



Factsheet:

Access to Base Registries in Switzerland

Published 10/09/2018

Disclaimer: The information provided herein is the result of the ABR project within ISA² programme. ISA² has made the utmost effort to research and keep the correct and most updated information on JoinUp. However, this factsheet has not been validated by relevant MS authorities, thus, ISA² does not accept any responsibility for the content, accuracy, completeness, legality or function of this factsheet. Please contact ISA² for further information: isa2@ec.europa.eu

Table of Contents

Switzerland towards Interoperability..... 3

Legal Interoperability 5

Organisational Interoperability..... 7

Semantic Interoperability 8

Technical Interoperability..... 9

Cross-border Interoperability 10

E-Government Public Services making use of Base Registries data..... 11

Switzerland towards Interoperability

Switzerland's unification in 1848 signified a shift in the Swiss perspective, moving from a fragmented existence to stronger and closer collaboration in unity. However, the separate cantons, which form the state, insisted on a degree of autonomy in some matters, including managing their local administrations. This is still evident, as many of the cantons continue to have their separate offices and registries to collect information about their citizens. Therefore, registries at the canton level are administered through the cantons, while the federal registries which are managed by federal bodies integrate the information from the cantons into the federal registries.

Throughout Switzerland's path to interoperability, the Federal Department of Finance along with the Steering Committee for implementation of the e-Government strategy, have been at the forefront of Swiss e-government developments. Despite these efforts, Switzerland has not identified the need to define a National Interoperability Framework. Nevertheless, a series of concrete initiatives addressing interoperability were implemented. Two of those initiatives are the **e-Government Strategy Switzerland**¹, supplemented by the **Swiss e-Government Architecture project (eGovCH)**².

The current **e-Government Strategy Switzerland 2016-2019**³ covers eight strategic projects and three strategic achievements. Among them are the development and updating of the e-Government standards, the identification of the data of a concrete person in the electronic exchange between information systems, the integration of the ten most demanded e-Government services for population and economy into the national e-Government portals or the creation of an administrative portal for companies to be a one-stop shop to allow companies to interact with the Swiss authorities electronically. Other strategies are related to a national and international electronic identity (eID), electronic signature, electronic voting, etc. In November 2017 the EasyGov platform launched allowing businesses to manage a number of administrative procedures online. Citizens only have to enter details such as the commercial registry number once thus supporting the once-only principle.

The technical reinforcement to the e-Government Strategy takes form in the **e-Government Architecture project (eGovCH)**, which aims to develop standards and architectures to improve the electronic coordination between administrations. For that matter, a series of documents have been released, available on the e-Government standards portal⁴:

- The **Standards and Architectures for e-Government Applications in Switzerland**⁵ (SAGA.ch) version 6.00, which is a technical guideline to be used for the implementation of e-Government applications.
- The **Swiss e-Government Architecture: Basics**⁶, which is a best practice document describing the business skills required for handling the administrative procedures for the Swiss authorities to meet the strategic e-Government objectives.
- The **Swiss e-Government Architecture: Production**⁷, which provides information about the administrative processes held by different administrative bodies.
- The **Swiss e-Government Architecture: Communication**⁸ document, which describes the exchange of data between the different administrations, providing details regarding the information architecture, business processes and a design pattern for data exchange.

¹ <https://www.egovernment.ch/en/umsetzung/e-government-strategie/>

² <https://www.egovernment.ch/fr/umsetzung/e-government-schweiz-2008-2015/e-government-architektur/>

³ <https://www.egovernment.ch/de/umsetzung/schwerpunktplan1/>

⁴ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?f=default&p=index>

⁵ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0014>

⁶ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0122&documentVersion=1.00>

⁷ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0124&documentVersion=1.00>

⁸ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0125&documentVersion=1.00>

-
- The **Survey to standards in the field of people reporting system**⁹ document, which provides information regarding the relationship and the interplay of different standards in the area of citizens-registration as well as the basic processes of data exchange.
 - The **XML Best Practices**¹⁰ which describes how XML schemes can be created and used in the Swiss e-Government.

