



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

Impulses for international cooperation in education

Experiences of the Swiss school system



Foreword

Decent education is fundamental to development. All over the world, schools lay a crucial foundation for social cohesion and economic success. Education is a top priority in Switzerland. School is compulsory for all. Every child receives a high-quality education, irrespective of their origin, religion, place of residence or residency status. The school system is responsive to children's specific needs. It also reflects Swiss federalism and has a strong presence in local communities.

In many countries in which the SDC is active, this is not the case. For example, in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries, only around 17% of children complete compulsory schooling. In many places the quality of schools is so poor that children can barely read or write when they leave. Despite making progress in school enrolment, South Asia has one of the world's highest illiteracy rates. In the countries of the South, rapid demographic growth is intensifying the existing education challenges.

The current Swiss school system has developed over time and is the result of lengthy negotiations, adaptations and developments. In development cooperation, too, participatory processes and solutions that are tailored to the local context are key to effectiveness. The experiences of the Swiss school system can inspire the work of the SDC in providing expertise to partner countries to strengthen their local school systems.

This brochure presents five core strengths of the Swiss school system which are significant to the SDC's international cooperation in education. They are based on a study on good practices in the Swiss school system and potential added value for the SDC, which was conducted on behalf of the SDC. This is not about exporting Swiss approaches, but about promoting exchange between those responsible for education in Switzerland and in the Global South and East. At the same time, the study supports the dialogue between the SDC and actors from the Swiss school system and with existing education partners in Swiss development cooperation.



Ambassador Manuel Sager

Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Background

This brochure is based on the final report of an analysis conducted by the Institute for International Cooperation in Education (IZB) at the University of Teacher Education Zug. The IZB Zug was commissioned by the SDC to identify characteristics and good practices in the Swiss school system that have potential added value for SDC's activities in the field of basic education in partner countries.

Basic education is a thematic focus in the Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017 – 2020. Basic education refers to compulsory schooling (primary and lower secondary).

The brochure focuses on five core strengths of the Swiss school system where Switzerland assumes a pioneering role internationally. Other features of the Swiss school system that could also serve as inspiration to the SDC as well as explanations can be found in the final report by the University of Teacher Education Zug ('Good practices in the Swiss school system and potential added value for the SDC'). The publication, published in September 2018, is available in German and French: www.shareweb.ch/site/education).



Strength 1

Important role of compulsory education – high-quality and inclusive

Strength 2

Decentralised management of education – promoting responsibility of local authorities and local solutions

Strength 3

Multilingualism – key to learning success, identity and the economy

Strength 4

Acquisition of relevant skills at school – preparing students for life

Strength 5

Solid schooling and permeability – crucial to successful further general education, vocational training and employment

Annex 1

Swissness in international cooperation in basic education

Annex 2

Overview of the added value of the Swiss school system for international cooperation, and classification based on the SDC's education strategy



Strength 1 Important role of compulsory education – high-quality and inclusive

Swiss school system

Compulsory education in Switzerland has a long tradition and an important role in society. It is an integral part of a stable political system, is anchored in democracy and is integrative. Its high quality is reflected in the fact that 95% of all school-age children attend public school. By international comparison, the proportion of private schools in Switzerland is therefore very low¹.

Switzerland invests in compulsory schooling. When adjusted for purchasing power, Switzerland is ranked second globally in terms of investment per pupil in primary and lower secondary school². The importance of education is further illustrated by the higher percentage of public education spending on compulsory schooling compared with post-compulsory education³. The local authorities have to guarantee that every child can attend school as close as possible to his or her place of residence. Proximity is therefore one of the characteristics of Switzerland's primary schools.

Compulsory education promotes integration and plays a key role in social cohesion. Regardless of the economic, cultural, linguistic, social or religious background of their parents, all children have the right to a high-quality education. Historically, compulsory schooling was introduced as a conscious effort to combat child labour. Children with learning difficulties also have good educational opportunities, as a wide range of free, additional support, learning and assistance measures are available in public primary and lower secondary schools. Children of asylum seekers and refugees, and children from families without established residence status also have a right to attend school. Recently arrived migrant or refugee children of school age are either integrated in mainstream classes at public primary or lower secondary schools, or join preparatory reception classes, bridging classes or integration classes. The streaming of pupils into performance levels is permeable, which allows for transitions between levels. Mixed-ability classes at primary level and socially and culturally heterogeneous classes at all levels promote mutual understanding and acceptance.

