



# Swiss Panel Global Cooperation 2021

Attitudes of the Swiss population towards Switzerland's commitment to global poverty reduction

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**Public support for Switzerland's engagement in global cooperation for the fight against global poverty is strong and has remained so during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Swiss population supports both a greater financial commitment and additional policy measures.**

Does public support for international cooperation decline in times of crisis, as soon as national budgets are under pressure? The results of the first nationwide Swiss Panel Global Cooperation survey, conducted by ETH NADEL, suggest that this is not the case. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Swiss population was in favor of strong financial and political support for low- and middle-income countries.

This report provides an overview of the Swiss population's attitudes toward and commitment to global poverty reduction and development cooperation.<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted at the end of 2021 with around 2,800 people. Comparing the sample with population data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, the survey participants are representative of the Swiss adult population.

### **The Swiss population is concerned about global poverty**

About 70% of respondents are concerned or very concerned about global poverty, even though they overestimate global incomes. Three out of four respondents think that, at most, half of all people worldwide live on less than \$10 per day, i.e., less than \$300 per month. In reality, it is 4.7 billion out of 8 billion people. At the same time, the respondents are too pessimistic about their own position in the global income distribution: only one in ten respondents think they are in the top 10% of the world's income distribution, whereas in reality six out of ten people living in Switzerland belong to the global top 10% (adjusted for price differences across countries).<sup>2</sup>

**In summary:**

#### **Of the Swiss population...**

**- 13% know**

that global poverty has decreased over the past 20 years.

**- 32% would like to know more**

about global inequalities.

**- 55% believe**

that the budget for Swiss development cooperation should increase.

**- 70% are in favor**

of waiving intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines.

**- 71% underestimate**

the number of people living on less than 10 international dollars per day.

**- 88% know little or nothing**

about the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Demand for information on global poverty

On the other hand, the historical achievement that extreme poverty (defined as living on less than two international dollars a day)<sup>3</sup> has decreased by more than 50% in recent decades is not well known: three out of four people in Switzerland think that extreme poverty has actually increased.

Almost one third of the respondents indicate that they do not feel well informed and would like to know more about poverty and global inequality. On the other hand, 18% say they are “happily uninformed”, i.e., they indicate that they are not well informed, but do not want to know more about global development. About half of the Swiss population feels well informed about living conditions in low-income countries.

According to the survey, 55% of people get most of their knowledge about low- and middle-income countries from television and/or print media (including online), followed by radio (28%), social networks and their own experiences (18% each). Only 12% of respondents cite their own education or nonprofit organisations as a source of information.

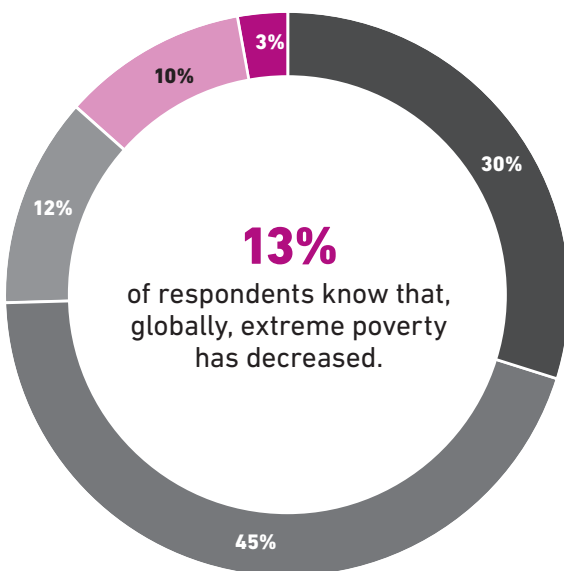
### The UN Agenda 2030 and the Swiss Strategy on Sustainable Development

In 2015, 193 countries adopted the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to eradicate poverty and protect the planet. In 2021, the Federal Council adopted a ten-year strategy for sustainable development. This strategy is based on the SDGs and serves as a national instrument for implementing the objective enshrined in the Swiss Constitution, namely “the establishment of a sustainable balance between nature, in particular its capacity for renewal, and its use by human beings” (Article 73 of the Constitution).