More information and documents are available on the Swiss e-Government standards agency (eCH) portal¹¹.

⁹ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0105&documentVersion=1.00>

¹⁰ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0018&documentVersion=1.00>

¹¹ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?f=default&p=index>

Legal Interoperability

Substantial efforts have been invested in regulating the Swiss base registries over the last decade. In accordance, Switzerland's base registries' activities and contents are defined in their corresponding legislations, which in turn enable the execution of harmonised operations within the base registries, among them and among the authorities in charge of maintaining them.

The following legal provisions about the main national base registries in Switzerland are:

- The **Commercial Registry** is under the **Order of 17 October 2007 on the Commercial Registry**¹² which describes the purpose of the Registry as the one “used for the constitution and the identification of legal entities. It aims to record and publish the legally relevant facts and to ensure legal certainty and the protection of third parties under mandatory provisions of law.” It does not provide an exact definition, but it sets complete information regarding the registry's authorities, content, composition, electronic communication, registration procedures, principles governing registration, etc. A complete list of the legal basis for the Commercial Registry can be accessed via the Federal Office of Justice portal¹³.
- The **Land Registry** is guided by the **Order of 23 September 2011 on the Land Registry**¹⁴ which defines the Registry as a “public registry for real estate rights, annotations and references, consisting of the ledger, the newspaper, the plan of the Land Registry and vouchers” (art.2). The ordinance regulates the organization for keeping the Land Registry, the structure, content and legal effects of the Land Registry, the communications and electronic transactions with the Land Registry office, the procedure for registration, modification and cancellation of real estate rights, as well as for registration, modification and removal of annotations and references, delivery of information and consultation of the Land Registry. Another important legislation affecting the Land Registry is **Order of 18 November 1992 on the Cadastral Survey**¹⁵, Cadastral Survey referring to the measurements approved by the cantons and recognised by the Confederation executed for the establishment and maintenance of the Land Registry. This data are reference Geo-data used by federal, cantonal and communes, economic circles, academia, and others to obtain Geo-information. The Cadastral Surveying is regulated by the order of 21 May 2008 on Geo-information¹⁶, unless the special provision of this Ordinance.
- For the **Population Registry**, is guided by the **Law on Population Registration (EMG) of 17 December 2008**¹⁷, whose purpose is to regulate the census records and recording system, as well as the legally provided exchange of personal information between the Population Registry and other official person registries. Another law concerning the Population Registry is the **Federal law on the harmonisation of the Population Registry and other official records of people**¹⁸ which aims at simplifying the data collection for statistical purposes by the harmonising personal registries and the exchange of data between the registries. It also sets the identifiers and characters to be included in the records, the competencies of the Federal Statistical Office relating to uniform standards, the characters and terms, the principle of completeness and accuracy of records, and the obligation to update the registries of residents.

¹² <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20072056/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.bj.admin.ch/bj/fr/home/wirtschaft/handelsregister/rechtsgrundlagen.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20111142/index.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/19920299/index.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/official-compilation/2008/2745.pdf>

¹⁷ http://www.sz.ch/documents/111_110.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/20052012/index.html>

In addition to the base registries' legal provisions, other relevant pieces of legislations in the context of e-Government are:

- The **Freedom of Information in the Administration Act**¹⁹ and the **Federal Act on Data Protection**²⁰, both of which serve to transpose the PSI Directive (2003/98/EC). The Freedom of Information in the Administration Act seeks to promote transparency about the mandate, organisation and activities of the administration. To this end, it contributes to informing the public by ensuring access to official documents. Furthermore, the most relevant legal constraint for access to data in base registries in Switzerland is the data protection, regulated by the Federal Act on Data Protection. The Act seeks to protect the privacy and the fundamental rights of persons when their data is processed. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner ensures that there are no breaches of legal obligations to provide information, to register or to cooperate. Any action considered to be in contempt of the Act will be punitively fined by the Criminal Code.