Impulses for international cooperation

The social significance of Switzerland's compulsory education and the institutional arrangements that make it possible to guarantee every child a top-quality education influence the SDC's work in partner countries.

Although the right to education is formally enshrined in conventions and national legislation, some **263 million children worldwide have no access to school** – e.g. due to poverty, a lack of schools, cultural barriers, war and displacement. Incidentally, many children drop out before completing primary and secondary school because they have to work, marry or because the family can no longer afford the school fees. In the least developed countries, only around one third (33%) of children complete compulsory schooling. **It is very difficult to make up for missed educational opportunities.**

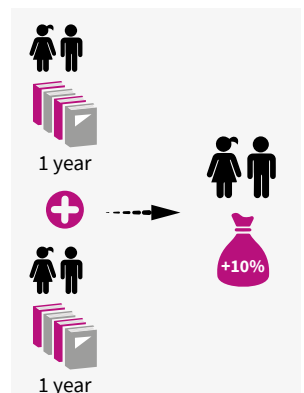
The education goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to ensure that girls and boys all over the world receive free, equitable and high-quality primary and secondary education. Children who have never enrolled in school and those who have been displaced should also have access to education. Countries are required to spend at least 20% of their public budgets on education. **In particular, funding needs to be increased for compulsory schooling.** In many developing countries state budget allocations for education are low, and a large proportion is invested in tertiary education. This mainly benefits better off sections of the population who can afford to send their children to fee-paying private schools if necessary.

Investment in education pays off, both socially and economically. Every additional year spent in school increases an individual's future earnings by up to 10%⁴. Despite their many differences, SDC partner countries can benefit from the historical development of Switzerland's compulsory education system, and from the important role it plays today.

✓ Example

In Mali the SDC helps children who have never enrolled in school due to poverty or conflict to catch up and return to school. The accelerated programme helps children reach the level required to join a class in the regular school. Nomadic children who have never attended school due to their lifestyles can now also get an education thanks to mobile schools that travel around with them. The SDC supports the Malian education authorities in institutionalising such integrative approaches in the country's education policy.

Every additional year in school means 10% higher income in the future





Strength 2 Decentralised management of education – promoting responsibility of local authorities and local solutions

Swiss school system

In Switzerland's federalist system, the 26 cantons have authority over education. They determine the structure and content of compulsory schooling. Unlike in post-compulsory education, when the federal government and cantons work together as partners, in compulsory schooling the federal government merely sets out the basic principles. The cantons are then responsible for implementing them. The local authorities are responsible for the running of schools. **The Swiss school system is one of the most decentralised in the world.** The broad-based support of public primary and lower secondary schools in local communities allows the **local population to have their say** in how schools are run. This local presence means solutions can be adapted to the context. This is why there may be major differences between individual schools. Despite this heterogeneity, high-quality education is guaranteed.

The school system is characterised by the active involvement of teachers, head teachers, parents and civil society. The principle of layperson supervision on school boards and education councils is a **unique feature of direct democracy in education.** In these bodies, men and women from various professions perform management functions. This system is unique to Switzerland.

Very different school models can be found in a small area. Teachers can structure their lessons to meet local needs. The school management works with the municipal school board to ensure internal quality. Meanwhile, cantonal supervisory, inspection and evaluation bodies are responsible for external quality management.

Parents can also help shape day-to-day school life. **Institutionalised cooperation with parents** is advantageous to both parents and schools. Such cooperation can take place through parents' councils, parents' coffee mornings and parents' forums. These allow various needs and expectations to be discussed and solutions to be sought among parents or between schools and parents.

Impulses for international cooperation

Switzerland's direct democracy and federalist tradition have a marked effect on the organisation of its education system. By contrast, many education systems in SDC partner countries are centrally managed.

In many places, schools in the remotest corners of the country are governed from the capital. Although education authorities exist at regional and local level, they often have limited decision-making power and resources. This entails **challenges in terms of the efficiency of education management, and in terms of education quality and access**. For example, decisions on the location of schools, recruitment and remuneration of teachers, or on types of teaching materials, are made from afar. In countries with poor infrastructure this can result in teachers not being paid for several months, or schools not having any teachers as they cannot find anybody willing to teach in remote locations. In countries with regions that have different cultures, languages or religions, the teaching materials defined by the central government are often not tailored to local circumstances.

