

The "No to 10 million Switzerland" initiative and its aftermath

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The free movement of persons was tested again before the package reached the ballot. The Swiss People's Party launched the popular initiative "No to 10 million Switzerland (sustainability initiative)", which required the Confederation to take measures to keep the permanent resident population below ten million before 2050. If the population exceeded 9.5 million before that date, the Federal Council would have had to tighten admission, and if the measures failed, the Confederation would ultimately have had to terminate the free movement agreement.¹ Because of the guillotine clause, a termination would have ended the whole of the Bilaterals I six months later, taking with it, as the Union had indicated, the new package.

The initiative was put to the vote on 14 June 2026 with an unusually high turnout of nearly 59 per cent. It was rejected by about 55 per cent of the voters and by a majority of the cantons.² In Basel-Stadt the rejection was particularly clear: according to the cantonal results, nearly three-quarters of the voters said no.³ The result fits the pattern that runs from the EEA vote of 1992 through the votes of 2014 and 2020: Basel votes for openness more strongly than the country as a whole.

The rejection removed an immediate threat to the bilateral path, although it did not settle the debate on immigration. Political analysts noted that concern about population growth, housing costs and infrastructure remained widespread among voters who had rejected the initiative.⁴ According to the Federal Statistical Office, the Swiss population passed nine million in 2023. Its continued growth will keep the subject on the political agenda.⁵ For the scenarios developed below, the vote of June 2026 is best read as a signpost. It shows that a majority remained unwilling to give up the bilateral path for a population ceiling, while the margin leaves room for future initiatives with different wording.

1 Notes

1. Popular initiative "Keine 10-Millionen-Schweiz! (Nachhaltigkeitsinitiative)", proposing a new Art. 73a of the Federal Constitution with a ceiling of 10 million permanent residents before 2050, an intermediate threshold of 9.5 million and, as a last resort, termination of the AFMP. Content to be verified. ↩
2. Popular vote of 14 June 2026 on the initiative "No to 10 million Switzerland": rejected by about 54.8 per cent of the voters, turnout about 58.9 per cent, according to the provisional results reported by SRF and swissinfo. Figures and cantonal results to be verified. ↩
3. Final results of the canton of Basel-Stadt for the federal vote of 14 June 2026: about 73.5 per cent no, about 26.5 per cent yes, turnout about 61.5 per cent. Figures to be verified. ↩
4. On the analysis of the vote of 14 June 2026 and the persistence of concerns about immigration and population growth, see the post-vote commentary of the research institute gfs.bern and contemporary press analysis. To be verified. ↩
5. On the permanent resident population of Switzerland exceeding nine million in 2023, see the publications of the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), STATPOP. To be verified. ↩

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