

Europe

Switzerland



Switzerland, officially the **Swiss Confederation**, is a [landlocked country](#) located in west-central [Europe](#).^{[d][13]} It is bordered by Italy to the south, [France](#) to the west, [Germany](#) to the north, and [Austria](#) and [Liechtenstein](#) to the east. Switzerland is geographically divided among the [Swiss Plateau](#), the [Alps](#) and the [Jura](#); the Alps occupy the greater part of the territory, whereas most of the country's population of 9 million are concentrated on the plateau, which hosts [its largest cities](#) and economic centres, including [Zurich](#), [Geneva](#), and [Basel](#).^[14]

Switzerland originates from the [Old Swiss Confederacy established](#) in the [Late Middle Ages](#), following a series of military successes against [Austria](#) and [Burgundy](#); the [Federal Charter of 1291](#) is considered the country's founding document. Swiss independence from the [Holy Roman Empire](#) was formally recognised in the [Peace of Westphalia](#) in 1648. Switzerland has maintained a policy of [armed neutrality](#) since the 16th century and has not fought an international war [since 1815](#). It joined the United Nations only in 2002 but pursues an active foreign policy that includes frequent involvement in [peace building](#).^[15]

Switzerland is the birthplace of the [Red Cross](#) and hosts the headquarters or offices of most major [international institutions](#) including the [WTO](#), the [WHO](#), the [ILO](#), [FIFA](#), the [WEF](#), and the UN. It is a founding member of the [European Free Trade Association](#) (EFTA), but not part of the [European Union](#) (EU), the [European Economic Area](#), or the [eurozone](#); however, it participates in the [European single market](#) and the [Schengen Area](#). Switzerland is a [federal republic](#) composed of [26 cantons](#), with federal authorities based in [Bern](#).^{[a][2][1]}



Snow is an important form of precipitation in Switzerland. Snow falls less frequently in low-lying areas than in the mountains. The impact varies depending on the region and can range from slippery roads in the lowlands to avalanches in the mountains.