All these factors mean that in some places schools do not function, or are out of touch with local realities. The result is children not learning as well or not attending school at all.

Education reforms which transfer powers from the national education ministry to regions, as well as supporting measures to strengthen decentralised education authorities are considered good practice in international cooperation. The same goes for involving local communities in the day-to-day running of schools. **Knowledge of the diversity and decentralised nature of Switzerland's education landscape** may inspire the SDC to work with education policymakers, teachers and parents to develop **locally adapted solutions**.

“ *Education reforms which transfer powers from the national education ministry to regions, as well as supporting measures to strengthen decentralised education authorities are considered good practice in international cooperation.* ”

✓ Example

In Afghanistan the SDC works closely with school councils ('shura'), made up of parents and community representatives, to promote participation in the day-to-day life of schools through training and coaching. It also helps regional education inspectors fulfil their supervisory obligation in schools. These activities promote local involvement, reinforce educational institutions at sub-national level and therefore help ensure good governance in the education sector.



Quality and
relevance

Strength 3 Multilingualism – key to learning success, identity and the economy

Swiss school system

Multilingualism is a feature of Switzerland that is also reflected in compulsory education. **Depending on the language of the region, the language of instruction** may be German, French, Italian or Romansh, with the gradual introduction of a second – and in some cases third – national language, as well as English. Bilingualism is promoted from the outset in bilingual cantons. Teachers are trained accordingly. State-run primary and lower secondary schools offer special language support for children and young people with a migration background who do not have a good command of the local language. This is enshrined in cantonal laws on compulsory schooling. The aim is to develop their language skills so they can successfully learn in regular classes.

However, also in **the promotion of the mother tongue/first language** of children with a migration background, the school system sees potential for both the individual and for society. Good skills in the first language have a positive effect on the acquisition of additional languages and support overall learning. Promotion of first languages helps improve the educational opportunities of children who speak a foreign language and is therefore offered as a voluntary programme outside of school hours as part of HSK (courses in native language and culture).

Besides personal resource development, multilingualism in Switzerland is also conducive to **social cohesion and national identity** across regional linguistic boundaries. In economic terms, multilingualism increases an individual's job market opportunities. It is also one of the resources of Switzerland as a business location.

Impulses for international cooperation

Different languages of instruction depending on region, a tradition of multilingualism in schools, and the importance of the mother tongue are a matter of course for Switzerland. However, in international cooperation and in many SDC partner countries, these approaches are relatively new.

Some 40% of the world's population has no access to education in a language they speak or understand.⁵ This has implications for learning success. In Sub-Saharan Africa, **61% of children are unable to read or write after completing primary school**. One of the main reasons for this is that from the first year of primary school, lessons are taught in the official national language and in many places this is not the same as the local language. This is particularly problematic for children whose parents are illiterate, do not speak the national language and cannot help with homework. This often results in children dropping out of school early as they feel overwhelmed and are unable to learn effectively. In many cases, language is also tied up with identity politics and power. In multi-ethnic countries, the dominance of a language of instruction defined by the central government can be the source of social tension.

Since the launch of the Global Education Agenda in 2016, bilingualism and multilingualism in compulsory schooling and **promotion of the mother tongue have been recognised as good practice**. Implementation of this requires special knowledge. With its expertise in this area, Switzerland can add value to education policy discussions internationally and in local contexts.

“ Since the launch of the Global Education Agenda in 2016, bilingualism and multilingualism in compulsory schooling and promotion of the mother tongue have been recognised as good practice. ”

✓ Example

The SDC is supporting pilot schools in southern Chad, where children are mainly taught in the local language, Sar, for the first years of primary school, with French then being introduced gradually. Teachers, school authorities and parents are astonished at how quickly the children are progressing in reading, writing and arithmetic. This success has also attracted the interest of the national education ministry.



