Fact sheet "Child and youth policy in Switzerland"

March 2013

Child and youth policy in Switzerland is characterized by the federal division of responsibilities between the Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities. Primary responsibility rests with the cantons and municipalities; the Confederation takes on supporting and supplementary activities. At the same time, child and youth policy is closely linked with the activities of non-governmental organizations and private initiatives.

The Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) is the Confederation's specialist office for child and youth issues and deals with the subject areas of the protection of children and youth, the promotion of children and youth, children's rights and the participation of children and youth.

In response to the new needs of a changing society, the Swiss government has passed a number of resolutions intended to expand the Confederation's commitment in the following areas:

In its report “Strategy for a Swiss Child and Youth Policy”, adopted on 27 August 2008, the Swiss Federal Council defined child and youth policy as a policy of protection, promotion and participation on the basis of the Swiss Federal Constitution and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. With the measures it adopted, the Federal Council aimed to amend existing Swiss Federal legislation within the present constitutional powers: the complete revision of the Youth Promotion Act led to the federal law on the promotion of extracurricular work with children and youth (Child and Youth Promotion Act (KJFG) of 30 September 2011, SR 416.1) and the Ordinance on Measures for the Protection of Children and Youth and the Strengthening of Children's Rights of 11 June 2010 (SR 311.039.1).

With the report "Youth and Violence – Effective Prevention in different settings: family, school, community, media", adopted on 20 May 2009, the Federal Council dealt with a specific topic within the area of child and youth policy. The report analyses the causes and extent of violent behaviour among youth, offers an overview of existing prevention measures in Switzerland and reveals the direction of a promising violence prevention strategy. On the basis of this report, from 2011 to 2015 the Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) is implementing the two youth protection programmes "Youth and Violence" and "Media literacy and the protection of minors from harmful media content". The first of these programmes aims to improve the efficiency of efforts to prevent violent behaviour among youth, while the second seeks to promote competence among children and youth with regard to the opportunities and dangers of digital media.

On 27 June 2012 the Federal Council adopted a further basic report on the protection of children. "Violence and neglect in the family: necessary measures in the area of child and youth welfare and state sanctions" analyses the topic of the abuse and neglect of children and youth in families as well as violence between parents which is witnessed by their children or in which their children become involved. The Federal Council suggests increased support for the cantons in expanding child and youth welfare services. Among other things, it intends to help to finance cantonal programmes for the further development of the protection of children and youth.

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1 See Art. 11 para. 1 and Art. 41 para. 1 letter g of the Federal Constitution as well as Art. 67 of the Federal Constitution.
3 In fulfilment of the Fehr postulate 07.3725, Protection of Children and Youth from Violence in the Family.
Implementation activities and ongoing conceptual and legal work in child and youth policy in 2012:

**Children's rights, protection of children and youth**

The *Federal Council Ordinance on Measures for the Protection of Children and Youth and the Strengthening of Children's Rights* of 11 June 2010 forms the legal basis for carrying out programmes in the area of child and youth protection. At the same time, it covers the existing tasks of the Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV). The ordinance regulates prevention, awareness-promotion and information measures in the area of child and youth protection along with measures to strengthen the rights of children in line with Articles 19 and 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Here the primary focus is on support for individual measures in the areas of child protection and the strengthening of children's rights as well as cooperation with the affected organizations. The foundation of the Ordinance is Article 386 of the Swiss Criminal Code (StGB). The Ordinance entered into force on 1 August 2010.

**Children's rights:** With its funding for children's rights (around CHF 190,000 annually), the Confederation has committed itself in the main to an improved awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the coordination of its implementation in Switzerland. The Confederation can either conclude service agreements with partner organizations or finance individual projects.

The Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) is newly responsible for reporting on the status of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Switzerland, and is working toward a coordinated approach to the implementation of children's rights. For this purpose it is in contact with the different responsible parties and defines possible measures within the Confederation's sphere of authority.

**Protection of children:** With its funding for the protection of children (around CHF 900,000 annually), the Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) supports organizations which are active across Switzerland in the area of child protection (in the form of service agreements). In addition, the Federal Social Insurance Office is a member of the "Swiss Project Fund for Child Protection". This charitable association identifies and supports evidence-based prevention and training projects with measurable results. It also promotes research projects targeted at closing knowledge gaps in the field of prevention. By actively disseminating research results, findings and experiences, the association intends in the medium term to establish a knowledge network which benefits all stakeholders in the field of child protection and thus contributes to improving child protection sustainably.

