

Switzerland

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Introduction - key issues

Switzerland's museum landscape is very varied, with institutions of all different sizes and on topics as varied as art, history, science and technology, traditions, communication, transport, and virtually every other area of society. Following a request that came out of the National Cultural Dialogue and on the basis of a convention signed with the Federal Office of Culture (FOC), the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) introduced national statistics on museums in 2016 (data from the 2015 survey). Assisted by a support group, including the SMA (Swiss Museums Association) – which had been compiling summary statistics for around ten years (mainly museum visitor numbers) – these new Swiss museum statistics seek to provide a nationwide view of a field that is strategically important to the country's identity and national values, and which is of great interest to professionals, decision-makers, journalists and the public. Since 2016, these statistics have been based on an online survey with ten basic variables that is conducted annually (or every two years after the 2022 survey year). Additional questions on specific topics are added at regular intervals: loans and deposits between museums (2018 survey), development of digital services linked to COVID-19 (2021 survey), staff and gender (2022 survey).

Definition of museum

The FSO adopts the definition used by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). According to the new definition adopted in August 2022, a museum is *“a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”* Various museum-like institutions are not included in the survey, such as exhibition spaces that do not have a collection, collections without an exhibition space, zoos and botanic gardens, as well as archives and libraries that exhibit some of their holdings in the foyer, for example.

The FSO survey is exhaustive – all institutions corresponding to the ICOM definition of a museum are covered. This includes museums only open on request, as we can therefore consider them open to the public. Museums that have not been open to the public in the period covered by the data are not taken into account in the results.

Existence of museum-related laws

True to Switzerland's federalist structure, Article 69 of the Federal Constitution – sometimes called the 'Cultural Article' – states that responsibility for cultural matters lies with the cantons. This article does, however, specify that the federal government may support cultural activities of national interest. Within this context and through the FOC, the federal government supports museums, collections and third-party networks linked to museums, and allocates financial support in this area (more information: [Museums, collections and third-party networks \(admin.ch\)](#)).

In addition, the federal government manages the Swiss National Museum (with three locations in Zurich, Prangins and Schwyz), and manages other museums and collections. The Federal Museums

and Collections Act (MusCA: [RS 432.30 - Federal Act of 12 June 2009 on the Federal Museums and Collections \(Museums and Collections Act, MusCA\) \(admin.ch\)](#)) regulates the tasks and organisation of the federal museums and collections.

As the federal government's powers with regard to cultural matters are limited, the cantons are responsible for the remaining cultural tasks. Every canton has its own legislation regarding cultural promotion. In each case, the legislation defines various aspects, such as the purpose, field of application, principles, services, and collaboration with communes. There are cantonal museums, managed by the cantons, just as there are communal museums.

As museums under private law therefore do not belong to a public authority, they may take the form of an association or foundation, for example. The associations and foundations are governed by the Swiss Civil Code.

Categories used regarding type of collection

The Swiss museum statistics distinguish eight museum categories according to the main theme(s) of their collection(s). The FSO has adopted this SMA typology to distinguish the following eight types of museums ([Structure and funding | Federal Statistical Office \(admin.ch\)](#)):

- Regional and local museums (in 2021: 32.2% of Swiss museums)
- Art museums (15.0%)
- Technology museums (13.6%)
- History museums (11.1%)
- Natural history museums (5.5%)
- Archaeological museums (2.4%)
- Museums of ethnology and ethnography (1.4%)
- Other museums (18.9%)

Categories used regarding type of ownership

The survey allows us to distinguish how museums are managed, which may be different from their funding. Museums are therefore distinguished in this way ([Structure and financing | Federal Statistical Office \(admin.ch\)](#)):

- **Public (28.7% of museums in 2021)**
 - o Federally administered (0.7%)
 - o Cantonally administered (5.6%)
 - o Communally administered (17.3%)
 - o Corporation/public-law institution (5.1%)
- **Private (71.3% of museums in 2021)**
 - o Association (31.1%)
 - o Foundation (28.1%)
 - o Private individual (6.0%)
 - o Company (6.1%)

Existing data - basic figures and diagrams

Main results of the Swiss museum statistics (survey 2022):

The detailed results of the Swiss museum statistics are available on the Federal Statistical Office's web portal in German ([Museen | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#)), French ([Musées | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)) and Italian ([Musei | Ufficio federale di statistica \(admin.ch\)](#)).

