

Swiss residents and English

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

For Swiss residents of Zug, English has become a part of daily life. Young people learn it at school, consume English-language media and use it at work. Surveys show that English, used regularly by 44 per cent of the population, is the most widespread non-national language in Switzerland and that it is used regularly more often than French in German-speaking Switzerland.¹ In Zug, with its concentration of international companies, the share of residents who use English at work is higher than the national average.

The spread of English among Swiss residents has been accompanied by debates about its effect on the national languages. Some cantons in German-speaking Switzerland decided in the early 2000s to teach English before French in primary school. The decision provoked controversy in the French-speaking cantons, which saw it as a threat to national cohesion. The debate reached the federal level. In June 2026 the Federal Council opened a consultation on an amendment of the Languages Act that would secure the teaching of a second national language in primary school.² Central Switzerland, including Zug, teaches English first. The debate illustrates that English in Switzerland is not only a practical tool but also a political question touching the relations between the language regions.

1 Notes

1. Federal Statistical Office, press release on the Survey on Language, Religion and Culture, 14 August 2025, republished on vbs.admin.ch: English, used regularly by 44 per cent, is the most widespread non-national language; in German-speaking Switzerland it is used regularly more often than French (45 against 15 per cent); 65 per cent of 15- to 24-year-olds rate their active English skills as good or very good; English used regularly at work, in the family and on the internet. ←

2. [swissinfo.ch](https://www.swissinfo.ch), "Fremdsprachen-Unterricht: Chronologie", 31 March 2004: in May 2003 the Zurich cantonal parliament supported English from the third class; in March 2004 Zurich decided on English from the second class from 2006/07; the central Swiss education directors kept early English from the third class in December 2003; in the mid-1990s French-speaking Switzerland opposed the push to give English priority over French; on 31 March 2004 the EDK agreed on a first foreign language from the third and a second from the fifth class from 2012/13. [swissinfo.ch](https://www.swissinfo.ch), "Bundesrat will zweite Landessprache an Primarschulen durchsetzen", 12 June 2026: consultation on amending the Languages Act until 5 October 2026, in reaction to efforts in German-speaking Switzerland to drop early French; two variants, one requiring a second national language and English in primary school (in line with HarmoS), the other guaranteeing a second national language from primary school to the end of compulsory schooling. ↩

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