Strength 4 Acquisition of relevant skills at school – preparing students for life

Swiss school system

Skills-based curricula in Swiss schools address **contemporary challenges**. Schools also need to respond to economic, ecological and social changes so that future generations are equipped to participate in the labour market, political life and society. This involves teaching both cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Besides languages, mathematics, geography, history and sport, additional skills are important these days: **self-awareness** and independence, cooperation skills and the ability to handle conflict, problem-solving skills and language ability. School is also where children first address topics related to sustainable development, respectful **coexistence**, global development and peace, management of **natural resources**, gender equality, intercultural understanding and key political and **economic mechanisms**. Children also develop an initial **understanding of democracy** at school, and this can be put into practice in class councils and school parliaments.

The **focus on everyday situations and transformative learning are strengths of the Swiss school system**. During their training, teachers learn to incorporate the everyday experiences of their pupils in lessons. Learning is therefore meaningful and becomes transformative. Switzerland's practice-orientated dual-track teacher training is of great importance when compared with other countries. It is seen as a central factor in the high level of technical competence of teachers in Switzerland.

Personal competencies

Self-reflection
Independence
Autonomy

Social competencies

Ability to cooperate
Ability to deal with conflict
Dealing with diversity

Methodology competencies

Language skills
Information processing
Task/problem solving
Interdisciplinary competencies

Transversal competencies

Society

Peace, equality,
democratic
governance and
human rights

Economy

Appropriate
development,
decent work and
income

Environment

Protection of species
and habitats
Education for sustainable
development (ESD)

Education for
sustainable development

Impulses for international cooperation

Schools shape children's daily lives and their futures. What children learn at school also has an impact on society. Knowledge acquired is often unconsciously integrated in day-to-day life. In Switzerland, the benefits and relevance of education may appear self-evident. This is not the case everywhere.

In some SDC partner countries, lessons are defined based on curricula adopted from other countries that do not reflect the local circumstances and issues relevant to the social context. Or in some cases, teaching aids present an outdated view of the world. Teachers have limited scope in terms of structuring their lessons. Frontal instruction, which is practiced in many areas, restricts children's creative freedom and prevents them from discovering, developing and using their skills. Teachers are often poorly trained and do not have the necessary teaching skills to engage pupils.

In many places, school is considered cut off from the reality and daily life of the local community and economy. Among other things, this has a negative impact on parents' motivation to send their children to school and children's motivation to complete their schooling.

A key element of the education goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to improve teaching quality in subjects such as maths, reading and writing, but also to make learning more context relevant. **The 2030 Agenda believes that education has a pivotal role to play in ensuring a fair and responsible society.** Thus, according to target 4.7, topics such as sustainable and healthy lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace and civic participation are to become an integral part of school curricula worldwide by 2030. The SDC can draw on the experiences of Swiss schools in this area in its work with partner countries.

“ According to target 4.7, topics such as sustainable and healthy lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace and civic participation are to become an integral part of school curricula worldwide by 2030. ”

✓ Example

In Mongolia the SDC is supporting the education ministry's skills-based curriculum reform. The reform involves pupils acquiring basic environmental, political, social and economic knowledge. They will also be taught to learn independently, to research, to cooperate and to find creative solutions. In countries such as Colombia and Ukraine, human rights education plays a key role in SDC projects.



Transition
to work

Strength 5 Solid schooling and permeability – crucial to successful further general education, vocational training and employment

Swiss school system

Switzerland's high-quality compulsory schooling provides the tools for personal and professional development. The acquisition of a solid general education at school allows students to specialise during further vocational or academic education. For example, thanks to the high standard of Switzerland's compulsory education, dual-track vocational education and training programmes can get by with a light workload in general education subjects, which means they can focus on vocational skills and work practice. Fifteen-year-olds at Swiss schools were ranked among the best in maths and natural sciences in the PISA surveys⁶. But the interdisciplinary competencies demanded by future employers and vocational trainers – such as independence, dedication and reliability – are also acquired at school.

Young people are **prepared for post-compulsory education and employment at school**. At secondary school, students in 8th and 9th grade are offered career guidance advice and support. This also includes taster days in companies, visiting job fairs and exchanges with potential future employers. For young people who do not find an apprenticeship or job after completing compulsory education, there are bridging programmes and interim solutions available. The same applies to teenagers and young adults who are asylum seekers or refugees and are no longer of school age.

High permeability is a special feature of the Swiss education system. Decisions made during an individual's education are not set in stone. There are always opportunities to switch courses or change paths, catch up on qualifications or enter or change schools.