Under the management of the Swiss Federal Archives, a Swiss pilot called the **Open Government Data Portal**²¹ was created in January 2015 and contained 1213 datasets that can be re-used by the Swiss authorities (open government data or OGD). The portal is part of the **Open Government Data Switzerland strategy 2008-2015**²². The strategy had three main goals: (1) to release official data to the public in machine-readable and open formats to be freely reused, (2) to coordinated publication and provision of official data and (3) to establish an open data culture. To continue the efforts invested in opening data, the pilot portal was replaced with a new one²³ in February 2016. The portal contains 1229 datasets, which can all be retrieved and downloaded as Swiss open government data, free of charge. It is not clear to what extent the information opened stemming is from the base registries. However, enterprises can submit statistical data online via the Swiss Statistics Website managed by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO).

The Swiss federal geo-data portal²⁴ also provides online access to Swiss geographical information and related services from various suppliers. The geo-data portal is one of the priorities of the Swiss e-Government program²⁵. The project's goal is to increase the number of online government services to businesses and citizens, as well as to promote the electronic exchange of information between public administrations.

¹⁹ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20022540/index.html>

²⁰ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19920153/index.html>

²¹ <http://www.opendata.admin.ch/>

²² <https://www.egovernment.ch/en/umsetzung/e-government-schweiz-2008-2015/open-government-data-schweiz/>

²³ www.opendata.swiss

²⁴ <https://www.geo.admin.ch/en/home.html>

²⁵ <https://www.news.admin.ch/message/index.html?lang=de&msg-id=57850>

Organisational Interoperability

Due to the multi-layered political structures in Switzerland, the country's base registries are administered and maintained by the cantons' authorities as well as at the federal level. The following table gathers the main base registries in Switzerland, the Public Administration bodies to which they belong to and the Master Data Type(s) they handle:

Base Registry	Authority	Master Data
Population registry	Municipalities and Federal Department of Justice and Police	PERSONAL DATA (NATURAL AND LEGAL PERSONS)
Vehicle Registry	The Federal Roads Office (ASTRA) under the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC)	VEHICLES
Commercial Registry	Commercial Registry Offices	BUSINESS
Land Registry	Office for Land Registry and Land Law (OFRF)	LAND
Tax Registry	Federal Tax Administration, Federal Department of Finance	TAX

The **Population Registry** in Switzerland is managed locally, while this is done in a centralised manner for the **Registry of Foreigners**.

The responsibility for keeping and maintaining the **Commercial Registry** offices lie with the cantons. Each canton shall designate a supervisory authority, responsible for exercising administrative supervision of the Office handling the Commercial Registry. Furthermore, the Federal Commercial Registry Office keeps a central registry, which is updated daily and is available via the Zefix portal²⁶.

The organisation and keeping of the **land registries** are the responsibility of the cantons. The cantons determine the official language in which the ledger is to be held in the district of the Land Registry. The Federal Office of Land Registry and Land Law (OFRF) of the Federal Office of Justice is the one exercising supervisory control on keeping the land registry by the cantons and external agencies in the federal government that it has designated. It also sets the catalogue data for the Land Registry and prepares the establishment of data models and uniform interfaces for keeping the Land Registry.

The steering committee for the implementation of the e-Government strategy manages e-Government Switzerland from a strategic viewpoint. It is responsible for the implementation of the e-Government strategy Switzerland and is comprised of nine members: three representatives from each political level in the country, the Confederation, the cantons and the communes; the Federal Council, the Conference of the Cantonal Governments of Switzerland, the Swiss Union of Cities and the Association of Swiss Communes appoint their representatives to the committee which is chaired by the Head of the Federal Department of Finance.

Regarding organisation interoperability, **a study has been initiated** on the possibility of introducing an organisation responsible for common infrastructures that are used across the administrative levels (for example common registries, infrastructure for secure data exchange, etc.).

²⁶ <http://www.zefix.admin.ch/>

Semantic Interoperability

Semantic assets are a key mechanism to enable the appropriate and fast integration of information exchange between national systems. Thus, core vocabularies and common standards are prerequisites for semantic interoperability. Switzerland has created a standards agency and provides several data models for geospatial data.

