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Beard business

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Trimmed beards for better security! From 1 November 2020, police officers guarding the Federal Palace are only allowed to have beards of up to 50 millimetres in length. Longer beards are a “security issue”, says the Federal Security Service. Facially hirsute policemen have since been transferred to other posts.

380

However, length is not the only thing that matters at the so-called International Alpine Beard Festival. Pius Sidler, reigning champion in the “Natural Alpine Beard” category, not only sports a 380-mm beard, he also cuts a very authentic and dignified figure. Anyone who wishes to put up a challenge will have to wait until the next festival on 3 October 2021 in Seewis (Grisons).

1750

Incidentally, a flowing beard made by hand in Switzerland from real buffalo hair costs up to 1,750 Swiss francs and is a product beloved of St Nicholas lookalikes across the country. Switzerland’s many dedicated St Nicholas associations make tens of thousands of visits to families every year, but they had a hard time of it in 2020. Demand for their services fell amid the pandemic. At least they had plenty of time to care for their beards instead.

46

However, healthcare workers are anything but idle at the moment. “Clapping for carers” is all well and good, but no other profession is currently haemorrhaging as many people as healthcare. Around 46 per cent of all qualified personnel change careers, often at a young age. The main reason that leavers give is that they are chronically overworked due to staff shortages – a situation exacerbated every time one of their colleagues calls it a day.

1 000 000

In these turbulent times, it’s the little things that count. Take the Swiss-invented REX peeler. Dating back to 1947, it is the epitome of frugality, sleek design, and timelessness. Zena Swiss has been producing and selling a million of these patented kitchen utensils every year since 1969. If you want to know how useful this humble peeler is, ask Betty Bossi (see page 14).

FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

Readers give “Swiss Review” good marks – and have a clear idea of what they want

A very large proportion of “Swiss Review” readers rate our magazine as “good” or even “very good”. Many of them also have clear ideas as to how we could improve the publication. These are the results of our reader survey.

MARC LETTAU

How would readers describe “Swiss Review”? We are a trustworthy, informative magazine that provides unbiased reporting on relevant issues in a clear and comprehensible manner. This is the overriding consensus among those who took part in our reader survey in summer 2020. The Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society (FÖG) – the University of Zurich’s independent body specialised in media research – conducted the survey. According to social scientist and survey coordinator Jörg Schneider, one specific quality stands out in the results: “A very high percentage of readers think that ‘Swiss Review’ is a trustworthy publication”.

The verdict from our highly diverse, multilingual, worldwide readership was positive overall, with 42 per cent giving the magazine top marks (“very good”) and 38 per cent scoring us as “good”. A further 17 per cent are more or less satisfied, while under 3 per cent marked us as poor or very poor.

But this is just a rough snapshot. Marks varied – albeit marginally for the most part – depending on gender, age, and country of domicile. For example, the under-25s and the over-65s share a slightly more positive view of our magazine compared to age groups in between. And we consistently received slightly better marks from women than from men. Geographical distance also played a role, with people living in places like South America or Australia more inclined than EU expatriates – our main readership community – to score us higher.

According to our readers, “Swiss Review” also has weaknesses. Around 10 per cent believe that its visual appearance can be improved. This opinion came more from online readers than from readers of the print edition. “Swiss Review” is politically biased, according to 12 per cent of readers, half of whom accuse us of being too government-friendly and too afraid to speak our mind. The other half accuse us of exactly the opposite, saying that we are too critical of Switzerland, and that our position verges on “socialist”. According to Schneider, this relatively small contingent – and the views they express – confirm, if anything, that our magazine has, in his words, a “good command of controversial political issues”.

Wish list

Readers used the survey to tell us how they thought we could improve the magazine. People want to see more articles on nature and the environment – a theme that featured at the top of most readers’ wish lists. This call was loudest among young readers as well as readers who are past retirement age, although other age groups also think that green issues should be given clear priority, followed by sociopolitical topics. Readers would like to see even more report-style pieces, while “useful information” also features prominently among people’s preferences: over a third of respondents want more practical, clear advice and tips from both the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and the federal authorities.

Differences between print and online readers

There was very little difference, if any, in scoring between those who read the printed version of “Swiss Review” and those who read online. Both groups also said very similar things about how to improve the magazine. However, one significant divergence is that a large proportion of print subscribers “consume” the magazine intensively, i.e. they read many, if not all, of the articles and often discuss the content of these articles with others in their private and professional lives. Online readers consume much less intensively, both reading less and spending less time doing so.

Emotional connection

The survey results also reveal an emotional connection to the magazine, with 70 per cent of readers saying that “Swiss Review” strengthens their ties to Switzerland. “This is the most significant soft factor,” says Schneider. “Two thirds of readers also view the magazine as a sort of ‘guide’ to contemporary Switzerland.”

