On 27 August 2008, the Swiss Federal government responded to various parliamentary initiatives by adopting a report on the “Strategy for a Swiss Children and Youth Policy”, which provides the basis for Switzerland’s future children and youth policy. In this report, the Federal Council (Bundesrat), i.e. the Swiss government, expresses its determination to extend the involvement of the Federation in the areas of child protection, youth promotion and youth participation in politics, while safeguarding the predominantly federalist framework of children and youth policy in Switzerland. In response to the new needs of a changing society, the proposed measures aim at amending the existing Swiss Federal legislation in the areas of children's rights, the prevention of abuse and violence against children as well as the promotion of youth activities.

Youth in Switzerland

Approximately 2.6 million young people below the age of 30 live in Switzerland. They represent a third of its total population. The share of foreigners in this demographic group is approximately 25%¹; youth unemployment runs at a moderate 3%²; far more than 30% of those seeking trainee positions find a training company in the system of dual vocational training after their period of compulsory school education.

By international standards, the general conditions are very favourable for young people growing up in Switzerland. Current research confirms a positive image of young people. The study on “Values and Life Opportunities in Transition” in the Swiss Youth Survey series³ comes to the conclusion that young Swiss men and women continue to be an age group with persistently positive and realistic orientations. The majority of young people shows a high level of satisfaction and strives for realistically defined goals in life. Their value orientations are relatively constant and stable, and they have changed very little compared to the past. A second study, the COCON⁴ Swiss Children and Youth Survey studied the development of social competence in the adolescent period and found that social competences such as compassion, acceptance of responsibility and willingness to achieve are very well developed among young people in Switzerland; in this context, significant factors are a trusting relationship between parents and child as well as extracurricular spaces of learning and experiences.

¹ Source: Bundesamt für Statistik [Federal Statistical Office], BFS
⁴ Universität Zürich, Jacobs Center (forthcoming): Der Schweizerische Kinder- und Jugendsurvey COCON [The COCON Swiss Child and Youth Survey], Zürich.
Switzerland is known as an Alpine state; a large share of its population including the young generation lives in cities and agglomerated municipalities. Consequently, social problems and the actions introduced by social and youth policy also focus on these areas. The developments and problems in the area of children and youth currently receive a particular high level of public attention. The overwhelming majority of children and youth finds an adequate way of dealing with today's circumstances, but there is a minority which fails to find its way in today's society and is overtaxed by its challenges.

**Current challenges**

This takes us to the question of the current challenges which young people are confronted with in their adolescence. Just as in other European countries and as a result of societal, technical and economic developments in recent decades, the world and the situation of children and youth have undergone fundamental changes. The transition from school and/or training into the rapidly changing world of employment and from a dependent to an independent life is much less standardised and much more diverse today. This opens up a wide variety of opportunities for young people; but it also leads to uncertainties and excessive burdens. A globalised economy needs highly trained labour, new technologies create the basis for the changes in our everyday communication. In order to cope with this changed environment, core competences are required. In addition to linguistic, technical and mathematical competences, they also include social and life competences, for whose acquisition the formal education system and extracurricular spaces of learning and experience are highly significant.

As a result, there have been efforts in recent years to push ahead with the harmonisation of compulsory education in Switzerland. And it is planned that the implementation of the Bologna reform of university education will be largely completed in 2011. There has been a lot of progress in the harmonisation of the formerly fragmented structures of vocational education in the cantons. Because of the high priority given to the system of dual vocational education - approximately 70% of all young people living in Switzerland get their vocational training in the system of dual vocational education - adjustments seemed to be urgently required. With the review of the Vocational Education Act, all occupations with the exception of the universities have been brought into a uniform system. The term ‘European Qualifications Framework’ (the “Copenhagen process”) is also well-known in Switzerland and is an orientation for vocational training to ensure its international competitiveness. The overwhelming majority of young people has an opportunity to get solid vocational training. This is regarded as an important reason for Switzerland's low level of youth unemployment - by international standards. But its inequalities and problems are also manifest. A collection of data by the Federal Migration Office concludes that between 15 and 20% of an age cohort of foreign youngsters do not go through regular vocational training and thus have a higher risk of unemployment and dependence on social welfare benefits. The poor position of young people and especially of young people in the second migration phase on the vocational training market can be explained by the fact that many of them are already in a disadvantaged position during their compulsory school education.