As previously mentioned, the **Swiss e-Government standards agency (eCH)** provides a document called the **XML Best Practices**²⁷. This document describes how XML schemes can be created and used in the Swiss e-Government. Additionally, there is detailed information regarding the business process description languages (BPEL, BPMN, UML, XMI, XPDL) or file and data description formats (HTML, GML, Microsoft Office XML formats, PDF, ePub, XML-schemas, JSON, ADMS, etc.).

In the case of the **Land Registry**, a data model²⁸ is set by law (Ordinance on Cadastral Surveying²⁹), which describes the content, according to a catalogue of objects and structure of data in a standardised language for data description. The object catalogue includes the following information layers: fixed points, ground cover, various objects, altimetry, nomenclature, land, pipes, boundaries, territories in constant motion, building addresses, administrative divisions. A complementary law (Technical Ordinance of the FDJP and DDPS of 28 December 2012 concerning the Land Registry³⁰) sets the data model for the Land Registry (MD-eGRIS)³¹ together with its interface for the collection and exchange of data from the Land Registry (IPD-RF)³² and the data model for data exchange between the Land Registry and Cadastral Surveying (MD-IMO-RF)³³ with, again, its correspondent interface for data exchange between Cadastral Surveying and Land Registry (IMO-RF).

The same law also provides information regarding the document data formats for electronic communications and the transactions with land registries and alternative procedures for transmission of communications and electronic transactions, more specifically a criteria catalogue for the recognition of alternative platforms.³⁴

²⁷ <http://www.ech.ch/vechweb/page?p=dossier&documentNumber=eCH-0018&documentVersion=1.00>

²⁸ <https://www.bj.admin.ch/bj/fr/home/wirtschaft/grundbuch/datenmodelle.html>

²⁹ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/19920299/index.html>

³⁰ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/classified-compilation/20122710/index.html>

³¹ https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/data/bj/wirtschaft/grundbuch/tgbv_anhang1.pdf

³² https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/data/bj/wirtschaft/grundbuch/tgbv_anhang3.pdf

³³ https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/data/bj/wirtschaft/grundbuch/tgbv_anhang2.pdf

³⁴ https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/data/bj/wirtschaft/grundbuch/tgbv_anhang4-f.pdf

Technical Interoperability

Regarding technical interoperability, once again the Swiss e-Government standards agency (eCH) occupies a principal role. It has created some documents establishing standards to be used for e-Government applications.

The document of paramount importance in the Swiss technical interoperability layer is the **Standards and Architectures for e-Government Applications in Switzerland** (SAGA.ch) version 6.00, which presents, in great detail, the technical guidelines for the implementation of e-Government applications and establishes common standards for the development of e-Government systems. Specific information can be found on different types of interfaces, communication protocols, logs for real-time exchange of information, web services, security technologies and cross-data security standards, etc.

In essence, SAGA.ch is a standardisation project with a holistic approach. The document is aimed primarily at decision makers in the fields of organisation and Information Technology (IT) for the authorities. SAGA.ch has been created by the documents SAGA.de versions 1.1 to 4.0.

In addition to the SAGA, it is recommended to use other global standards such as SAGA India, e-Gif Zealand, and EIF.

Cross-border Interoperability

As an **EFTA**³⁵ country, Switzerland has played a hand in closing interoperability gaps through EU directives.

Switzerland is a member of **EUCARIS**³⁶ (European CAR and driving license Information System) and **INSPIRE**³⁷

INSPIRE is a directive to share spatial data with European public authorities. It aims to use this information towards the improvement of the environment and includes data from administrative units, transport networks, protected sites, elevation, population distribution, energy resources, utility and government services, natural risks zones etc. INSPIRE was founded on interoperability basics. Member countries have agreed on common standards to describe and share spatial data between public authorities. In Switzerland, The Federal office of Topography is responsible for managing the Swiss spatial data. Through its platform geocat.ch 86% of the data is available to the public. Furthermore **“Strategy focus for 2020”**³⁸ clearly describes the office’s ambitions towards creating a transparent and open government. Despite the fact that the Swiss government has no legal obligation to participate, it aims to implement semantic and technical compatibility procedures in order to adhere to international requirements by using INSPIRE as its geo-data index.