### The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have not yet reached the general public

Switzerland’s “Sustainable Development Strategy 2030” was adopted by the Federal Council in 2021. It is based on the United Nations’ Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and aims to

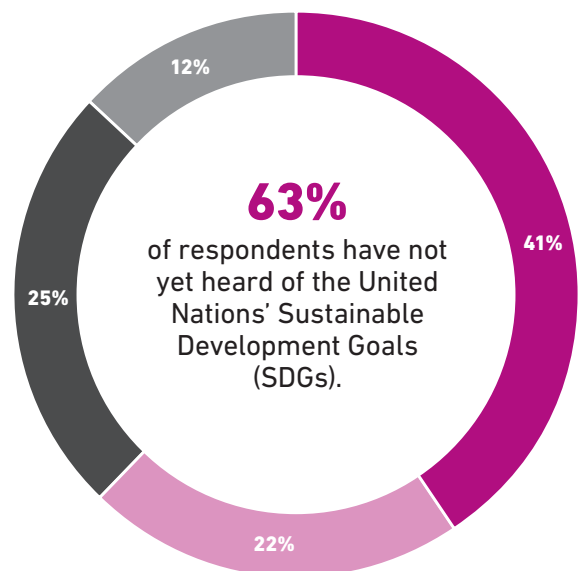
Figure 1: Perception of the trend in extreme poverty



In my opinion, over the last 20 years, extreme poverty has...

- increased by 50%
- increased by 20%
- barely changed
- decreased by 20%
- decreased by 50% (correct answer)

Figure 2: Sustainable Development Goals



How familiar are you with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

- I have never heard of them.
- I am not sure if I have ever heard of them.
- I've heard of them, but I couldn't explain the basic idea behind the SDGs.
- I have heard of them and could explain them to someone.

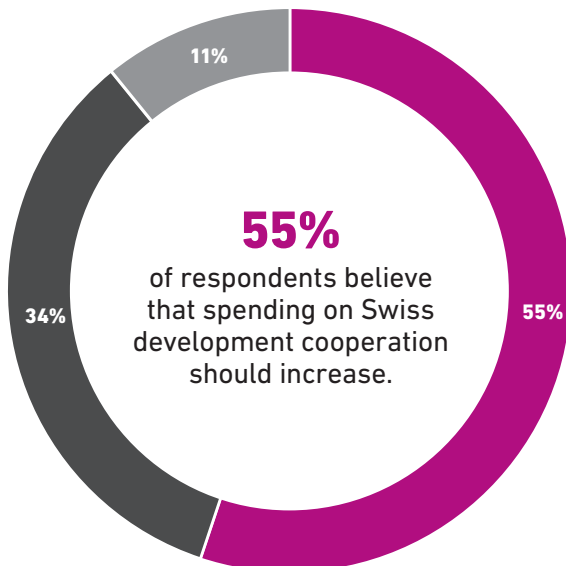
make environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development a central element of Switzerland's domestic and foreign policy.

However, 63% of the Swiss population surveyed in the Swiss Panel Global Cooperation 2021 by ETH NADEL say they have never heard of the SDGs and only 12% say they can explain them to someone; the latter group also includes the 1-2% of respondents who already use the SDGs in their daily work. About 25% have heard of the SDGs, but could not explain them. This level of knowledge is very similar to that of France, but higher than that of Germany and Great Britain, where fewer than 10% of respondents know about the SDGs.<sup>4</sup> Hence, information campaigns by Swiss public authorities, the media and civil society have not yet reached the general public who are not directly involved in questions of sustainability and global equity.

### Strong support for Swiss development cooperation

Switzerland has a long tradition in humanitarian aid and development cooperation. In 2021, the government planned CHF 3.3 billion for global development cooperation, which corresponds to 0.48% of the gross national income,<sup>5</sup> or CHF 350-400 per resident. Without being informed of this, 55% of the respondents are in favor of increasing Swiss development cooperation, while 34% believe that it should remain more or less stable. However, most respondents overestimate the current level of Swiss development cooperation. Almost 80% of respondents believe that public spending on development cooperation amounts to CHF 500 or more per person. When respondents are informed about the actual (lower) spending on global development cooperation, the already high level of support increases significantly: about 71% of respondents are in favor of increasing spending on development cooperation, while 22% think that it should remain more or less the same.