The results of the National Research Programme NFP 52 entitled "Childhood and youth in Switzerland" confirmed that children and youth from families with a low income and poor educational background or with a single parent or migration experiences have significantly poorer starting conditions than their peers.

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5 Cf. www.edk.ch Projekt HarmoS. Swiss school systems are still organised differently at the canton level.
6 Cf. Rektorenkonferenz der Schweizer Universitäten (Conference of Swiss UniversityRectors) www.crus.ch
8 Message of the Bundesrat on the support for education, research and innovation in 2008–2011 of 24 January 2007
11 ibid. S. 177
In a current expert opinion on the problems of youth violence, the criminologist Dr. Manuel Eisner describes the interaction of various individual, family-, school- and neighbourhood-related risk factors, which are associated with a higher risk of using violence. He also points out that violence and aggression are not isolated problems, but that they very often occur in conjunction with other social and behavioural disorders. Youth violence is part of a behavioural syndrome, which includes various other problematic forms of behaviour (such as alcohol and drug abuse, promiscuity, a higher accident risk, truancy)\textsuperscript{12}.

At canton and Federal level, various efforts are under way to develop adequate solutions to the above-mentioned problem situations. In cooperation with the cantons, for example, the Federation has developed a comprehensive priority programme to promote integration\textsuperscript{13}. The recent revision of the Juvenile Criminal Code stresses the educational principle and provides that, in case of repressive interventions, special attention shall be paid to the life and family situation of the young individual as well as the development of his/her personality\textsuperscript{14}. For a number of years, the Federation has provided support in the form of seed money for institutions of pre-school childcare as a complement to the care provided by the family. This funding is intended to enable the parents and especially the mothers to take up a job. It is also recognised that childcare outside the family and targeted early interventions can compensate for existing disadvantages - in linguistic competence, for example. Regarding the prevention and interventions against youth violence, the Swiss government will present a report in the first half of 2009 which will discuss and possibly propose the implementation of preventive and repressive actions. It may be assumed that efforts at the level of the local authorities, cantons and the Swiss Federation will be necessary to effectively fight this problem.

Protection, support and participation as key content of child and youth policy

Following from the above-mentioned statement, it is clear that actions in various fields of politics are significant to create favourable conditions for the upbringing of children and youth. This is the starting point for the Swiss Federal Government’s report on child and youth policy. Children, young people and their environment depend on support, counselling, assistance, and promotion so that they can adequately cope with the current challenges and so that they can overcome problem situations. The report defines the objective of child and youth policy as ensuring the protection, well-being and social integration of all children and youth through public activities, actions and facilities to promote the development of children and youth into responsible and socially competent personalities and to accommodate their specific interests and needs\textsuperscript{15}. In this context, we must take into account that children and youth are not a homogeneous group and differ with respect to their age, gender, social class and origins, personal opportunities and abilities and that their living conditions are characterised by a wide variety of factors. As a result, the design of an effective child and youth policy is a demanding interdisciplinary effort, which is oriented towards creating positive conditions for the life of children and youth. This interdisciplinary function is underlined in the report, but the proposed actions focus on the three core elements of child and youth policy, namely protection, support and participation, which are derived from the principles of international and constitutional law\textsuperscript{16}.

- **As a policy of protection, child and youth policy** shall guarantee the protection of children and youth against risks resulting from negative impacts and influences in their environment. Preventive measures enable an early intervention in case of foreseeable undesirable
developments. Investments in child and youth policy therefore have a sustained effect and will prevent long-term expenditure in corrective actions against the damages incurred.

- **As a promoter of development and autonomy, child and youth policy** relates to the support for the development of children and youth and a gradual training of independence, autonomy and social responsibility. Such actions aim at developing social and life competences in the above-mentioned sense and therefore support children and youth as independent, mature and responsible members of society.