In its report "Violence and neglect in the family: necessary measures in the area of child and youth welfare and state sanctions"*, the Federal Council proposes measures for prevention and intervention in order to more effectively combat and prevent the phenomenon of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children by their parents (child abuse) as well as the neglect of children and youth within the family, and to close existing gaps. The report concentrates on two areas: sanctions against perpetrators and help for the affected children and youth. The authors conclude that no additional measures are necessary in the area of sanctions: both the current measures available to the state in the event of punishable offences against minors and the direct protection of victims from violence (restraining orders) are sufficient. With regard to child and youth welfare, the report defines the basic services of a modern child and youth welfare system, thus contributing at a nationwide level to the clarification of key terms, and creating a common understanding. In addition, the Federal Council intends to support the responsible parties at the cantonal level in developing child and youth welfare further and to conclude the corresponding agreements with the cantons from 2014. The Council encourages the cantons to make use of this opportunity to improve the protection of children and youth.

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4 The association was founded by the Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV), the UBS Optimus Foundation and the Oak Foundation. It bundles the knowledge and existing networks of public and private institutions in the form of a public-private partnership whose activities complement existing structures and organizations in the area of child protection. See also [http://kinderschutzfonds.ch](http://kinderschutzfonds.ch).

5 Based on Art. 26 of the Child and Youth Promotion Act (KJFG).
Protection of youth: The Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) has been implementing the Switzerland-wide prevention programme "Youth and Violence" since 2011. It is intended to prevent violence in the areas family, school and community and is sponsored jointly by the Confederation, the cantons, cities and municipalities. Existing measures are being systematically catalogued with the intention of identifying successful measures and developing a set of "good practices". Innovative approaches to violence prevention are being piloted at model locations. The knowledge gained from these pilots is to be communicated in practical form through publications and events. The responsible groups should additionally be able to obtain support as directly and simply as possible. Overall, the programme aims to lay the foundation in Switzerland within five years for sustainable, effective violence prevention (www.jugendundgewalt.ch). The programme "Media literacy and the protection of minors from harmful media content", which has also been implemented since 2011, aims mainly to contribute to the safe, age-appropriate, responsible use of media by children and youth. Parents, teachers and caregivers are to be strengthened in their caregiving and childrearing roles through the targeted provision of information and training. In this respect the Confederation notes the variety of existing offers from private organizations and the media, and is cooperating with the business community, universities, NGOs and the responsible offices at the cantonal and local levels (www.jugendundmedien.ch).

Promotion of children and youth, participation

Completely revised Youth Promotion Act: On 1 January 2013, the completely revised federal law on the promotion of extracurricular work with children and youth (Child and Youth Promotion Act (KJFG)) entered into force. It replaced the Youth Promotion Act (JFG) and the funding for the protection of children which had been in force since 1989. In 2013 the sum of all funding paid out on the basis of the Child and Youth Promotion Act will amount to CHF 10.3 million. These funds are used for contributions to the operational structures and regular activities of individual organizations and umbrella associations which undertake open, extracurricular association activities; to support training and further training in leadership for young adults; for model projects and participation projects of private institutions; for political participation at the federal level (mainly the Federal Youth Session); and for the cantons and municipalities for model projects of national significance. In terms of content, the Confederation strives with the Child and Youth Promotion Act to strengthen the integration and prevention potential of the promotion of children and youth and expand support for open, innovative forms of extracurricular work with children and youth. In addition, the Act provides start-up financing benefiting the cantons for the establishment and conceptual further development of their child and youth policy. Another focal point of the Act is the coordination of child and youth policy. This comprises the exchange of information and experiences with the cantons as well as with other parties involved in child and youth policy, cooperation at the federal level and the composition and mandate of the Federal Commission of Child and Youth Affairs (EKKJ).

Furthermore, Switzerland is taking part from 2011 to 2013 in the European education and youth programmes. The European Union programme "Youth in Action" offers youth and young adults aged 13 to 30 the opportunity to live in neighbouring countries within the EU, alone or as part of a group, and to participate in projects and develop their non-formal competencies and skills. Applications for financing can be submitted to the ch Foundation, which functions as a national agency for the EU programmes (www.ch-go.ch). The National Advisory Board of "Youth in Action" has been tasked under the chairmanship of the Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV) with supporting and guiding the implementation of the programmes.
**Documentation** (online at: [www.bsv.admin.ch](http://www.bsv.admin.ch) > Topics > Child and youth policy issues):

- Federal Council resolution of 11 June 2010: **Nationwide prevention programme “Youth and Violence”, national programme ”Media literacy and the protection of minors from harmful media content”**, Ordinance on Measures for the Protection of Children and Youth and the [Strengthening of Children’s Rights](http://www.bsv.admin.ch) (SR 311.039.1)
- Federal Council dispatch on the promotion of extracurricular work with children and youth of 17 September 2010
- **Federal Act on the promotion of extracurricular work with children and youth** (Child and Youth Promotion Act (KJFG)) of 30 September 2011.

Contact:
Muriel Langenberger, Head of child and youth policy issues, Federal Social Insurance Office (BSV)
[Muriel.Langenberger@bsv.admin.ch](mailto:Muriel.Langenberger@bsv.admin.ch)