
I. GENERAL

Historical Background and Political Structure

Switzerland, or the Helvetic Confederation as it is also called, was founded by three alpine valley cantons which signed a treaty of alliance in the thirteenth century. The present federal state and its constitution go back to 1848. The federal government is comprised of an Executive or Cabinet called the Federal Council and a legislature. The Federal Council is made up of seven members which are elected by the legislature; the Council includes the President of the Confederation who is nominated annually to serve a one-year term. The legislature consists of two chambers, namely a 200-member National Council (elected by the population at large), and a 46-member Council of States representing the 26 cantons or provinces. There is also a Federal Supreme Court.

The Confederation has responsibility for foreign affairs, national defence, communications etc., while the cantons have sovereignty over their respective jurisdictions within the limits of the federal constitution.

Geography and Climate

Switzerland, situated in the centre of Europe, is bordered by France to the west, Austria and Liechtenstein to the east, the Federal Republic of Germany in the north, and Italy in the south. Total land area is 41 293 km² of which 74 per cent is arable. The climate is temperate and varies according to altitude, the average temperature in winter being 1°C and in summer 18°C.

Population

The total population in 1988 was 6 668 500 with an average of 160 inhabitants per square kilometre.

By Principal City (including surrounding metropolitan area)

Zurich	842 447
Geneva	386 867
Basel	363 109
Berne	300 316
Lausanne	264 003
Lucerne	161 559
St-Gallen	126 190
Winterthur	108 472