The figures described below are from the 2022 survey and thus concern the 2021 data. They are therefore still impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Structure and funding](#)

In 2021, the FSO recorded 1081 museums in Switzerland that opened to the public at least once over the course of the year. This represents 33 more museums than in 2020 (1048 museums), but still 51 fewer than in 2019 (1132). The museums that were unable to open during the year of the study are not included in the survey. The large majority of museums that were closed in 2020 and 2021 did so due to COVID-19 and the resulting public health measures. More than a quarter of Swiss communes (27.6%) had at least one museum in 2021. This is a slight improvement versus 2020 (26.3%). Compared with other types of cultural infrastructure, museums are spatially more widely distributed: in 2021, only 7.5% of Swiss communes had at least one cinema. Almost three quarters of museums (72.0%) were located in German-speaking Switzerland, 20.1% in French-speaking Switzerland, and 8.0% in the Italian-speaking part of the country. In relation to the distribution of the population (71.0% in German-speaking Switzerland, 24.8% in French-speaking Switzerland and 4.2% in Italian-speaking Switzerland), the proportion of museums in the Italian-speaking part of the country is particularly high.

In 2021, just over half of museums (51.9%) stated that **most of their budget** was funded by a public actor (federal government, canton or commune). Communes are the most common principal funding body: more than a third of museums in Switzerland (33.8%) are mainly funded by a commune. They are followed by associations (which are the principal funding bodies of 16.9% of museums), associations (16.5%) and cantons (15.3%).

A thematic module on museum **staff** was added to the 2022 survey. The workforce of museums in Switzerland amounted to around 11 400 salaried employees (6200 full-time equivalents) and 7500 volunteers in June 2021. Museums are therefore an area where part-time work and volunteering play an important part.

The average work-time percentage of a museum employee is 53.9%, so just over half of a full-time workload. Furthermore, nearly 4 in 10 people working in museums do so on a voluntary basis. Nearly two thirds of museums (64.0%) use volunteers. For the smaller institutions (museums recording fewer than 5000 visitors), this figure amounts to as much as 73.2%. Conversely, less than a third (32.6%) of museums recording over 50 000 visitors use volunteers.

Over three quarters of museums (75.2%) employ salaried staff. This proportion is highest in art museums (89.1%) and natural history museums (86.3%). It is lower in regional and local museums (61.2%). Only two thirds of small museums (67.7%) have salaried staff. The majority of salaried staff are women (61.8%). In terms of work-time percentage, the split is reversed, at 61.1% for men and 49.5% for women.

[Collection and exhibition](#)

In 2021, around 77.1 million **objects** were kept in Swiss museums. Natural history museums are those with the most objects in total (690 000 per museum versus 71 000 on average).

In 2021, 9 out of 10 museums (91.1%) featured a **permanent exhibition**. While the vast majority of museums feature a permanent exhibition, it is worth noting that art museums are different in this respect, with only 66.6% having one.

62.3% of Swiss museums opened at least one **temporary exhibition** in 2020 (1346 temporary exhibitions in total). While this is a decline compared with the last survey before the pandemic (1640 exhibitions in 2019), this number is higher than in 2020, when 1119 temporary exhibitions opened. Art museums still have an above-average number of temporary exhibitions: in 2021, art museums opened an average of 2.9 temporary exhibitions (Swiss average: 1.2).

Visitor numbers and cultural outreach

In 2021, Swiss museums notched up nearly 10.3 million **visitors**, which is a 26.3% increase compared with the previous year. However, this figure remains well below the 14.2 million visitors recorded by museums in 2019 (decline of 27.9% between 2019 and 2021), the last time the survey was conducted before the pandemic. Visitor distribution is very uneven between the different institutions. Three quarters of Swiss museums (73.3%) recorded fewer than 5000 visitors in 2021, while a small minority of museums (4.3%) managed to reach or exceed the 50 000 threshold.

Among the cultural outreach activities offered by museums, **guided tours** of exhibitions feature prominently. In 2021, the vast majority of museums (95.1%) organised at least one guided tour. This is higher than in 2020 (90.8%) but a bit lower than in 2019 (97.4%). The total number of guided tours of Swiss museums was nearly 70 000 in 2021, which is an increase of 44.0% compared with the previous year (nearly 50 000). However, this figure is still almost a third lower than in 2019 (around 107 000).

Nearly 8 in 10 museums (78.1%) organised at least one **event** in 2021. Once again, this figure is higher than in 2020, when only two thirds of museums did so (66.6%), but is still lower than in 2019 (87.6%). More than 24 500 events were held in Swiss museums in 2021, which is an increase of 76.5% compared with the previous year (just under 14 000). Like in other years, a third of the events organised by Swiss museums took place in art museums (over 8000 in 2021).

The development of digital offerings in museums between 2019 and 2020

Many museum offerings, such as temporary exhibitions, guided tours and events, were considerably cut back in 2020 due to closures and restrictions linked to COVID-19. But that did not stop museums being active, and continuing to offer and develop **digital offerings** in particular. Additional questions on this topic were added to the 2021 survey in order to understand museums' online activity and how it evolved between 2019 and 2020.