The survey in figures

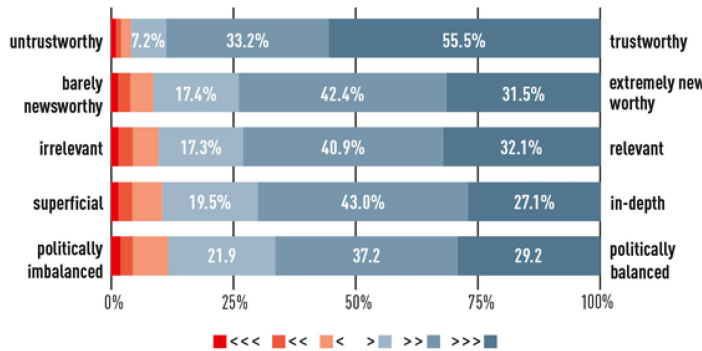
Some 17,000 people took part in the “Swiss Review” reader survey coordinated by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, with around 14,000 completing the questionnaire in full. Around 5,500 people also gave a written answer to our open-ended question “What are you missing from ‘Swiss Review’?” This feedback and the completed questionnaires have helped us to assess reader satisfaction and gain an insight into what people would like to see in the magazine in future.

(MUL)

The only source of information for many readers

“Swiss Review” is one of many media channels. However, 44 per cent of readers say that the magazine essentially meets all their Swiss news and information needs. Some 28 per cent say that “Swiss Review” provides their only source of news and information from Switzerland. Readers who access Swiss-related news and information from sources other than “Swiss Review” make use of Swiss newspaper and magazine websites (41 per cent), read the international press (39 per cent), visit swissinfo (19 per cent) or consult Swiss government websites (11 per cent).

Our website contains a number of frequently asked questions about “Swiss Review” (revue.ch/en/faq). For additional information, visit revue@swisscommunity.org.



New website for OSA, Youth Service and “Swiss Review”

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) – which since 1 January also goes under the name of “SwissCommunity” – launched a new, combined website at the beginning of the year.

All OSA, “Swiss Review” and Youth Service content can now be found at www.swisscommunity.org. Readers of our magazine can still visit www.revue.ch, which will redirect automatically to the new shared website.

The new website not only features fresh content and advice – it will also be our community hub allowing the Swiss Abroad to interact, share knowledge, opinions and information, get helpful tips, and announce events online.

This revamp has been in the pipeline for a long time but has now taken on added significance since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, says OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli. “The pandemic has shown us how important it now is to stay connected,” she says. The aim of the new website is to help ensure that people stay in touch. “Not only will it strengthen people’s connection and attachment to Switzerland, but it will also provide the Swiss Abroad with additional opportunities to interact.” However, online interaction is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Rustichelli: “Ultimately, people still need to meet each other. That goes without saying.” Which is why our traditional Swiss expatriate associations have nothing to fear from increased digitalisation. On the contrary. “Digitalisation will help them to enhance their profile.” Strengthening and underscoring their role and objectives within this highly interconnected community is the challenge they face.

(MUL)

New events in 2021: online offers to accompany the traditional summer and winter camps

This year, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, under the name SwissCommunity, is organising a summer camp and a winter camp, and for the first time will be providing online offers for young Swiss Abroad aged between 15 and 25.

Due to the global health situation (Covid-19 pandemic), the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad has taken the difficult decision to reduce the number of camps originally planned for 2021. Just two camps will be organised: one in the Vaud Alps and one in the Pennine Alps. The summer camp will take place from 10 to 23 July 2021 in Château-d’Oex and the winter camp will be from 27 December 2021 to 5 January 2022 in Grächen.

Of course, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is closely monitoring the evolution of the pandemic in the world. Any change which may impact the organisation of the camps will be announced on the website www.swisscommunity.org.



Enjoying fondue at the 2019 Sainte-Croix sports and holiday camp – before face coverings and social distancing

Summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

Swiss children living abroad will have an opportunity to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time with around 40 other children from around the world – at a series of two-week summer camps from the end of June to the end of August 2021.

There are still some free spots available on our holiday camps. For further details on the 2021 summer season as well as the relevant application form, visit www.sjas.ch/en/camps/.

(LR)

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Given the uncertainty surrounding the organisation of the camps, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is pleased to be able to offer young Swiss living abroad an alternative. For the first time, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad will be providing online offers, combining learning, fun and new encounters. All offers can be found at www.swisscommunity.org.

For more information:

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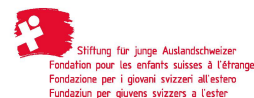


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“It would be a great first step if we had 40 per cent women”

Better representation of women is an objective shared by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) offer a tangible opportunity in this regard. What is OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli's view on the matter?

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU



OSA Director
Ariane Rustichelli:
“Better female representation is necessary at all levels and in all decision-making bodies.”

Some 44 women and 76 men represent the Swiss expatriate community in the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, the CSA. The proportion of women is too low in your opinion.

