

# Switzerland

Country name	Switzerland
State title	Swiss Confederation
Country name in official languages	Schweiz ( <i>deu</i> ) Suisse ( <i>fra</i> ) Svizzera ( <i>ita</i> ) Svizra ( <i>roh</i> )
State title in official languages	Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft ( <i>deu</i> ) Confédération suisse ( <i>fra</i> ) Confederazione Svizzera ( <i>ita</i> ) Confederaziun svizra ( <i>roh</i> )
Name of citizen	Swiss
Official languages	German ( <i>deu</i> ), French ( <i>fra</i> ), Italian ( <i>ita</i> ), Romansh ( <i>roh</i> ) <sup>1</sup>
Script	Roman
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	(CH/CHE)
Capital	Bern <sup>2</sup>
Population/Area	8.74 million <sup>3</sup> / 41,285 km <sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Switzerland is a landlocked country in the heart of Europe. The Alps cover 60% and stretch the width of the country. The Jura mountain range extends into France in the northwest and in the centre is the Swiss Plateau or “Mittelland”, which has the highest concentration of populated areas. The Latin name of the state title is *Confœderatio Helvetica* and of the country is *Helvetia*. These forms appear on coinage, stamps and are used as the source for e.g. the top-level domain .ch and the ISO country codes. As a confederated state, Switzerland grants a high degree of autonomy to each canton.

## Geographical names policy

Switzerland’s national mapping agency is [Bundesamt für Landestopografie](#) (Federal Office of Topography), known as *swisstopo*. Geographical names should be taken from their official maps and geodata (available [online](#)), with all diacritical marks retained. Several of the canton websites also have their own geoportals.

Swiss multilingualism comes of its geographical location, neighbouring Austria, France, Germany and Italy. In regions where multiple official languages are spoken, various names may be encountered and Switzerland’s approach is to use the name in the official language(s) of the canton. The choice of official language(s) rests with the canton and is usually the mother tongue of the majority population according to the latest census. In cantons with a significant minority population, this linguistic

<sup>1</sup> ISO 639-3 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

<sup>2</sup> Often referred to as the “federal capital”, Bern is the capital of Switzerland. The French spelling is *Berne* and the Italian is *Berna*, but the local official spelling Bern (*deu*) is recommended for use on HMG products.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home.html> .

community may have special rights, such as requesting their language names on road signs as seen in Fribourg/Freiburg (*fra/deu*). Many names have different spellings in the different national languages, such as *Zürich* in German, *Zurich* in French and *Zurigo* in Italian, and PCGN would suggest using the spelling as found in official sources, in this case, *Zürich*. One exception is the town of Biel/Bienne where this dual-language form is official and both names should be shown, separated by a solidus.

## Languages

Switzerland is a multilingual country with three official languages: German, French and Italian; Romansh is also an official language but is used by the federal authorities only if the information affects the area where that language is spoken. The various dialects of these languages spoken in the country can differ significantly from the written form. The two most widely spoken non-national languages are English (5.8%) and Portuguese (3.5%). Both French and German are official languages in the cantons of Bern, Fribourg and Valais; the official languages in Graubünden canton are German, Romansh and Italian. The towns of Biel/Bienne (majority German) and Fribourg (majority French) are officially bilingual French and German.

Swiss German (*gsw*) encompasses the Alemannic German dialects spoken in Switzerland and is the most widely spoken language, with over 60% of the population using it as their main language. Although Swiss German is the usual spoken language, Swiss Standard German is taught to all children at school and is used for all formal written communication. Swiss Standard German is similar to Standard German, with a few differences (known as *Helvetisms*) such as replacing the German eszett (ß) with ‘ss’, the removal of uppercase umlauts and accented vowels (Ä, Ö, Ü, Á and É) and the use of some loanwords from the other official languages e.g. the French word *poulet* rather than the Standard German *hähnchen* for ‘chicken’.

French is the official language in the western part of Switzerland, and this area is known in French as *la Romandie*. Spoken by nearly 23% of the Swiss population, the French spoken in Switzerland is similar to standard French. Italian is spoken by 8% of the people and serves as the official language in Ticino canton and the southern valleys of the canton of Graubünden. Romansh, spoken by around 10,000 people (0.5% of the Swiss population) in Graubünden, is also present in minor communities in Friuli and South Tyrol in Italy.

## Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings<sup>4</sup>):

As mentioned in ‘Languages’ above, many of the diacritics listed below (particularly upper-case characters) are omitted when written in Swiss languages.

