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Getting on the electoral register is simple and straightforward

You can live abroad but still vote on Swiss matters. Switzerland grants voting rights to its citizens living abroad. If you want to exercise your voting rights, you must first get on the electoral register.

MARC LETTAU

Some 780,000 Swiss live abroad, of whom a large proportion – over 600,000 – are older than 18 and therefore entitled to vote under Swiss law. However, many do not avail themselves of the political rights that Switzerland grants to its expatriate citizens. At present, the electoral register contains the names of 220,000 Swiss Abroad. But many who have not voted to date may well be wondering how they can get their names on this register now that election year is under way.

How to qualify

The procedure is relatively easy and – here's the key – only needs to be completed once. After being entered in the register, you will always receive the necessary ballot material automatically by post. The statutory requirements for being entered in the electoral register are also quite simple: you must be at least 18 years old, your permanent residence must be abroad, you must be registered with the Swiss representation in your country of domicile, and you must not be legally incapacitated from voting. You will not incur any fees for being entered in the electoral register. Furthermore, you pay nothing for the privilege of voting as such – or almost nothing: there is still the small matter of covering the postage cost when returning your ballot papers.

How to proceed

Voting in elections and popular votes is an immersive, additional way of engaging with your country of origin. Moreover, the fact that Swiss Abroad are entered in the electoral register of their most recent Swiss municipality of residence further accentuates this bond. If you have never

lived in Switzerland, you will be registered with your Swiss municipality of origin. The name of your municipality is one of the items of information you will need to be entered in the register. The Application to exercise political rights is a straightforward form that you can download online, fill in by hand and send to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile.

Numerous opportunities to participate in Swiss democracy

Swiss who live in Switzerland can exercise their democratic voice in many ways and can make political decisions more than once a year at municipal, cantonal and federal level with their vote. The rights of Swiss Abroad are not quite as wide-ranging. All expatriates can vote at national level. Apart from casting their ballots, they also have the right to sign petitions calling for referendums or popular initiatives, as well as the right to run for election to the National Council. Ten cantons – Berne, Basel-Landschaft, Fribourg, Jura, Geneva, Grisons, Neuchâtel, Solothurn, Schwyz and Ticino – also grant voting rights at cantonal level to their citizens living abroad.

As mentioned above, entries in the electoral register are permanent and do not need to be renewed. They are valid for the entire time that you are abroad. You can also ask to have your name removed from the register, by writing to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile. Note that your name will also be deleted from the register if your voting papers cannot be delivered three times in a row. Even if this occurs, it is still possible for you to get back on the electoral register without any problem.

One hindrance remains

Swiss Abroad, especially those who live overseas, often complain of receiving their voting papers too late and essentially being unable to vote as a result. They continue to clamour for e-voting – and the authorities have heard their call. Intense preparations are under way for a new series of e-voting pilots. Furthermore, a number of pilots trialling the dispatch of voting papers via diplomatic courier have already been completed and are now being evaluated.



Useful information about the federal elections – at www.elections-2023.ch

The 2023 elections are an important matter for the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), which has set up its own dedicated online portal at www.elections-2023.ch, providing useful information about the forthcoming elections. The website's content includes the OSA 2023 election manifesto, information on the political parties and on any Swiss Abroad running for election to the National Council as well as reports in the Swiss media relating to the Swiss Abroad. (AW)

The Application to exercise political rights form is available to download at revue.link/form