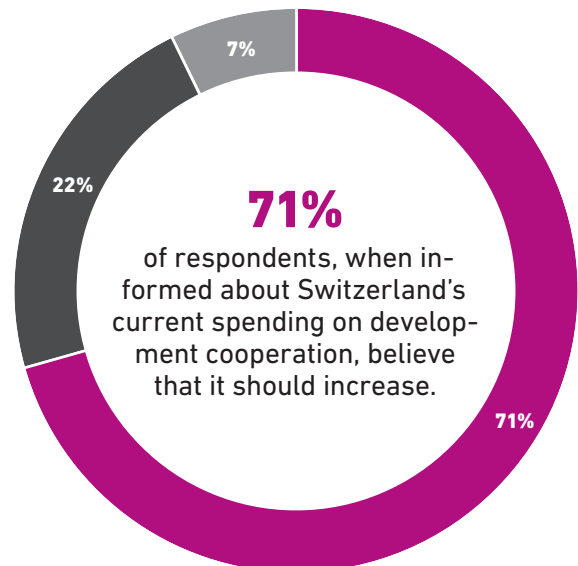
Figure 3: Attitudes towards Swiss development cooperation (WITHOUT information on public expenditure)



In my opinion, Swiss public spending on development cooperation should...

- increase
- remain the same
- decrease

Figure 4: Attitudes towards Swiss development cooperation (WITH information on public spending)



Switzerland's public spending on development cooperation amounts to about CHF 350 per capita per year. In my opinion, spending on development cooperation should...

- increase
- remain the same
- decrease

When asked why Switzerland should be involved in development cooperation, the main reasons given are maintaining world peace (79%), reducing the impact of global climate change (79%), as well as solidarity (77%). Securing economic benefits for Switzerland is only seen as a motivation for development cooperation by 32% of respondents. Multilateral organisations such as the UN, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank are considered to be particularly effective in the fight against global poverty, ahead of non-profit organisations, the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the private sector.

### Fighting global poverty beyond development cooperation

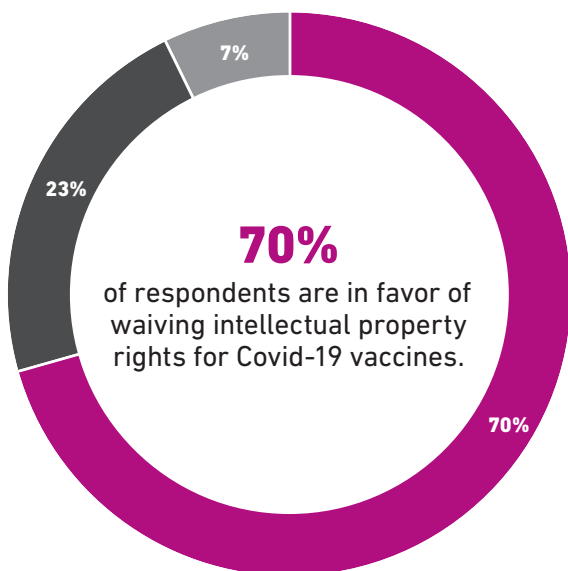
Development aid is only one of the factors that shape Switzerland's (and other high-income countries') impact on living conditions in low- and middle-income countries. Other factors include tax policy, agricultural and trade policy, and intellectual property protection. These policies can, depending on their design, support or hinder the global

fight against poverty. For example, global spending on agricultural subsidies is twice as high as global spending on development cooperation. Illegal international financial flows<sup>6</sup> are more than six times higher and deprive countries of significant financial resources.<sup>7</sup> The question of the extent to which Switzerland's different policies should support each other in the global fight against poverty is a controversial one, as there might be a tradeoff between Switzerland's interests and those of poorer countries.

### Suspension of patent rights for Covid-19 vaccines

For example, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, Switzerland was an active donor to the WHO's COVAX initiative, whose main mission is to ensure access to vaccines for all countries, regardless of their economic power. At the same time, Switzerland has so far opposed India's and South Africa's request in 2020 that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) suspend intellectual property rights on vaccines during the pandemic, which might have accelerated access to Covid-19 vaccines and treatments in low- and middle-income countries. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, not only did the pandemic have a more severe initial economic impact on low-income countries than on high-income countries, but these countries will now also recover more slowly because of inadequate access to Covid-19 vaccines.<sup>8,9</sup>

Figure 5:  
**Intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines**



**In my opinion, Switzerland should support an intellectual property rights waiver for Covid-19 vaccines so that poorer countries can also produce Covid-19 vaccines.**

- Yes, this is the right thing to do.
- No, intellectual property rights must be respected.
- Yes, provided that Swiss pharmaceutical companies do not suffer from large financial losses.

Political decisions of this type are often based on the assumption that the public is not willing to support measures that would entail costs for the Swiss economy, in this case, the pharmaceutical industry. Contrary to this assumption, the survey results reveal strong support for a temporary waiver of intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines: 70% of respondents believe that Switzerland should support such a waiver, regardless of the possible economic costs. Only 7% of respondents are concerned about the financial consequences for Swiss companies and 23% are in favor of always respecting intellectual property rights.