**German** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
Ä	00C4	ä	00E4
Ö	00D6	ö	00F6
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC

<sup>4</sup> See [www.unicode.org](http://www.unicode.org)

**French** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB
Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ì	00CC	ì	00EC
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB
Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
ÿ <sup>5</sup>	0178	ÿ	00FF

**Italian** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	á	00E1
À	00C0	à	00E0
È	00C8	è	00E8
Ò	00D2	ò	00F2
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9

**Romansh** contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
È	00C8	è	00E8
Ò	00D2	ò	00F2
Ù	00D9	ù	00F9

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<sup>5</sup> Rarely encountered.

Map of Switzerland



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

**Administrative structure**

The 26 cantons (fra & ita: *canton*; deu: *kanton*, roh: *chantun*) function as the first-order administrative divisions (ADM1s) in Switzerland. They are the member states of the Swiss Confederation. Each has its own constitution, parliament, government, police and courts. Although the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Graubünden and Valais have more than one official language and therefore name, the PCGN recommended names are those found in official sources.

Canton (ADM1) PCGN recommended name	Location	Canton centre	ISO 3166-2 code	Canton official languages
Aargau	47° 23' 44" N, 008° 10' 20" E	Aarau (47° 23' 23" N, 008° 03' 08" E)	CH-AG	German
Appenzell Ausserrhoden	47° 21' 47" N, 009° 16' 58" E	Herisau (47° 22' 58" N, 009° 16' 19" E)	CH-AR	German
Appenzell Innerrhoden	47° 18' 45" N, 009° 24' 20" E	Appenzell (47° 19' 42" N, 009° 24' 35" E)	CH-AI	German

Canton (ADM1) PCGN recommended name	Location	Canton centre	ISO 3166-2 code	Canton official languages
Basel-Landschaft	47° 30' 16" N, 007° 42' 16" E	Liestal (47° 28' 58" N, 007° 44' 35" E)	CH-BL	German
Basel-Stadt	47° 34' 01" N, 007° 36' 55" E	Basel <sup>6</sup> (47° 33' 30" N, 007° 34' 24" E)	CH-BS	German
Bern <sup>7</sup>	46° 52' 21" N, 007° 35' 44" E	Bern (46° 55' 00" N, 007° 28' 00" E)	CH-BE	German, French
Fribourg <sup>8</sup>	46° 42' 30" N, 007° 06' 11" E	Fribourg (46° 47' 45" N, 007° 09' 17" E)	CH-FR	French, German
Genève	46° 11' 48" N, 006° 06' 38" E	Genève (Geneva) (46° 11' 44" N, 006° 08' 53" E)	CH-GE	French
Glarus	46° 58' 32" N, 009° 04' 23" E	Glarus (47° 02' 26" N, 009° 04' 05" E)	CH-GL	German
Graubünden <sup>9</sup>	46° 39' 31" N, 009° 37' 23" E	Chur <sup>10</sup> (46° 51' 24" N, 009° 31' 37" E)	CH-GR	German, Romansh, Italian
Jura	47° 22' 22" N, 007° 10' 05" E	Delémont (47° 21' 59" N, 007° 19' 44" E)	CH-JU	French
Luzern	47° 10' 00" N, 008° 10' 00" E	Luzern (Lucerne) (47° 05' 00" N, 008° 16' 00" E)	CH-LU	German
Neuchâtel	46° 59' 27" N, 006° 47' 52" E	Neuchâtel (46° 59' 35" N, 006° 55' 48" E)	CH-NE	French
Nidwalden	46° 55' 39" N, 008° 24' 37" E	Stans (46° 57' 29" N, 008° 21' 58" E)	CH-NW	German
Obwalden	46° 51' 31" N, 008° 12' 35" E	Sarnen (46° 53' 55" N, 008° 15' 02" E)	CH-OW	German
Sankt Gallen	47° 14' 22" N, 009° 09' 09" E	Sankt Gallen (47° 26' 11" N, 009° 23' 19" E)	CH-SG	German
Schaffhausen	47° 43' 38" N, 008° 34' 45" E	Schaffhausen (47° 41' 50" N, 008° 38' 06" E)	CH-SH	German

<sup>6</sup> The spelling Basle is sometimes seen in English. The French spelling is Bâle.

<sup>7</sup> Berne (*fra*), Berna (*ita, roh*).

<sup>8</sup> Freiburg (*deu*).

<sup>9</sup> Grigioni (*ita*), Grischun (*roh*), Grisons (*fra*).