Impulses for international cooperation

In many SDC partner countries, the close link between compulsory education on the one hand and post-compulsory education and the labour market on the other does not exist. There is also a lack of flexibility and permeability.

Vocational trainers and private sector employers frequently bemoan the fact that the basic skills students learn at school do not adequately equip them for future working life. This means they then need training to catch up on these skills. And young people who leave school without any qualifications or drop out have few opportunities to catch up on what they have missed. Often their only option is to look for informal employment. At authority level, compulsory education and post-compulsory education are often assigned to **different ministries**. This makes it more difficult to ensure complementarity and coordination.

Careers guidance within school systems is rare. Post-compulsory educational paths are often predetermined and depend on final school grades. In many countries, secondary education is seen exclusively as a means of preparing students for subsequent higher education. In countries of the South with vocational education and training systems, it is often students with poor grades who embark on a vocational training programme. This damages the reputation of vocational education and training. Young people who have to work often drop out of school. The number of young people who are 'NEETs' (*Not in employment, education or training*) is increasing worldwide.

SDC's partner countries need to find solutions to prepare young people for **their choice of career during compulsory schooling**. And they need school and vocational training systems that are more permeable and better coordinated. The Swiss school system can make a valuable contribution in this area.

“ **SDC's partner countries need to find solutions to prepare young people for their choice of career during compulsory schooling.** ”

✓ Example

The SDC helps secondary schools in Romania put pupils in touch with future employers and host companies through careers guidance programmes within the framework of compulsory education. This also includes the development of teaching materials to help them prepare for the local job market and get to know their own skills profiles.



Annexes

Annex 1

Swissness in international cooperation in basic education

Annex 2

Overview of the added value of the Swiss school system for international cooperation and classification according to the SDC's education strategy

Annex 1

Swissness in international cooperation in basic education

Compelling features of Swissness can be found in international cooperation in education. The five strengths of the Swiss school system are particular sources of inspiration as Switzerland plays a key role internationally in these areas. These strengths should be used and promoted as comparative advantages in Swiss development cooperation in the field of education. How the potential of Swissness can be utilised in SDC partner countries depends on the local context.

The five notable features of the Swiss school system which are internationally regarded as good practice:



Strength 1

Important role of compulsory education – high quality and inclusive



Strength 2

Decentralised management of education – promoting responsibility of local authorities and local solutions



