

Italian in the federal administration: target values and reality

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The representation of Italian speakers in the federal administration is the most measurable test of the equality of Italian. Article 20 paragraph 2 of the Languages Act requires fair representation of the linguistic communities. The Languages Ordinance translates this into numerical ranges. In the version in force from 2014 until the end of 2025, Article 7 set target values for the whole federal administration, excluding the ETH domain, of 68.5 to 70.5 per cent for German speakers, 21.5 to 23.5 per cent for French speakers, 6.5 to 8.5 per cent for Italian speakers and 0.5 to 1.0 per cent for Romansh speakers.¹ The ranges approximate the shares of Swiss citizens by language and therefore set a modest standard. They do not prescribe quotas in individual recruitments, but they guide the personnel policy of the departments and the evaluation by the Delegate for Plurilingualism.

1 The overall share

Measured against these ranges, the overall share of Italian speakers has been stable for a decade, close to the lower end of the target band. A parliamentary interpellation by Laurence Fehlmann Rielle in 2019 and the Federal Council's answer of 14 August 2019 give the series for the years after the revision of the ordinance: 6.9 per cent in 2014, 7 per cent in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and 6.6 per cent in 2018 across all salary classes.² The personnel management report for 2024 recorded 69.2 per cent German speakers, 23.4 per cent French speakers, 7.0 per cent Italian speakers and 0.5 per cent Romansh speakers.³ The Delegate for Plurilingualism gives almost the same figures for the following year: 69.1 per cent German, 23.5 per cent French, 7.0 per cent Italian and 0.5 per cent Romansh.⁴ Italian speakers are thus represented within the target range, but they have not moved towards its upper end.

The overall figure hides marked differences between departments. In the Federal Department of Finance the share of Italian speakers is above average, mainly because of the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security, whose staff at the southern border is recruited in Ticino. The Federal Chancellery also has a higher share because it houses the central language services, including the Italian translation division.⁵ A study by the Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA), reported in November 2020, found that more than 60 per cent of federal employees worked in an office or administrative unit with inadequate representation of the linguistic minorities. German speakers were over-represented in 45 of 67 administrative units, and Italian speakers were underrepresented in 41 units.⁶ An Italian-speaking official in the customs service in Chiasso and an Italian-speaking translator in Bern raise the average for the administration as a whole, but they do not change the language of work in the offices that prepare financial market legislation.

2 Notes

1. LangO, Art. 7, version of 1 October 2014 (above); Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism, *Il plurilinguismo in Svizzera in breve* (above). ↩
2. Laurence Fehlmann Rielle, interpellation "Plurilinguismo nell'Amministrazione federale" of 9 May 2019 and answer of the Federal Council of 14 August 2019, as documented by the Forum per l'italiano in Svizzera, https://www.forumperlitalianoinsvizzera.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019.09_Plurilinguismo_amm_inistrazione_federalel.pdf. ↩
3. "Amministrazione federale, il numero di italofoni è stabile", laRegione (ATS), 7 March 2025, <https://www.laregione.ch/svizzera/svizzera/1820758/amministrazione-federale-il-numero-di-italofoni-e-stabile>. ↩
4. Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism, *Il plurilinguismo in Svizzera in breve* (above). ↩
5. laRegione, 7 March 2025 (above). ↩

6. laRegione, report on the language communities in the federal administration, 17 November 2020, <https://www.laregione.ch/svizzera/svizzera/1475003/federale-germanofoni-lingue-amministrazione-francese>, presenting a study by the Zentrum für Demokratie Aarau (ZDA). ↩

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