from 1 February 2017. The programme fast-tracks entry into the USA for people who have already undergone background checks by authorities in Switzerland and the USA. Pre-approved travellers can enter the USA via automatic kiosks, thus avoiding potentially long waiting times when arriving in the USA. www.fedpol.admin.ch > Latest news > News > 11.01.2017

Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at the online desk (www.eda.admin.ch) or via www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications.

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent free of charge to all households of Swiss Abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either in printed format or electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app).

Switzerland in space

The brochure shows through examples the importance of space travel for Switzerland and European cooperation, as well as for research and industry – but also how we benefit from it in our daily lives. Order free of charge at www.fdfa.admin.ch/publication > topic: science and space travel



Federal referenda

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date. The following proposals will be put on the vote on 24 September 2017:

- Federal Decree of 14 March 2017 on Food Security (direct counter-proposal to the popular initiative "For food security", which has now been withdrawn) (BBl 2017 2383);
- Federal Decree of 17 March 2017 on Additional Funding for AHV (Old-Age and Survivors Insurance) by increasing Value Added Tax (BBl 2017 2381);
- Federal Act of 17 March 2017 on the Reform of Retirement Provision 2020 (BBl 2017 2393).

Further voting date 2017: 26 November

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations of Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.admin.ch/votes.

Popular initiatives

The following new federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- 'For clean drinking water and healthy food – No subsidies for pesticides and the prophylactic use of antibiotics' (21.09.2018)
- 'For a ban on financing war material manufacturers' (11.10.2018)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

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Contract children, institutionalised children, forcibly adopted children – late recognition of suffering and injustice

Switzerland is coming to terms with a dark chapter in its social history. The main victims were contract children, children in care, people held in administrative detention and those who faced compulsory adoption or sterilisation. Many of these people were subjected to physical, mental or sexual abuse over many years. Partly as a result of these traumatic experiences, many of them are living in precarious conditions to this day.

In recognition of the injustice they faced and by way of redress, the victims of such compulsory social measures and placements are to receive a solidarity contribution. On 30 September 2016, the Swiss Parliament therefore passed the Federal Act on Compulsory Social Measures and Placements prior to 1981, earmarking 300 million Swiss francs to finance the plan.

In addition to compensation, the law envisages various measures for assisting the victims. Amongst other things, they are to receive advice and support from cantonal authorities and archives in completing applications and obtaining the necessary documents. The archives must also grant the victims simple and free access to files that concern them.

Solidarity contribution

Anyone who considers himself or herself a victim under this law and who would like to claim a solidarity contribution must complete the relevant application form, either by themselves or with the aid of the cantonal authorities or archives, and send it to the Federal Office of Justice by 31 March 2018.

All victims will receive the same amount. The sum, which will depend on the total number of applications received, will be a maximum of 25,000 francs per person. The first payments are to be made from April 2018 onwards.

Applications from the Swiss Abroad

The following special rules apply to applicants living outside Switzerland: Applications may be sent to the Federal Office of Justice by post, but may also be handed in directly at Swiss embassies or consulates. There, applicants will also have to obtain a life certificate and, where appropriate, provide a delivery address in Switzerland. Recipients of a solidarity contribution will only be subject to the special statutory regulations on tax, social welfare, social insurance and debt recovery if they are resident in Switzerland. People living outside Switzerland will be subject to the relevant national regulations.

Useful information, application forms and a guide are available in the three national languages on the website of the Federal Office of Justice: www.bj.admin.ch > Society > Compulsory social measures and placements.

For further information, please contact: FSZM secretariat (by phone: +41 58 462 42 84 or by email: sekretariat@fuersorgerischezwangsmassnahmen.ch)

Three people, three stories

These reports by the victims of Switzerland's compulsory social measures are extremely personal and tell a tale of unspeakable suffering that continues to affect the victims and their families to this day.

Bernadette Gächter's story

"I am one of those women who were forced to have abortions and be sterilised on the basis of eugenic principles. This was in the canton of St. Gallen in 1972. When I accidentally fell pregnant at the age of 18, I was told I was mentally disturbed even though I had graduated from secondary school. Doctors, my guardian and my foster parents told me I had brain damage and that my child would also be born with brain damage. They had me sterilised the same way you sterilise a cat to prevent it having four litters a year. I could no longer start a family, no longer have children. As a young woman, it hurt me deeply whenever I saw mothers with their babies

Bernadette Gächter,
who was forcibly
sterilised as a young
woman.
Photo: Remo Neuhaus
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or children. Today, whenever I see women with their grandchildren, it still pains me greatly. I have no feeling in my belly to this day. I've been fighting for my rights for 30 years. It takes enormous strength, incredible energy and a very strong will to live a meaningful life in spite of something like that. Following a decision by the Council of Europe on 26 June 2013, I am now entitled to compensation."