Strength 3

Multilingualism – key to learning success, identity and the economy



Strength 4

Acquisition of relevant skills at school – preparing students for life



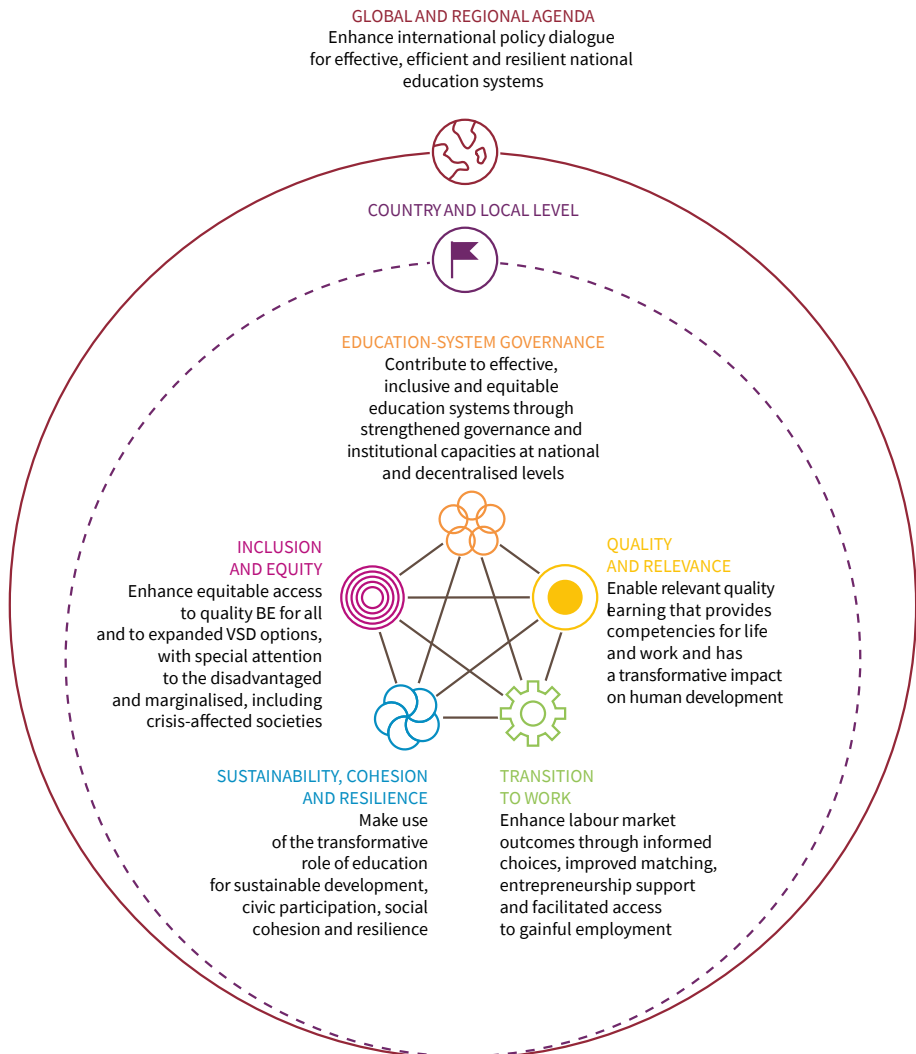
Strength 5

Solid schooling and permeability – crucial to successful further general education, vocational training and employment






































































Annex 2

Overview of the added value of the Swiss school system for international cooperation and classification according to the SDC's education strategy

The SDC's strategic orientations in education



The table below presents all the aspects of the Swiss school system that were analysed by the University of Teacher Education Zug in terms of their added value for the work of the SDC. They are linked to the strategic orientations of the SDC's education strategy.

Aspects of Swiss school system with potential added value for the SDC	Fit with the SDC's strategic orientation			
1. Social and education policy framework				
Negotiating sustainable solutions				
Education as a public responsibility				
Innovation in the public school system				
Coordinating federal interests with issues affecting society as a whole				
2. Special features of the Swiss school system				
Skills-based approach to learning				
Integrative and inclusive attitude (inclusion)				
Striving for equity in dealing with migration-related diversity				
Enrolling school-age children and young people with a refugee background				
Handling of first, second and foreign languages				
Coexistence of different governance systems				
High level of permeability with support, advice and bridging programmes				
Promoting interdisciplinary skills to contribute to successful vocational training				
Careers guidance in 9 th grade with support and advice programmes				
Design of transition structures				
Quality management				
Inclusion of (immigrant) parents and parent associations				
Involvement of civil society				
3. Teacher training and development				
Linking theory and practice				
Linking up teacher training and development				
Head teachers as key people – driving school and lesson development				
Experiences in setting up and using digital learning environments				
4. School and teaching				
Different forms of cooperation between teachers and educational experts				
Pupil focus / role of teacher as learning guide				
Different teaching styles in different language regions				
Use of innovative teaching models and methods				
Elements of assessment practice				
Design and development of teaching materials and curricula				
5. Cross-sectoral teaching topics				
ESD approach				
Experiences in education for human rights and democracy				
Expertise and experience at system, organisational and classroom level in the field of media education / ICT				

References

- 1 Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education EDK.
- 2 OECD (2017) Education at a Glance 2017 – Calculation taking into account purchasing power and the different duration of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels.
- 3 Federal Statistical Office (2018) – Public education expenditure by education level, 2015: 49% compulsory school (including special needs schools), 16% upper secondary, 23% tertiary, 10% research, 2% non-allocated expenditure.
- 4 UNESCO (2011) Education for All Global Monitoring Report
- 5 UNESCO (2016) Global Education Monitoring Report, Policy Paper 24.
- 6 OECD (2015) PISA study.

Published by

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC
3003 Bern
www.eda.admin.ch

Cover photograph

© SDC

Design

www.anoukpasquier.ch

This publication is available in French, German,
Italian and English. It can be downloaded at
www.shareweb.ch/site/education

Bern, 2018, © SDC

Contact

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
Education Focal Point and Network
Freiburgstrasse 130
3003 Bern

Tel.: +41 (0)58 462 34 75
E-Mail: education@eda.admin.ch
Web: www.shareweb.ch/site/education

