

English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. This translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.

Federal Act on the National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities (Languages Act, LangA)

of 5 October 2007 (Status as 1 February 2021)

The Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation,
based on Articles 4, 18 and 70 of the Federal Constitution¹,
having considered the report of the National Council Science, Education and Culture
Committee dated 15 September 2006²
and the report of the Federal Council dated 18 October 2006³,
decrees:

Section 1 General Provisions

Art. 1 Subject matter

This Act regulates:

- a. the use of the official languages by the federal authorities and in dealings with them;
- b. the promotion of understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities;
- c. support for the plurilingual cantons in fulfilling their specific tasks;
- d. support for measures by the cantons of Graubünden and Ticino that benefit Romansh and Italian.

Art. 2 Aim

By means of this Act, the Confederation intends:

- a. to strengthen quadrilingualism as one of Switzerland's fundamental characteristics;
- b. to consolidate the internal cohesion of the country;

AS **2009** 6605

¹ SR **101**

² BBl **2006** 8977

³ BBl **2006** 9047

- c. to encourage individual and institutional plurilingualism in the national languages;
- d. to preserve and promote Romansh and Italian as national languages.

Art. 3 Principles

¹ In fulfilling its tasks, the Confederation shall observe the following principles in particular:

- a. it shall ensure that it treats the four national Swiss languages equally;
- b. it shall guarantee and apply linguistic freedom in all its areas of activity;
- c. it shall take account of the traditional linguistic composition of Switzerland's regions;
- d. it shall promote understanding between the linguistic communities.

² It shall work with the cantons to fulfil its tasks relating to the policy on languages and understanding between the linguistic communities.

Section 2 Official Languages of the Confederation

Art. 4 Scope of application

¹ This section applies to the following federal authorities:

- a. the Federal Assembly and its organs;
- b. the Federal Council;
- c. the Federal Administration under Article 2 paragraphs 1–3 of the Government and Administration Organisation Act of 21 March 1997⁴ (GAOO);
- d. the federal courts;
- e. the extra-parliamentary committees of the Confederation.

² Where the goals set out in this Act so require, the Federal Council may provide that:

- a. provisions of this Section apply to organisations or persons under Article 2 paragraph 4 GAOO that are entrusted with administrative tasks under federal law;
- b. the granting of licences or assignments and the award of financial assistance are made conditional on complying with the provisions of this Section.

Art. 5 Official languages

¹ The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Romansh is an official language in dealings with persons who speak this language.

² The federal authorities shall use the official languages in their standard forms.

Art. 6 Choice of language

¹ Any person dealing with a federal authority may do so in the official language of their own choice.

² The federal authorities shall answer in the official language in which they are addressed. They may agree with persons who contact them to use a different official language.

³ Persons who speak Romansh may address the federal authorities in its idioms or in Rumantsch Grischun. The authorities answer in Rumantsch Grischun.

⁴ The Federal Council may restrict the free choice of official language for dealings with authorities whose activities are limited to a specific region.

⁵ In dealings with persons who have no command of an official language, the federal authorities shall if possible use a language that these persons understand.

⁶ The special provisions on the administration of federal justice are reserved.

Art. 7 Comprehensibility

¹ The federal authorities shall endeavour to ensure that their language is appropriate, clear and comprehensible and shall ensure that gender-appropriate wording is used.

² The Federal Council shall take the measures required; in particular, it shall arrange for the basic and advanced training of employees and the provision of the required aids.⁵

Art. 8 Federal Assembly

¹ In debates in the Federal Assembly and its committees, each member shall use a national language of his or her choice.

² Dispatches, reports, draft legislation and requests must normally be submitted for consideration in the Federal Assembly and its committees in German, French and Italian.

Art. 9 Federal Council and Federal Administration

¹ The members of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor and Federal Administration staff shall work as they wish in German, French or Italian.

⁵ The amendment in accordance with the FA of 20 June 2014 on Continuing Education and Training, in force since 1 Jan. 2017, relates to the French and Italian versions only (AS 2016 689; BBl 2013 3729).

² Federal Administration employers as defined in the legislation on federal personnel shall make the required aids available.

Art. 10 Publications in German, French and Italian

¹ Federal enactments and other texts that must be published officially in the Official or Classified Compilations of Federal Legislation or in the Federal Gazette in terms of the Publications Act of 18 June 2004⁶ or based on other federal law provisions shall be published in German, French and Italian unless the law provides otherwise.⁷

² Publication shall take place simultaneously in German, French and Italian.

Art. 11 Publications in Romansh

Texts of particular importance as well as the documents for federal elections and votes shall also be published in Romansh. The Federal Chancellery shall determine which texts are published after consulting the Chancellery of the Canton of Graubünden and the federal agencies concerned.

Art. 12 Communications, signs and identity documents

¹ The federal authorities shall use the local official language for public communications.

² The federal authorities shall communicate with the public in the four official languages, in particular in the design:

- a. of its printed matter;
- b. of its internet home pages;
- c. in signs in its buildings.

³ Personal identity documents shall be issued in the four official languages.

⁴ Federal forms intended for the general public must be made available in all the official languages. The federal authorities may allow exceptions for forms intended for a limited group of persons.

Art. 13 International agreements

¹ An original version of bilateral agreements that must be published must be made available in at least one official language of the Confederation.

² In the case of multilateral agreements that must be published, it must be ensured that an original version in at least one official language of the Confederation is produced.

⁶ SR 170.512

⁷ Amended by Annex No 5 of the FA of 26 Sept. 2014, in force since 1 Jan. 2016 (AS 2015 3977; BBl 2013 7057).

³ Exceptions under Article 14 paragraph 2 of the Publications Act of 18 June 2004⁸ and special provisions of federal legislation are reserved.

Section 3

Promoting Understanding and Exchange between the Linguistic Communities

Art. 14 Student exchange schemes

¹ The Confederation and the cantons shall encourage the exchange of school students and teachers at all school levels.

² The Confederation may grant financial assistance to the cantons and exchange organisations.

Art. 15 Teaching

¹ The Confederation and the cantons shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, ensure that the teaching language, and in particular its standard form, is accorded special attention at all academic levels.

² They shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, encourage plurilingualism among learners and teachers.

³ They shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, be committed to a system of teaching foreign languages that guarantees that at the end of their compulsory schooling, students have skills in at least one second national language and one other foreign language. The teaching of the national languages shall take account of the cultural aspects of a plurilingual country.

Art. 16 Further measures to promote language skills

The Confederation may grant financial assistance to the cantons to:

- a. devise the basic requirements for the teaching of a second and third national language;
- b. promote skills in the local national language among those who speak a different language;
- c. promote the skills of those who speak a different language in their own mother tongue.

Art. 17 Academic institution promoting plurilingualism

In order to coordinate, introduce and conduct applied research on languages and plurilingualism, the Confederation and the cantons may support an academic institution suitable for this purpose.