

The Languages Ordinance and its revisions

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The ordinance of 2010, as revised with effect from 1 October 2014, specifies the duties of the federal administration. It requires the employers to ensure that employees from all language communities have equal opportunities and that staff can work in German, French or Italian as they wish, as long as operational needs do not require otherwise. In recruitment, candidates from all language communities who meet the objective criteria must be considered in the preselection.¹ The ordinance also sets requirements for language skills. All employees must have the oral and written knowledge of a second official language that their function requires. Middle managers must have good active knowledge of at least one second official language, and senior managers active knowledge of a second official language and passive knowledge of a third. The revision of 2014 created the position of a Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism, appointed by the Federal Council and attached to the Federal Department of Finance, and introduced a four-yearly reporting cycle under which the departments provide quantitative and qualitative information on the promotion of plurilingualism.²

Nicoletta Mariolini, an economist from Ticino who had sat in the Ticino Grand Council from 2007 to 2013, has held the office of delegate since 1 August 2013.³ The delegate coordinates the implementation of the language policy in the administration, evaluates it and advises the departments. The office has no power to issue binding instructions to the departments. Its influence rests on the reports it prepares for the Federal Council and on its role in recruitment and training programmes.

In October 2025 the Federal Council amended the ordinance again. Two changes concern Italian directly. The Federal Office of Culture may now finance projects to promote Italian and Romansh outside their territories of origin, including school initiatives and cultural projects for young people of the Italian-speaking diaspora in other cantons. The target value for Italian speakers in the federal administration was raised to a range of

7.5 to 8.5 per cent with effect from 2026.⁴ The first change responds to a demographic fact discussed in the next section: about half of all Italian speakers live outside Ticino and the Grisons. The second is examined in the section on the federal administration.

1 Notes

1. LangO, Art. 6–8, version of 1 October 2014 (above). ↩
2. LangO, Art. 8b and the provisions on reporting, version of 1 October 2014 (above). ↩
3. Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism, "Nicoletta Mariolini", <https://www.plurilingua.admin.ch/it/nicoletta-mariolini-3>. ↩
4. RSI, "La Svizzera rafforza la promozione dell'italiano e del romancio", 29 October 2025, <https://www.rsi.ch/info/svizzera/La-Svizzera-rafforza-la-promozione-dell%E2%80%99italiano-e-del-romancio--3238397.html>; Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism, Il plurilinguismo in Svizzera in breve, https://www.plurilingua.admin.ch/dam/it/sd-web/wgN8O5waA2LA/20240717_II%20plurilinguismo%20in%20Svizzera%20in%20breve.pdf, which gives the target ranges until 31 December 2025 and from 1 January 2026. ↩

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