<sup>10</sup> Caira (*roh*) Coire (*ita*).

Canton (ADM1) PCGN recommended name	Location	Canton centre	ISO 3166-2 code	Canton official languages
Schwyz	47° 02' 26" N, 008° 44' 28" E	Schwyz (47° 01' 40" N, 008° 39' 22" E)	CH-SZ	German
Solothurn	47° 19' 44" N, 007° 40' 12" E	Solothurn (47° 12' 24" N, 007° 31' 00" E)	CH-SO	German
Thurgau	46° 17' 04" N, 009° 04' 37" E	Frauenfeld (47° 33' 36" N, 008° 53' 59" E)	CH-TG	German
Ticino	47° 10' 00" N, 008° 47' 26" E	Bellinzona (46° 11' 42" N, 009° 01' 43" E)	CH-TI	Italian
Uri	46° 47' 05" N, 008° 38' 30" E	Altdorf (46° 52' 50" N, 008° 38' 40" E)	CH-UR	German
Valais <sup>11</sup>	46° 05' 00" N, 007° 50' 00" E	Sion (46° 13' 39" N, 007° 21' 20" E)	CH-VS	French, German
Vaud	46° 37' 00" N, 006° 38' 42" E	Lausanne (46° 32' 00" N, 006° 40' 00" E)	CH-VD	French
Zug	47° 09' 32" N, 008° 32' 19" E	Zug (47° 10' 21" N, 008° 31' 03" E)	CH-ZG	German
Zürich	47° 25' 00" N, 008° 40' 00" E	Zürich (47° 22' 00" N, 008° 33' 00" E)	CH-ZH	German

**Other significant locations**

PCGN recommended name	Other names	Feature Type	Location
Alps <i>(conventional name)</i>	Alpes ( <i>fra</i> ) Alpen ( <i>deu</i> ) Alpi ( <i>ita</i> ) Alps ( <i>roh</i> ) Alpe ( <i>slv</i> )	Mountains (Switzerland; Liechtenstein; France; Germany; Austria; Italy; Slovenia)	46° 25' 00"N 010° 00' 00"E
Bodensee ( <i>deu</i> )	Lake Constance <i>(conventional name)</i>	Lake (Austria; Germany; Switzerland)	47° 35' 00"N 009° 28' 00"E
Grosser Aletschgletscher	Glacier d'Aletsch ( <i>fra</i> )	Glacier	46° 27' 15"N 008° 04' 25"E
Jura		Mountains (France; Switzerland)	47° 15' 00"N 007° 15' 00"E

<sup>11</sup> Wallis (*deu*).

PCGN recommended name	Other names	Feature Type	Location
La Romandie	Welschland ( <i>deu</i> ) Romandia ( <i>ita</i> ) Romanda ( <i>roh</i> )	Cultural region	42° 12' N 006° 09' E
Lac de Neuchâtel		Lake	46° 54' 21" N 006° 51' 44" E
Lac Léman ( <i>fra</i> )	Lake Geneva (conventional name) Le Léman ( <i>fra</i> )	Lake (France; Switzerland)	46° 26' 40" N 006° 32' 31" E
Lago Maggiore	Lac de Locarno ( <i>fra</i> )	Lake (Italy; Switzerland)	45° 57' 00" N 008° 39' 00" E
Mittelland	Swiss Plateau (conventional name)	Plateau	47° 00' 00" N 007° 45' 00" E
Rhine (conventional name)	Rhein ( <i>deu</i> ) Rhin ( <i>fra</i> ) Rijn ( <i>nld</i> ) Reno ( <i>ita</i> ) Rain ( <i>roh</i> )	River (Germany; France; Switzerland; Netherlands; Austria; Liechtenstein)	51° 59' 03" N 004° 04' 57" E
Rhône	Rotten ( <i>deu</i> ) Rodano ( <i>ita</i> ) Rodan ( <i>roh</i> )	River (Switzerland; France)	43° 19' 58" N 004° 50' 42" E
Walensee		Lake	47° 07' 22" N 009° 11' 42" E
Zürichsee		Lake	47° 13' 18" N 008° 44' 26" E

Sources

- BBC country profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17980650>
- Bundesamt für Statistik (Federal Office for Statistics): <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home.html>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/switzerland/>
- Ethnologue: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
- FCDO Geographical Names Index: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- Swiss government website: <https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start.html>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui>
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Unicode [www.unicode.org](http://www.unicode.org)
- US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](https://www.nga.mil)

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