The vast majority of museums has **an official website**, (87.2% in 2019 and 88.7% in 2020). For 39.6% of museums, the activity on their website in terms of hours worked increased between 2019 and 2020, whereas it remained stable for half of museums (49.6%, including the museums without a website during this two-year period). The remaining 10% is split between the museums that saw their activity decline (just under 4%), or those that were unable to assess the evolution. High-attendance museums increased their online activity the most, with 90.6% having done so, versus 61.7% of medium-attendance museums and 31.2% of low-attendance museums.

More than half of museums (55.4%) were active on **social media** with one or more accounts in 2020 – a 48.8% increase versus 2019. Between 2019 and 2020, 35.8% of museums also increased their activity on social media. Like the increase in activity on their websites, the high-attendance museums also increased their activity on social media (93.8% did so) more than the medium-attendance museums (63.7%), and above all, the low-attendance museums (25.5%).

Museums can have different types of online presence, some of which are used more than others. The four most-used digital formats in 2019 and 2020 were the sending of newsletters or news emails (55.7% of museums did this in 2020), posting images or slideshows of works from the museum online (42.9%), communication on the internal workings of the museum (40.6%) and posting video content online (35.0%).

List of references

Federal Statistical Office

The Federal Statistical Office regularly produces **statistics on museums in Switzerland**, available in German, French and Italian:

German: [Museen | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#)

French: [Musées | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)

Italian: [Musei | Ufficio federale di statistica \(admin.ch\)](#)

The **methodological aspects** and definitions from the survey can be consulted on the FSO portal (on the page on Swiss museum statistics):

In German: [Schweizerische Museumsstatistik | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#).

In French: [Statistique suisse des musées | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)

In Italian: [Musei | Ufficio federale di statistica \(admin.ch\)](#)

A publication on the **museum landscape and audiences of Swiss museums** (situation in 2019 and evolution over five years) is also available online (in German, French and Italian):

German: [Museumslandschaft und Publikum der Museen der Schweiz - Situation 2019 und Entwicklung über fünf Jahre | Publikation | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#)

French: [Paysage muséal et public des musées en Suisse - Situation en 2019 et évolution sur cinq ans | Publication | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)

Italian: [Panorama museale e pubblico dei musei in Svizzera - Situazione nel 2019 ed evoluzione su cinque anni | Pubblicazione | Ufficio federale di statistica \(admin.ch\)](#)

The Federal Statistical Office produces statistics every five years **on cultural practices** (visits to museums, exhibitions and galleries), available in German, French and Italian:

German: [Museen, Ausstellungen, Galerien | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#)

French: [Musées, expositions, galeries | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)

Italian: [Musei, esposizioni, gallerie | Ufficio federale di statistica \(admin.ch\)](#)

Every year, the Federal Statistical Office produces **statistics on funding of cultural activities**, available in German, French and Italian:

German: [Kulturfinanzierung | Bundesamt für Statistik \(admin.ch\)](#)

French: [Financement de la culture | Office fédéral de la statistique \(admin.ch\)](#)

Federal Office of Culture

Every year, the Federal Office of Culture in conjunction with the Federal Statistical Office publishes pocket statistics on culture in Switzerland, which also contain data on museums. These documents are available in German, French and Italian:

German: [Kulturstatistiken \(admin.ch\)](#)

French: [Statistiques culturelles \(admin.ch\)](#)

Italian: [Statistiche culturali \(admin.ch\)](#)

Swiss Museums Association SMA

With more than 800 institutions, the Swiss Museums Association represents the full diversity of the Swiss museum landscape, particularly in the eyes of the authorities and the general public. It is committed to promoting contacts between museums, to transmitting the richness of each other's experiences and to disseminating norms and standards.

The Swiss Museums Association was founded in 1966 as a merger of the museums of Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. Its goals are:

- To ensure the quality of the museum sector: as an umbrella association, one of its main objectives is to promote the quality of museum work and to anchor the ICOM code of ethics in museums.
- To promote exchange throughout Switzerland: the SMA and ICOM Switzerland organise an annual congress for museum professionals, offering opportunities for further education and exchange.
- To create favourable conditions: the SMA represents the interests of the museum sector at various levels.
- To increase the visibility of the museum sector: the SMA engages in public relations work to position museums as attractive and central cultural actors in society.

Annual reports in German and French: <https://www.museums.ch/publikationen/jahresberichte/>

Other

Database of museum-type institutions online: [Museum Finder \(museums.ch\)](#)

(Available in German, French, English and Italian)