When asked what other specific policy measures Switzerland should adopt to support the development of poorer countries, nearly 90% of respondents say it is important to require Swiss companies to monitor their supply chains to ensure that they do not involve human rights risks and environmental damage. Respondents also believe it is important to take steps to reduce Switzerland's carbon footprint (76%) and to prevent multinational companies from shifting profits from low- and middle-income countries to Switzerland for tax reasons (74%). These responses show that the respondents are willing to support such policy measures, even if they potentially involve economic costs for the Swiss population.

### High engagement of the Swiss population

Public support for official development cooperation is high, but what about private commitments from the Swiss popu-

lation? Participants in the survey were asked whether they have engaged in any of ten activities related to decreasing global inequalities. These activities differ in terms of invested time and money.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, actions that are less costly and time-consuming are performed more often; however, two more costly and time-consuming actions are also very common: boycotting certain products (53%) and donating to organisations dedicated to global poverty reduction (36%).<sup>11</sup> In other high-income countries, only about 20% of the population donate to global poverty reduction or boycott certain products.<sup>12</sup> Of those who did not donate in 2021, 26% indicate that they lack the money to do so, 12% lack knowledge about donating, 18% do not trust

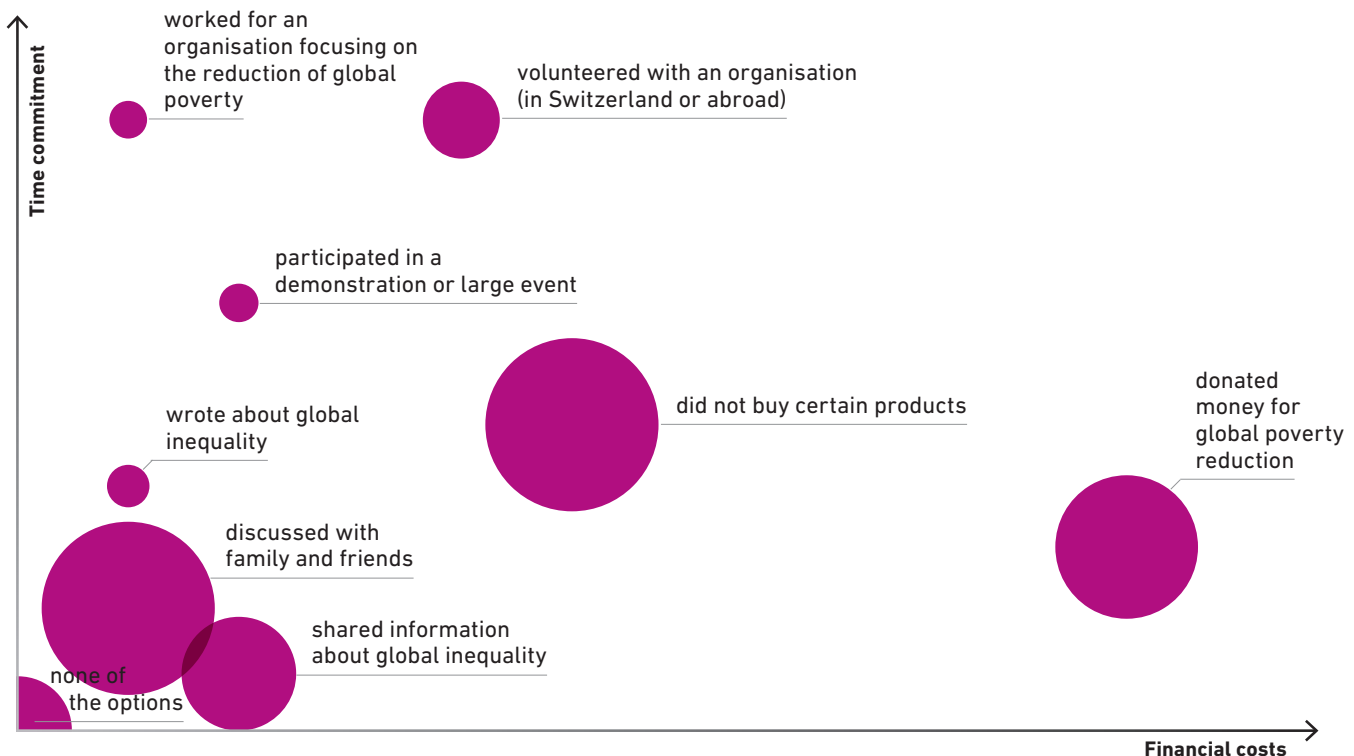
non-profit organisations, and 10% doubt the effectiveness of non-profit organisations. In making their donation decisions, respondents rely primarily on information provided by friends and family (23%), followed by information provided by the media and non-profit organisations (16% each).