- **As a policy of participation and co-management, child and youth policy** relates to the understanding that children and youth are (legal) subjects in their own right and a resource with their own creative ideas and attempted solutions to social and political problems, and therefore it promotes individual and collective participation rights for this age group. In these activities, the forms of participation should be oriented to appropriate opportunities for children and youth of various age groups.

**Development of child and youth policy - the Federal division of responsibilities**

As a Federal state, Switzerland is structured according to the federalist principle. Federalism in this sense means that, in their capacity as members of the Federation, the cantons enjoy a high level of autonomy. Federalism is one of the fundamental principles of public policy and enshrined in the constitution with a correspondingly high level of priority. The activities of the state at all levels are complemented by voluntary activities of non-governmental organisations and private initiatives. The cantons have the primary responsibility for designing and implementing child and youth policy in the previously defined sense. In contrast, child and youth policy at Federal level has developed slowly. In this field, the Federation has a limited number of responsibilities such as child and youth protection pursuant to the Civil Code and the Criminal Code, the prevention of child abuse and the general field of funding youth services. The fundamental idea is to devolve responsibility to structures, which are smaller in scale and closer to the stakeholders concerned. But this also means that there are different approaches and understandings of child and youth policy at the level of the 26 cantons.

According to a 2003 study, whose findings continue to be valid, only approximately half of all cantons consider child and youth policy as encompassing both the protection and the support of young people. Instead, a number of cantons have developed independent and separate policies on child and youth protection versus child and youth support, and they focus on either one or the other area. Consequently, only some cantons have comprehensive youth legislation or youth-specific provisions in their general framework legislation. At this juncture, we should mention the developments in child and youth policy, which have occurred in some cantons in recent years. In the Youth Acts adopted after the revision of the Federal Constitution by the canton of Valais on 11 May 2000, the canton of Fribourg on 12 May 2006 and the canton of Jura on 22 November 2006, child and youth policy is defined in a comprehensive sense and oriented towards the relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Federal Constitution.

Due to the heterogeneous structure of child and youth policy, it is even more striking that a uniform nationwide system has developed in parallel to the general youth services under the very well-known label Youth+Sports (Jugend+Sport, J+S). The system has a focus in the field of youth sports activities and is characterised by its clear division of responsibilities between the Federation and the cantons. It shall suffice to say by way of explanation that Youth+Sports originated in a voluntary pre-education programme, whose aim was to prepare young males for military service. Its roots are in the militia system, which is firmly embedded in Swiss culture and based on the core principle that all citizens are responsible for the community as a whole.

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18 Youth+Sports (Jugend+Sport, J+S) offers courses and camps for children and youth in 75 sports disciplines. Every year, approximately 50,000 young people between 10 and 20 years of age participate in more than 50,000 athletics courses and sports camps. The education and further education of youth leaders is one of the major pillars of J+S. Every year, approximately 100,000 J+S leaders - predominantly volunteers - are active in youth work and approximately 60,000 of them receive training or further education. On average, one of six individuals in an age cohort will be trained as a J+S leader.
Weaknesses and gaps in current policies

Given the federalist division of responsibilities and the heterogeneous design of child and youth policy in the cantons, various players criticise the current situation in Switzerland. The umbrella organisations of extracurricular youth work, the Federal Children and Youth Commission (Eidgenössische Kinder- und Jugendkommission) and the Conference of Canton Child and Youth Services Officers (Konferenz der kantonalen Beauftragten für Kinder- und Jugendförderung) have repeatedly criticised the insufficient coordination and cooperation between the cantons and the Federation, insufficient support services and opportunities for participation, as well as the lack of an overarching strategy and control. Furthermore, the Federation’s youth services, which are based on the Act on the Support for Extracurricular Youth Work of 1989 with its orientation towards youth work in and by associations and its lack of opportunities to control the content of such youth work, no longer fulfil the requirements of a modern child and youth service policy.

The Swiss government has identified the need to optimise its child and youth policy. But it is opposed to demands for Federal framework legislation with compulsory specifications for the services provided by the cantons, as it was demanded in the Parliamentary initiative which provided the basis for this report: the content of activities for the protection, promotion and participation of children and youth must take into account the situation of the local community and the cantons and must be embedded in their structures. Furthermore, the existing legal and constitutional structure assigns the main responsibility for this field to the cantons and local authorities.