Yes, it is too low for the simple reason that women represent the majority of people in the “Fifth Switzerland”. Women account for 54 per cent of the 770,000 Swiss who live abroad. But it is more than just a question of percentages. A council should reflect the community it represents as closely as possible. Proper female representation also translates into a different way of going about things in terms of the political agenda, the culture of debate and identifying solutions for example. We are currently seeing this in Switzerland. The women's strike and other initiatives are factors that resulted in more women being elected to the federal parliament in 2019. We can now see the substantive outcome.

The National Council is made up of 42 per cent women. Women account for 36 per cent of people who sit on the CSA. Does the percentage of women in the CSA need to increase to over 40 per cent?

Looking at it pragmatically, yes. It would be a great first step if we had 40 per cent women.

And what would be the second step?

The actual aim is 50 per cent or more, because again we want the CSA to reflect the diverse Swiss expatriate community as accurately as possible. By the way, this is not an end in itself.

Diversity always enriches our lives and is one of the keys to better and more broadly based decision-making.

Reflecting social diversity is not solely about ensuring better representation of women.

Correct. We should not forget to engage with all age groups either. Basically, we need to get young people more involved.

Apart from appealing to voters, what else can the OSA do to ensure better female representation?

We have to do more than just appeal to voters. Better female representation is necessary at all levels and in all decision-making bodies. In particular, this applies to the Swiss associations and umbrella organisations that run the CSA election process in each region. If these bodies are also serious about improving female representation, the number of candidates will increase. And if more women stand for election, more women will be elected.

In future, the OSA wants all Swiss Abroad in any given country to be able to participate in CSA elections, regardless of whether they are registered with a Swiss association or not. Would direct elections such as these help to further the female cause?

Women's chances increase if more of them can vote and stand for election. At least that is the theory. However, experience shows that a change of system on its own is not enough. We need an environment that encourages women. Women often still feel less empowered to stand for office. Perhaps they need fresh role models.

A worldwide election

Between January and June 2021, Swiss expatriates around the world will vote to determine the composition of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”. The CSA has 140 delegates, of whom 120 represent Swiss communities abroad and 20 live in Switzerland. Not all countries share the same procedure for electing CSA delegates, so the vote will not be centrally coordinated. Everything you need to know about the elections will appear in your regional edition of “Swiss Review”, courtesy of the Swiss association or umbrella organisation in your area. (MUL)

This is all still hypothetical, because direct elections will not be taking place in 2021.

This is true. The best direct elections are when everyone can vote online. However, the suspension of e-voting in Switzerland has set us back. No other government solutions are available. Consequently, we are pinning our hopes on an alternative e-voting system. We have already evaluated it, but procuring and rolling it out takes time. Nevertheless, our efforts underscore how important introducing direct elections remains. Essentially, direct elections would provide the CSA with greater legitimacy and political leverage.

Gaining work experience in Switzerland

educationsuisse gives advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland as well as tips on gaining initial work experience in Switzerland.

Would you like to work as a language assistant at a Swiss upper secondary school or a vocational school for a year?

Young students or recent graduates from countries whose official national language is English, German, French, Spanish or Italian can gain teaching experience in Switzerland. As native speakers, they enrich language lessons and exemplify cultural aspects of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which just covers their living costs in Switzerland. Applications for the 2021/22 school year are being accepted until the end of March 2021.

For detailed information about the Language Assistants programme, please consult ogy.de/movetia or send an email to edith.funicello@movetia.ch.

Would you like to work as an au pair in Switzerland?

Working as an au pair for a family with children can be a good opportunity for young Swiss Abroad to get to know their country of origin better. The salary is nothing to write home about, but they receive free board and lodging and enough spare time to attend a language course, for example.

Various organisations arrange au pair placements. Please contact educationsuisse for a list of addresses.

Would you like to help out on a farm in Switzerland for several weeks?

Agriviva, www.agriviva.ch, is an association that organises placements lasting several weeks for young people aged up to 25 and from around the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you will help a farming family with their daily work. These placements are ideal for young people who like to be active, love the outdoors, and are keen to get to know a new family and experience life on a Swiss farm. (RG)

educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad specific advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland. Its employees speak German, French, Italian, Spanish and English and are available to answer your questions via email, telephone, Skype or in the office in Berne.

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Language assistant Leslie Schmid, Swiss Abroad from Canada, at work. Photo provided.



Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

On 4 November 2020, the Federal Council decided that there will be three federal proposals submitted to the people on 7 March 2021:

- Popular initiative "Yes to a ban on full facial coverings"
- Federal Act on Electronic Identification Services
- Federal Decree on the approval of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement between the EFTA member states and Indonesia

Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative "Pay 7,500 francs to every Swiss citizen (Helicopter Money Initiative)" (20.04.2022)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at:

www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

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