

Switzerland

February 2022

Switzerland has a **longstanding humanitarian tradition** and is an important donor and a strategic partner of UNHCR. The country also maintains a **resettlement programme**.

The overall protection rate is high, but many applicants only receive **provisional admission** with restricted rights that impedes their integration.

UNHCR's Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein (OSL) advocates with government and non-government partners to **include persons of concern** in their planning & projects.

POPULATION OF CONCERN*

Refugees**	117,169
Asylum-seekers	5,612
Stateless persons	684

TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN*

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Eritrea	38,219	Afghanistan	832
Syrian Arab Republic	20,043	Turkey	822
Afghanistan	14,649	Sri Lanka	725

*Data source: UNHCR 2021 Mid-Year Statistical Report and UNHCR [data finder platform](#)

**Includes provisionally admitted persons

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Advocacy: UNHCR visited accommodation facilities, exchanged with persons of concern and authorities on the COVID-19 situation of communities of concern and advocated for compliance with COVID-19 protection regulations.

Inclusion: The vaccination of asylum-seekers in federal asylum centres and cantonal accommodations started on 25 May 2021. Vaccination scepticism is common among asylum-seekers as well as among migrant populations. The Office has been taking this up with refugee communities and participated in disseminating information.

Communication with Communities: UNHCR stays in contact with governmental partners and refugee communities to ensure that the communities are well informed and participates with a social media campaign on vaccination. More [here](#) and [here](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

Visit of the High Commissioner (HC)

The HC met with Ignazio Cassis, Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and Patricia Danzi, Head of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), in Bern in October to discuss the Afghanistan situation, among other issues.

Workshops with refugee leaders

In November and December 2021, OSL organized two workshops with over 20 refugee community leaders, laying foundations for systematic, long-term cooperation between refugee community representatives.

New brochure on resettlement

UNHCR's recommendations on resettlement and complementary pathways for Switzerland are now captured in a new brochure. The brochure is available on the OSL's website [in German](#) and [in French](#).

RASSEMBLER LES COMMUNAUTÉS



Le bureau du HCR pour la Suisse a organisé deux workshops en novembre et décembre 2021 avec des représentant-e-s de communautés réunissant des réfugié-e-s.

Plus d'information dans [cet article](#).

Key Priorities

- **Protection (monitoring):** A second multipurpose visit took place at Federal Reception Centres in the asylum region of North-West Switzerland (canton of Basel-Stadt and Solothurn) in November 2021. The visits aim to provide OSL with insight into practical implementation of the new asylum system to identify good practices and potential issues, and include interviews with various stakeholders, including asylum-seekers.
- **Asylum applications:** In 2021, 15,000 asylum applications were filed in Switzerland, a 35 per cent increase compared to 2020, indicating a return to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Implementation of 1951 Convention:** In November 2021, OSL published a commissioned study on the application of Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention in Switzerland (full study available [in German](#), executive summary also available [in French](#)). The study found that although the practice in Switzerland is to a large extent compatible with Article 1 of the Convention, there remain issues in which the practice is not fully aligned. Examples include the high standard of proof required for individual persecution, which can lead to the exclusion of many refugees fleeing persecution in the context of civil war or other situations of persecution affecting entire groups.
- **Legal workshop:** The Office conducted a half-day workshop in October for legal representatives working in the accelerated asylum procedure and the asylum authority. In addition to the role of UNHCR globally, in Europe, and in Switzerland, current issues regarding implementation of the 1951 refugee definition in Switzerland were discussed.
- **Advocacy:** The daily newspaper Le Temps published a [November interview with the HC](#). OSL

facilitated the interview, which covered issues such as climate change's impact on displacement and the 70th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Working with Partners

- **HLOM Briefing:** Officials from a dozen Swiss cities attended a November briefing organized by SDC and OSL before the High-Level Officials meeting (HLOM). The objective was to increase engagement of cities and communities in the process.
- **Strategic litigation:** OSL and the local NGO humanrights.ch started cooperating on the establishment of a coordination platform for strategic litigation efforts for refugee rights in Switzerland. Strategic litigation has significant potential but until now, due to the lack of coordination and information-sharing among those involved, the potential has not fully materialized. By working together with humanrights.ch, OSL capacitates the Swiss legal community to use strategic litigation in granting refugees access to their human rights in Switzerland.

Statelessness

- In a [new reference judgment](#) published in December, the Swiss Federal Administrative Court (FAC) adjusted its case law regarding statelessness recognition procedures. Previously, beneficiaries of refugee status in Switzerland were found to have no legitimate interest in recognition as stateless persons. OSL repeatedly criticized this practice and issued a press release [in French](#) and [in German](#) welcoming this judgement.

UNHCR Presence in Switzerland

Staff:

7 National Staff
1 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Bern

Financial information (22 February 2022)

Information relates to the Representations for Austria and to the European Institutions in Strasbourg, to the Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein (OSL), the Liaison Office in Vienna and the presence in Portugal.

Financial requirements

USD 5.2 M



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Unearmarked contributions provide UNHCR with vital flexibility in determining how best to protect and assist persons of concern who are in the greatest needs or at the greatest risks.