Switzerland’s parliament agreed to improve EU criminal record checking. Although they are not a member of **ECRIS**³⁹ (European Criminal Records Information Exchange System) Simonetta Sommaruga the Minister of Justice is considering it as an option. ECRIS was established in 2012 and is linked to member state authorities’ national databases allowing fast and efficient criminal record checks.

Nevertheless the Switzerland is already connected to border security and migration information systems such as the **Schengen Information System (SIS)**⁴⁰, **Eurodac**⁴¹ which established the EU asylum fingerprints database and is a participant in the following future systems **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)**⁴² and **Entry/Exit System (EES)**.

³⁵ <http://www.efta.int>

³⁶ <https://www.eucaris.net/countries/switzerland/>

³⁷ <https://inspire.ec.europa.eu/>

³⁸ <https://www.swisstopo.admin.ch/en/swisstopo/vision.html>

³⁹ https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_criminal_records-95-en.do

⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen-information-system_en

⁴¹ <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/etias/>

⁴² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/11/20/entry-exit-system-final-adoption-by-the-council/>

E-Government Public Services making use of Base Registries data

The Swiss portal **www.ch.ch** is the national e-gateway to Switzerland's public administration. It is the country's electronic business card and the main point of access to online information from the federal government, the cantons and local authorities in French, German, Italian, Romansh, and English. The portal is sub-divided according to target groups and provides subject-based access, via a single interface, to the entire information and services offering of all government levels.

Another relevant portal is the **National e-Government Switzerland site**⁴³ which contains data on the supply of e-services from the state, cantons, and communes. The data is updated continuously, and one can find information regarding marriage, birth or other certificates, VAT registries, land registry extracts, land registration, extracts from the commercial registry, business permits, tax returns, extracts from the criminal records, etc.

The **Federal Office of Justice portal**⁴⁴ provides information and links to several base registries, such as the Commercial, Land and Civil Registry.

The **Commercial Registry** services can be accessed online via:

- The Zefix portal⁴⁵, which allows to search for a company or information regarding the existence of a business name which identical or similar. It does not involve an examination of legal admissibility.
- The Zefix Web Services⁴⁶, which provides the latest information on the daily monitored data of all Swiss offices of the Commercial Registry for business names or the names of legal entities registered in Switzerland. The SOAP / XML interface allows quick integration with the already existing applications and as a consequence the mechanical treatment of the recovered data.
- REGIX⁴⁷ which allows checking if a certain company name is already registered in the Commercial Central Registry in the Federal Office of the Commercial Registry.

The registration of a company which could be done on **StartBiz**⁴⁸, can now be done via the **EasyGov**⁴⁹ platform mentioned previously. To be more specific, it is an improved online platform that facilitates the creation of new companies in Switzerland. Entrepreneurs can register their businesses online, and instead of solely providing guidance with company registration, tax, and accident insurance, the platform allows these procedures to be carried out online.

The **Vehicle Registry portal**⁵⁰ provides services such as address change, change of vehicle, change of insurance, changing township, name change, transfer plates, etc.

For **tax declaration**⁵¹, a portal was created under the Federal Tax Administration, where tax declaration done by a downloadable software application helps with the completion of forms that can be submitted by companies on paper, but not online.

⁴³ <http://www.egovernment-landkarte.ch/#/search?nature=service&page=1&size=100>

⁴⁴ <https://www.bj.admin.ch/bj/fr/home.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.zefix.admin.ch/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.e-service.admin.ch/wiki/display/openegovdocfr/Zefix+Service+Web>

⁴⁷ <http://www.regix.ch/fr>

⁴⁸ <https://www.startbiz.ch/en/home.html>

⁴⁹ <https://www.easygov.swiss/easygov/#/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.vd.ch/themes/mobilite/automobile/permis-de-circulation-carte-grise/>

⁵¹ <https://www.estv.admin.ch/estv/en/home.html>