



Press release

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21 Sustainable Development, Regional and International Disparities

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Sustainable Development Report 2012

20 years of sustainable development in Switzerland since the Rio Earth Summit: a contrasting evolution

Neuchâtel, 30.04.2012 (FSO) – **Living conditions in Switzerland are good and at a high level in international comparison. Inequalities persist, however, both at the national and international levels. The consumption of non-renewable resources does not make it possible to preserve available stocks for future generations. These are the main conclusions of the "Sustainable Development Report 2012" published by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE), the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).**

The "Sustainable Development Report 2012" is being published on the occasion of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development "Rio+20". It takes stock of the evolution of sustainable development in Switzerland 20 years after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, which embedded for the first time this concept in numerous national and international policies.

Living conditions are good and at a high level in international comparison

Every person ought to be able to live in dignity and enjoy good living conditions according to the principles of sustainable development. The Swiss population's rise in life expectancy in good health since 1992 (+8% for women and +9% for men) is therefore consistent with sustainable development. Overall satisfaction with life remains high among the Swiss population: almost 75% of people said that they were very satisfied with their life in 2010, placing Switzerland at the top of the international ranking in this area. The monthly equivalised disposable income has remained stable since the early 2000s and averaged just over CHF 4000 per capita in 2008. Approximately 15% of the population are at risk of poverty, placing Switzerland slightly below the EU-27 average.

Resources remain unevenly distributed

A high standard of living becomes less meaningful if resources are unevenly distributed within a country and between countries. In 2008, the richest 20% of the Swiss population earned on average more than four times as much as the poorest 20%. This situation has not changed significantly since 2000. There is, however, an observable reduction in inequality, for example the narrowing wage gap between men and women (-23% between 1994 and 2010). In the field of education, not all population groups enjoy equal opportunities. For example, young foreigners are four times more likely to have no post-compulsory education than young people of Swiss nationality.

At the global level, the distribution of resources is also unequal. Thus, on a per capita basis Switzerland's population uses nearly three times more environmental resources and services than the average available per capita worldwide. However, Switzerland is committed to a more equal distribution of resources between countries; accordingly, since 1992 it has increased the share of its gross national income earmarked for official development assistance by almost 15%.

The consumption of non-renewable resources does not make it possible to preserve available stocks for future generations

According to the principles of sustainable development, the stocks of non-renewable resources must be preserved to enable future generations to meet their needs. However, the observed increase in material consumption is not going in this direction: the total material requirement has increased by more than 20% since 1992. One of the consequences is a growing production of waste (the production of urban waste has increased by more than 30% since 1992). However, the total material requirement per unit of gross domestic product (material intensity) has declined by more than 5% since 1992 thanks to progress in industrial processes and increased recycling. Nevertheless, the heritage of future generations is to some extent being preserved in terms of human capital. This is evidenced by the improvement of reading skills of 15-year-olds, the increase in human resources in science and technology and the growing number of patent applications. Lastly, the rising share of GDP allocated to investment demonstrates the economy's commitment to improving its efficiency and preserving its productive assets.

SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE
Press Office

The measurement of sustainable development in Switzerland: the MONET system of indicators

The Monitoring of Sustainable Development (MONET) is an instrument to determine the extent to which Switzerland is on the path to sustainable development. The system of indicators was created in 2003 and currently comprises some 75 indicators which are regularly updated. It adopts a comprehensive approach to measure sustainable development, that is to say by considering the living conditions of the present generation, the distribution of resources within this generation and with other countries, the human, economic, social and natural heritage we are bequeathing to future generations and, lastly, the efficiency with which we use the resources available to us. The indicators are not selected on the basis of political considerations but rather based on a theoretical framework and methods that correspond to international recommendations in this area. This guarantees the independence, transparency and comprehensiveness of the monitoring.

The MONET system of sustainable development indicators has been adopted and adapted by several countries. It is Switzerland's contribution to "good practices" to measure sustainable development at the international level. The methodological foundations of the MONET system are presented in the second part of the "Sustainable Development Report 2012".

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Information:

Vincent Willi, FSO, Sustainable Development Section, tel.: +41 32 86 72444

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New publication:

Sustainable Development Report 2012, available in English, German, French and Italian. Order numbers: 1248-1200, Price: CHF 20.--

Link: www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4066

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FSO Press Office, tel.: +41 32 71 36013; fax: +41 32 71 36281, email: komm@bfs.admin.ch

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As partners of this report, the Federal Offices for Spatial Development (ARE) and the Environment (FOEN) as well as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) have received the press release in advance.