Alfred Ryter's story

"My mother suffered from a serious and long-drawn-out illness, with trips to spas over many years. So, when I was barely eight, I was sent to work on the farm of a childless couple, presumably for financial reasons. My two older brothers also became contract children. From then on, I slept on an old sofa in a threshing room, covered in old woollen blankets and surrounded by feed and all kinds of machines. When I realised where I was and how I was being treated, I became rebellious. I begged, wept and banged my feet against the door of the threshing room. I smashed things around me. To no avail. They were more powerful and they broke me. From then on, I was repeatedly starved, beaten and disregarded. However, it couldn't touch me anymore. I felt best when I was at work, which was long and hard. But at least I wasn't locked up. Hunger and pain were now my constant companions. Whenever I got too hungry, I ate pig slops or chicken feed. In the morning, when I returned from the cowshed and brought the farmer's wife the milk, I was given a piece of bread and jam as my morning meal, as well as a cup of milk, although that was diluted with cold water. At first, the farmer's wife told me she had poured cold water into the milk to prevent me from scalding myself while drinking.

If I misbehaved, which the farming folk believed was often the case, I was given only a piece of bread without jam and cold water for my morning meal. That would have to last me all day. I lost weight until I was just skin and bones. Did no-one notice? Why not?

"One of the most severe punishments I received was when I stole an orange from some summer visitors. When the farmer's wife found

out, she beat me with farm implements till I bled and locked me in the threshing room. A short time later, I was taken outside, forced to strip naked and told to sit in cold well water, whereupon the farmer's wife scrubbed me with a rice root brush. Thieves didn't only need beating, she said. They also had to have their evil scrubbed away.

"Fifty years later, my past caught up with me. I had suffered from depression previously, although I didn't really know why. Now I do. I had to cope with a number of devastating events: the suicides of my brothers and the constant reminders of my hellish youth. Thanks to more than 20 years' support from my psychiatrist and strong medication, I am now somewhat more stable. My time as a contract child shaped my entire life. Even my wife and two children suffered as a result."

Clément Wieilly's story

"I was born in Fribourg public hospital in 1954. My brother was born in 1952. Our parents abandoned us after our birth. First we were housed in the surgical and paediatric wards of Fribourg cantonal hospital, then at the St. Francis home for babies in Courtepin and in Pringy. Just like in all our subsequent placements, we were under the guardianship of the local authorities. From 1958 to 1968, we were placed in the orphanage of the civic community of the city of Fribourg. The director was very strict, knew no mercy, beat us and refused us meals. We were constantly punished, and extremely brutally. I had a pillow pressed over my face until I passed out. I was the victim of sexual abuse and voyeurism. At school, the other kids made fun of us because we were orphans. The teachers abused us. In 1962, a new director was appointed and he was a bit more compassionate. From 1968 to 1970, my brother and I were split up and I was placed with a farming family. The work was hard, with many restrictions attached and I wasn't paid. I worked from 5.30 in the morning until 8 at night and attended school occasionally. Every now and then, the family were nice or friendly towards me. During this time, my brother was housed with a family of chimney sweeps, for whom he worked unpaid. At the age of 16, I was sent to a home again, this



Clément Wieilly,
former contract child
Photo: Remo Neuhaus
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time a home for apprentices in Fribourg, where I was trained to become a plumber. The older children abused us mentally, physically and sexually. The educators pretended not to notice. My brother was also sent to that home, where he trained to become a shoe salesman. But we weren't there at the same time. He was abused in the same way I was. We grew up and then started work with no personal environment, no knowledge and no guidance. We were never prepared for life as young adults, with all that this entails. We were clueless and open to manipulation. We lacked basic knowledge about how to manage our finances or avoid danger. People therefore took advantage of our naivety and tricked us into taking out micro-loans. I'm still paying off my debts. Today, I am still living off a small disability pension and I managed to found the association Agir pour la Dignité." [The association supports victims of compulsory social measures and works to raise awareness about the issue among the general public. – Ed.]