

Switzerland

The Swiss context

Cultural diversity is an intrinsic part of the concept of the Swiss State. The historic cohabitation of four different languages and cultures in the restricted space that characterizes it, associated with the presence of people from cultures of various origins, led the Helvetic Confederation long ago to integrate the principle of cultural diversity into its Constitution, its political and administrative system and its cultural policy measures. For this reason, Switzerland supported the efforts for the establishment of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and participated actively in its development process. For Switzerland, this Convention entered into force on 16 October 2008 (RS 0.440.8).

Legal action framework

Cultural diversity features prominently in the Swiss Federal Constitution and in various Cantonal Constitutions, especially in the multilingual and urban areas of the country. The promotion of culture is primarily the responsibility of the cantons and municipalities, as set out in Article. 69 Cst., but the Confederation has the competence to promote cultural activities that are of national interest and to encourage artistic and musical expression, especially through training. Consequently, Switzerland implements an active policy for the promotion of cultural exchanges between the Swiss linguistic regions and other countries. The foreign policy of Switzerland also recognizes the role of culture in development cooperation and in promoting the image of the country. In this context, the 2005 Convention was immediately seen as a tool to strengthen the Swiss legislative framework and its legitimacy as a new instrument to ensure the sustainability of proven principles of Swiss cultural policy.

Implementation, results and challenges

It is primarily the responsibility of the Swiss cantons and municipalities to determine the nature and extent of action to deploy in support of the diversity of cultural expressions. They implement a multitude of measures in their territory to promote their founding diversity, as well as inter-cantonal and cross-border cooperation through different cultural and other policies. The wide variety of cultural initiatives, integration and sustainable development of the Swiss cantons and municipalities serve as a hallmark of Swiss federalism, which can therefore be considered a key feature stimulating diversity of cultural expressions in Switzerland. At the federal level, the two main strategies of Swiss cultural policy (Federal Council Message of 23 February 2011 concerning the promotion of culture for 2012-2015; 2011 FF 2773) and development cooperation (Strategic Orientation of the DDC for the promotion of intercultural exchanges and artists from the South and East 2010-2015²), developed after 2008, also refer directly to the text of the Convention.

However, from the broad consultation undertaken for the preparation of the report, it is clear that there is a need for awareness-raising on the objectives and potential of the Convention in Switzerland, notably in the cross-cutting thematic approach and in the context of parallel and subsidiary competence of the Confederation in encouraging culture. The impact of current policies on the diversity of cultural expressions is indeed difficult to measure in some cases, justifying better qualitative and quantitative documentation of the activities at the different levels of the political system, but also the private sector and foundations. The adoption of a statistical framework adapted to the appreciation of the diversity of cultural expressions in its various aspects, increased efforts to raise awareness of the issues and principles of the Convention and the development of a functional coordination between cantons, municipalities and the Confederation can be identified as the main challenges in supporting the implementation of the Convention in Switzerland.

² www.deza.admin.ch/ressources/resource_fr_184530.pdf