

# Joint Statement to the Federal Council

## Appeal to reconsider the withdrawal from basic education in international cooperation

In the context of the cuts to Switzerland's international cooperation budget, the Federal Council announced on 29 January 2025 its withdrawal from basic education including education-related partnerships, while maintaining its engagement in vocational training and education in emergencies. **As institutions engaged in education across the world, we profoundly regret this decision.**

This decision does not address the Swiss Parliament's request during the Winter Session 2024 to prioritize education with adequate resources in Switzerland's 2025-28 international cooperation strategy.

Switzerland has a reputed and respected track record in basic education, dating back to its first development projects. It brings clear added value including decentralized educational governance (municipal responsibility and locally adapted solutions), high quality and integrative function, multilingualism, permeability, and competency-based learning as preparation for life, as confirmed by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)'s own study. Investments in basic education have demonstrated a proven impact, with 1.6 million children gaining access to basic education for the 2021-2024 period alone - an achievement the government itself highlighted as a key result of the previous strategy.

At a time of limited resources, it is more critical than ever to focus on interventions with the deepest impact and the greatest contribution to sustainable development, stability, prosperity, and peace. Basic education is fundamental to these goals: new economic research shows that education has driven 50% of global economic growth, accounted for 70% of income increases among the world's poorest populations, and contributed to 40% of the reduction in extreme poverty over the past four decades (Gethin, 2024).

A fragmented approach, focusing solely on education in emergencies and vocational training, can be counterproductive, create silos and limit dialogue and synergies for effectiveness and transformation of education reforms. Switzerland has been a key advocate of a nexus approach, recognizing that education must be seen as a continuum from war-torn contexts to the most stable ones. Today's world has taught us all that stability can be fragile. Disasters and conflicts can strike anywhere and reverse hard-won gains in education outcomes. Vocational training on the other end of the spectrum can only succeed when built upon foundational skills gained through basic education. The interlinkages between basic education and vocational skills development is a key aspect of Swissness in an education system. As per SDC's own guidelines these interlinkages "are hardly addressed by other donors, who tend to support the general education and vocational education and training subsectors in isolation". Similarly, education in emergencies lacks long-term impact if there is no investment in strengthening education systems more broadly. At a time when key actors are withdrawing from international cooperation and education, the implicit assumption that others can fill the gap is neither strategic, realistic nor sustainable. **Therefore, our first recommendation to the Federal Council is to broaden its focus beyond education in emergencies to education in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This would allow a coherent, cost-effective, sustainable approach, across the spectrum from ensuring learning continuity for crisis affected children and youth to the strengthening of basic education systems.**

This decision also weakens International Geneva, a pillar of Switzerland's foreign policy strategy. Multilateralism is under strain, and major donors are withdrawing from global cooperation. Switzerland's retreat from basic education risks triggering a ripple effect, leading to broader disengagement and reprioritization. And make no mistake: the consequences of this domino effect would be long-lasting and devastating for millions of children, teachers, educators, families and communities around the globe. As the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development deadline approaches, there are over 251 million children and youth out of school and 7 out of 10 children unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 (UNESCO, 2024).

**Our second appeal, as undersigned international organizations, non-governmental organizations, foundations, private sector actors, and academia, is for the Federal Council to reevaluate its withdrawal from basic education more generally and to uphold the Swiss Parliament's request to prioritize and adequately resource education in the 2025-28 strategy.**