In this context, the Federal Constitution does not provide the Federation with the powers for a binding regulation of the material design of child and youth policy in the cantons, and such an attempt would meet with the fierce opposition of the cantons. From the perspective of the Swiss government, there can be no doubt, however, that the Federation must do more to exercise its power for promoting child and youth policy in the framework of the existing division of powers. The Federal Council therefore advocates a moderate expansion of its child and youth policy commitment. Consequently, the Federal Council described some concrete actions in its report to further develop child and youth policy:

**Actions for the protection of children and young people**

On the Federal level, funding is already available for preventive efforts against child abuse as well as awareness campaigns on children's rights. This funding originates in a decision by the Federal Council, but it is not enshrined in any legislation. Consequently, the activities of the Federation in this field will be defined more precisely and regulated in an executive ordinance.

This area also includes the preparatory work on a national child protection programme in a public-private partnership. This programme will be initiated by the Federation and private foundations, and it shall include the most important players in this field to coordinate, sponsor and realise concrete, targeted measures and projects. In the past, the Federation and private foundations supported individual projects without following an overarching strategy or coordinating their various efforts. In future, the jointly administered funds shall be used to implement a national strategy, which will be defined in consultation with the cantons. This implementation will be supported by an advisory group, which still needs to be established and will consist of representatives of the cantons, cities and local authorities, Swiss Federal commissions, agencies and institutes as well as individual experts in the child protection field. As of 2010, the day-to-day management of the programme will be entrusted to an external organisation on the basis of an invitation to tender.

And the Federation is in the process of intensifying its information activities on child and youth protection. It currently prepares an overview of canton regulations on the sale of alcohol and tobacco as well as the sale or rental of DVDs.

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19 Manifesto for an effective child and youth policy of 12 August 2006 and Expert opinion on an effective child and youth policy of the governing coalition and the Swiss Children and Youth Commission of 8 August 2007, respectively 10 September 2007.
20 E.g. the national counselling hotline. 147.ch
21 E.g. the Netzwerk Kinderrechte [Children’s rights network]
With respect to the protection of minors, the report does not propose any independent actions; it instead refers to the ongoing work for the preparation of a government report on youth violence and effective prevention strategies. In this context, it primarily discusses opportunities to improve the protection of children and young people in the media. Even though it is true that the protection of minors in Switzerland is either regulated in a heterogeneous fashion in the cantons or in various dedicated Federal acts of legislation, the report also underlines that the deficits in this area are not due to a lack of legislation; instead, the problem is that existing legislation is not consistently enforced at canton level.

**Actions in the area of child and youth services and participation**

Given the growing requirements in the labour market, with respect to media skills and social and societal problems, the Federal Council identifies an increasing importance of extracurricular spaces for learning and experience. Extracurricular child and youth work fulfils an important function in this field: it creates opportunities for participation, promotes voluntary commitment, independence and the exercise of social and political responsibilities, it creates opportunities for international exchange and has increasingly significant roles to play in health promotion and the prevention of violence. As a key action of the report, the Federal Council therefore proposes a total review of the existing Federal Act on the Support for Extracurricular Youth Work. The most important elements of the revised Act shall be:

- **Support for diverse and innovative forms of child and youth work:** in line with the diversification of life situations and the changed leisure-time behaviour of young people, the range of programmes in extracurricular youth work has also registered a considerable extension of its scope. Support for child and youth work by the Federation shall accommodate these diverse forms of programmes and activities. Its objective is to foster national cooperation as well as innovative and forward-looking pilot projects and, in so doing, to make a contribution to the further professional development and quality assurance of open child and youth work as well as the organisation of socio-cultural programmes in a way, which already applied to the support of non-public child and youth work at Federal level.

- **A legal basis for the activities associated with the preparation and implementation of the Swiss Federal Youth Session:** In the Swiss Federal Youth Session (Eidgenössische Jugendsession), the Federation supports an annual platform for young people to discuss political issues and to express their opinion. So far, there has been no specific legal basis for this platform. But these efforts and the provision of the appropriate ressources such as information, preparation and accompanying activities will continue to be necessary in future so that young people from the less educationally inclined classes or from disadvantaged environments as well as foreign youngsters will also be included.

