

# Reintroduction of an education objective in Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy: A Critical Enabler for Prosperity, Peace and Stability

Honourable Delegates

We, the undersigned—Swiss foundations active in international education—express concern about the deprioritization of education in the current version of Switzerland's international cooperation strategy 2025-28. It marks a departure from Switzerland's longstanding commitment to global education, by excluding a dedicated education goal, in contrast to past strategies. This shift, unlikely to go unnoticed internationally, risks appearing inconsistent, undermining Switzerland's credibility as a reliable partner and reducing the opportunity for an enhanced collaboration with the Swiss philanthropic sector and the critical enabler for prosperity, peace and stability. Furthermore, Switzerland's leading role in global education could be weakened and previous investments – particularly the promotion of Geneva as an educational hub- could be compromised.

In this regard, we welcome the National Council Foreign Policy Commission's decision on 5 November 2024 to prioritize education in Swiss international cooperation, which is an important milestone. The Council of States has the opportunity to reinforce this commitment.

## **A Misleading Divide between Security and Development**

In the ongoing debate over Switzerland's international cooperation budget, the competing discourse between development and security is misleading. Opting for one against the other can only lead to a zero-sum game. Instead, as Martin Dahinden points out, development cooperation is a sustainable and preventive security strategy. We express our support to maintain the 2025-28 international cooperation commitment credits and yearly budgets at the current level, without any further reductions. At the same time, it is important to discuss how these resources can be best invested in terms of the impact on sustainable development, peace, and stability.

## **Education: A Driving Force for Peace, Stability and Prosperity**

Education is a critical enabler of the broader Sustainable Development Goals, in particular for poverty reduction (SDG 1), for decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), for climate action (SDG 13), for peace (SDG 16). Education acts as a driving force of peace: it fosters critical thinking, it strengthens social equality and economic growth and contributes to building communities in which everyone can thrive and envisage a future for themselves or themselves - all fundamental anchors of peace, stability and security. A 2023 study by the Global Partnership for Education and the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) highlights that higher rates of both primary and lower secondary school completion, especially for girls, show positive correlations with factors known to create and sustain peaceful societies. The number of years spent learning at school is the factor that contributes most to reducing the various forms of violence (Martinez and Collins, 2023). If we care about global peace and security, we must care about education.

Recent emerging data on the economics of education show that, on conservative assumptions, education has contributed to 50% of global economic growth, 70% of the increase in income for the world's poorest quintile, and 40% of the reduction in extreme poverty over the last four decades. Education is by far one of the most efficient ways to put international cooperation funding to good use.

## **Switzerland's Leading Role in Global Education: A Key Asset of its Soft Power**

Mirroring the importance that education plays in Switzerland's success model, education has been a key pillar of Swiss international cooperation since its inception. The results and returns on these investments

have been deep and numerous. 1.6 million children and young people received access to basic education between 2021 and 2024, including in emergency situations, thanks to Swiss international cooperation (FDFA, 2024). Switzerland established itself as a leading actor in global education and as a reliable and respected partner, whose voice counts in the international education policy and forums. Switzerland is internationally recognized as having one of the world's strongest education systems and key characteristics such as the dual nature have led to global good practices. This leading role is an important component of Switzerland's international image, its soft power and provides access to key players beyond the education sector. Switzerland has invested substantial resources to successfully promote Geneva as a global hub for education, especially with the establishment of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies in 2021. This has attracted several essential initiatives to the city, including Education Cannot Wait, UNICEF and ITU's Giga initiative, UNESCO, the International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd), and the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), all of which have at least partially relocated to Geneva.

### **A Unique Opportunity to Scale Impact via Public-Private Philanthropy Partnerships**

The education sector benefits from a particularly high concentration of Swiss-based philanthropic and private actors, ready to scale Switzerland's impact through innovative public-private philanthropy partnerships. As an example, the Jacobs Foundation, UBS Optimus Foundation, Roger Federer Foundation together with the Global Partnership for Education have co-invested over USD 70 million to support innovative and impactful programs to provide access to quality, equitable education in Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Some of these programs have leveraged the participation of local and international (and for some for them, Switzerland-headquartered) private companies from the cocoa, coffee, telecom or banking industries; others are working to deploy an additional USD 90 million together. Such collaborations are made possible by the continuous prioritization of education by Switzerland with government funding acting as a catalyst. Together, as 'team Switzerland', we can align resources and amplify impact by supporting fewer, but more impactful, architectural pieces, in collaboration with key international mechanisms such as the Global Partnership for Education or IFFEd.

### **Support to Reintroduce Education as an Objective**

Currently, there is only a modest mainstreaming of education in the international cooperation strategy 2025-28, with no education objective included. The National Council Foreign Policy Commission's decision to prioritize education in Swiss international cooperation is an important step in the right direction. The Council of States has the opportunity to reinforce this decision.

We would highly appreciate your support for reintroducing an education objective, which is aligned with Switzerland's interest in prosperity, stability and peace.

Yours sincerely

Friends of Education Group

#### **Submitted on behalf of the following members:**

Addax and Oryx Foundation  
 Dalyan Foundation  
 Dariu Foundation  
 Drosos Foundation  
 Fondation Botnar  
 Green Leaves Education Foundation  
 Happel Foundation  
 Innovation Foundation  
 Jacobs Foundation  
 LGT Venture Philanthropy  
 MC2H Foundation  
 Roger Federer Foundation  
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