Only a minority of the Swiss population does not get engaged in the fight against global poverty: less than 20% of respondents say they did not participate in any activities in 2021.<sup>13</sup> In Germany, France, the UK and the US, this is the case for about 30% of respondents.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 6:

### Personal commitment

In 2021, I engaged with the issue of global poverty and inequality in the following ways...  
(multiple responses possible)



## Endnotes

- 1 The statistical annex is available on the ETH NADEL website: <https://nadel.ethz.ch/swiss-panel/2021.html>
- 2 World Inequality Database (2022a) Top 10% national income threshold, World, 1980-2021, retrieved June 7, 2022: [https://wid.world/share/#0/countrytimeseries/tptinc\\_p90p100\\_z/WO/2015/eu/k/p/yearly/t/false/26474.295000000002/40000/curve/false](https://wid.world/share/#0/countrytimeseries/tptinc_p90p100_z/WO/2015/eu/k/p/yearly/t/false/26474.295000000002/40000/curve/false)
- 3 World Inequality Database (2022b) Income inequality, Switzerland, 1980-2021, 1900-2019, retrieved June 7, 2022: [https://wid.world/share/#0/countrytimeseries/tptinc\\_p20p30\\_z;tptinc\\_p30p40\\_z;tptinc\\_p40p50\\_z;tptinc\\_p50p60\\_z/CH/2015/eu/k/p/yearly/t/false/18201.2355/40000/curve/false](https://wid.world/share/#0/countrytimeseries/tptinc_p20p30_z;tptinc_p30p40_z;tptinc_p40p50_z;tptinc_p50p60_z/CH/2015/eu/k/p/yearly/t/false/18201.2355/40000/curve/false)
- 4 Extreme poverty is calculated by the World Bank as the percentage of people living on less than 1.90 international dollars per day. The international dollar takes into account price differences between countries and can therefore be used for cross-country comparisons.
- 5 Focus 2030 (2021) Who Knows the Sustainable Development Goals in France, Germany, the UK and the USA? retrieved April 26, 2022: <https://focus2030.org/Who-knows-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-in-France-Germany-the-UK-and-the>
- 6 The actual contribution was 0.51% due to additional funding for pandemic control, donation of surplus Covid-19 vaccines, and additional humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/fr/home/ddc/portrait/chiffres-statistiques/apd-suisse.htm>
- 7 According to the OECD, illicit financial flows (IFFs) deprive countries of significant resources. They stem from corruption, crime, terrorism and tax evasion and use channels ranging from cash smuggling and remittances to trade finance. OECD (n.d.) Illicit Financial Flows, retrieved April 26, 2022: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/pcsd-framework-iffs.htm>
- 8 Isabel Günther, Kenneth Harttgen, Katharina Michaelowa (2021) Einführung in die Entwicklungsökonomik, UTB, UVK Verlag, München, ISBN: 978-3-8385-5120-3.
- 9 IMF (2022) World Economic Outlook Update: Rising Caseloads, a Disrupted Recovery, and Higher Inflation, Jan. 2022, retrieved June 7, 2022: <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/WEO/2022/Update/January/English/text.ashx>
- 10 World Bank (2022) Global Economic Prospects, DOI: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1758-8, retrieved April 26, 2022: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36519/9781464817601.pdf>
- 11 The ten activities are as follows: Discussing the topic with family and friends, boycotting certain products, sharing reports or information about the topic with others, writing about global inequality or poverty (including on social media), donating to reduce global poverty, volunteering for an organisation at home or abroad, participating in a demonstration, rally, or similar event on the topic, and working for or founding an organisation committed to reducing global poverty and inequality. Respondents were also given the option of answering 'none of the above'.
- 12 A total of 52% of participants reported making a donation to charity in 2021.
- 13 Jennifer Hudson, David Hudson, Paolo Morini, Harold Clarke & Marianne C. Stewart (2020) Not one, but many "publics": public engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. *Development in Practice*, 30:6, 795-808.
- 14 Ibid.

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ETH NADEL would like to thank the survey participants for their time and willingness to answer the questionnaire. The survey will be repeated annually until 2030.

ETH NADEL – Center for Development and Cooperation connects science with practice to inspire and train the next generation to put the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable and equitable development into action.

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