- **Promotion of the conceptual development of comprehensive strategies for child and youth policy at canton and local level:** In future, the Swiss government will promote conceptual development activities at canton and local level in view of developing youth policy strategies and actions through programme agreements of the Federation with the cantons. Through these agreements, the Federation can demand that the cantons comply with certain specifications to receive financial support from the Federation. The basis for such funding will be the (minimum) standards developed in the cooperation between cantons, for which a child and youth services draft is already available\(^\text{23}\). In this context, the Conference of Canton Youth Officers (Konferenz der kantonalen Jugenddelegierten) has developed standards for child and youth services to promote the development of needs-oriented and effective child and youth services by the cantons and the local authorities.

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\(^{23}\) Konferenz der kantonalen Delegierten für Kinder- und Jugendförderung [Conference of Canton Child and Youth Services Officers] KKJF, draft of May 2008
Actions in the context of information and coordination activities

There is an important role the Federation must play in information and coordination activities. The report proposes an enhanced horizontal coordination at Federal level by increasing the cooperation and intensifying the exchange of information between the Federal agencies concerned and by supporting a coordinated exchange of information between all child and youth policy players (the Federation, the cantons and local authorities as well as non-governmental organisations). This activity is regarded as key to the development and implementation of a common strategy.

International cooperation

In addition to the actions to improve child and youth policy on the national level, the report also refers to the opportunities for international cooperation in the youth field, which are available to Switzerland through its membership in the Council of Europe and, specifically, the Comité Directeur Européen pour la Jeunesse (CDEJ), and it also highlights the importance of the planned full participation in the European Union's youth programme “Youth in Action”. For these activities, the Swiss government awarded a negotiating mandate to the State Secretary for Education and Research (Staatssekretär für Bildung und Forschung, SBF) and seeks to become a full participant in the European Union's education and youth programmes. The CH Foundation (CH Stiftung) has already been selected as the future National Agency for both programmes. The positive outcome of the negotiations will depend especially on the vote of the Swiss people on the extension of agreements on the freedom of movement for persons.

Conclusion

In the present report, the Swiss government underlines the advantages of a federalist structure, which permits the development of actions for child and youth protection, child and youth services and participation in a manner, which is closely targeted to the realities, resources and needs of the stakeholders and will be designed and developed in direct contact with the local players.

At the same time it recognises that certain coordination and exchange mechanisms are meaningful and necessary in a system with a federalist structure to clearly define the competences and responsibilities on the various levels, to launch a common learning and implementation process and to ensure a constructive interaction of the various administrative levels and non-governmental players. As a consequence, the Federation will enhance its commitment in child and youth policy and will support the cantons in designing, further developing and implementing their youth policies. By a skillful design of cooperation mechanisms between the various levels, it wants to lay the foundations for an effective child and youth policy.

By adopting the report on the “Strategy for a Swiss Child and Youth Policy”, the Swiss government uses its margin for manoeuvre, which it has been granted as a result of the existing constitutional division of powers in Switzerland's federal structure. The report proposes concrete measures, which can be realised and implemented immediately and which are backed by the Swiss cantons as the main players in child and youth policy. Consequently, the Federal Council underlines the cantons’ primary competence in child and youth policy, but it also wants to initiate and support the further development and conceptual enhancement of child and youth policy at canton level.

For child and youth policy in Switzerland, this report marks an important milestone. As a result, the comprehensive design of child and youth policy in Switzerland is given clearer contours and takes more concrete shape also in connection with other parallel activities. All these activities are bundled in the Childhood, Youth and Old-Age Affairs Section (Bereich Kinder-, Jugend- und Altersfragen) in the Families, Generations and Society Domain (Geschäftsfeld Familie, Generationen und Gesellschaft) of the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO). With this structure, Switzerland’s Federal administration has a competent unit to deal with child and youth policy issues as well as intergenerational questions.

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24 The referendum is scheduled for 8 February 2009.