



DG DIGIT

Unit.D2 (Interoperability Unit)

# Open Source Software Country Intelligence Report

## Switzerland

### 2021

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# Switzerland

## Executive Summary

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Since 1 January 2021, the Digital Transformation and ICT Steering (DTI) unit within the Federal Chancellery is responsible for further developing DTI into a centre of excellence for the digital transformation of the federal administration, including through the use of open source software (OSS). Before that, the Federal IT Steering Unit (FITSU) was responsible for this.

In Switzerland, the 26 cantons are powerful entities with far-reaching legislative autonomy and powers in the area of OSS use and promotion. The Conference of the Cantonal Governments (CdC) and the Swiss Informatics Conference (SIK) are responsible for bringing together the canton and federal levels to coordinate on OSS legislation. Over the last decade, several political initiatives have been implemented at the federal level regarding the use of OSS solutions in the public sector. The cantons have also developed a large amount of local OSS legislation and initiatives.

There are several strategic players working to promote the adoption of OSS solutions in public administrations and raise public awareness about OSS nationwide. Furthermore, there exists an impressive number of initiatives at the local and cantonal level that have been put in place in recent years, signalling a willingness to move towards the use of OSS solutions in public administrations in Switzerland.

## Actors

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This section presents the policy makers who are active in digitalisation efforts and influence the status of open source in public sector, as well as the main strategic players that work together with the government at all levels to raise awareness on OSS. In Switzerland, there is no governmental body that is specifically responsible for OSS policies.

### *Policy makers*

- Responsibility for the topic of digitalisation has been transferred within the Swiss federal administration as of 1 January 2021. The new responsible body is the Digital Transformation and ICT Steering (DTI)<sup>1</sup> unit, which is structured as a division of the Federal Chancellery. Their goal is to further develop the unit into a centre of excellence for the digital transformation of the federal administration. To this end, the DTI may issue directives, initiate its own digitisation projects, or support the projects of other departments and offices. It ensures a cross-departmental view of the projects, resources and administrative services regarding digital transformation and ICT in the Federal Administration.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-79555.html>

- The Parliamentary Group on Digital Sustainability (Parldigi)<sup>2</sup> promotes the digitally sustainable use of knowledge assets through parliamentary initiatives, dinner events, open hearings, media releases and blog entries. The focus of Parldigi lies on OSS, open standards, open government data (OGD), open content and open access for the general public. In Switzerland, a decisive amount of legislative power lies with the 26 cantons, the federal member states of the Swiss Confederacy, and each canton has its own body responsible for OSS. For example, in Bern the relevant administrative body is the Office for Information Technology and Organisation of the Canton of Bern (KAIO), while in Geneva there is the Cantonal Office for Information Systems and Digitalisation (OCSIN).
- There are multiple players bringing together the cantonal and federal level, as well as multiple players on the cantonal level that are further explained here:
  - The Conference of the Cantonal Governments (CdC)<sup>3</sup> is the institution that brings together the cantonal governments and encourages cooperation among the cantons in their fields of competence, as well as on federal matters relevant to the cantons. The CdC guarantees coordination and information and serves as a conduit between the Confederation and the cantons on important domestic and foreign policy dossiers. Its more general role is to coordinate the availability of relevant information to the cantons, such as the implementation of the eGovernment Strategy. The CdC is regularly informed of such efforts through the cantonal representatives on the Steering Committee.<sup>4</sup>
  - The Swiss Informatics Conference (SIK)<sup>5</sup> is an institution founded in 1975 to promote cooperation between the municipalities regarding the digitalisation of the administration. The SIK coordinates in this area and promotes the exchange of information. Today, the Confederation, all cantons, the Principality of Liechtenstein, numerous cities and municipalities are members.
- eGovernment Switzerland<sup>6</sup> is a tripartite organisation. eGovernment Switzerland is responsible for the implementation of the eGovernment Strategy. The Federal Council, the Conference of the Cantonal Governments of Switzerland, the Union of Swiss Cities and the Association of Swiss Municipalities delegate members who are responsible for managing the organisation.
- eOperations Switzerland<sup>7</sup> was founded on 20 June 2018 by the SIK. The SIK is the sole shareholder of the company. Customers of eOperations Switzerland include the Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities, but not private companies. It aims to jointly develop and operate IT solutions for the eGovernment services of the Swiss public sector. The goal is to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.parldigi.ch/de/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kdk.ch/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://kdk.ch/themen/innenpolitische-geschaefte/e-government/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://sik.swiss/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.egovernment.ch/de/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eoperations.ch/>

reduce costs and increase the procurement of eGovernment solutions for businesses and the public. eOperations Switzerland provides consulting and project management services for its public sector clients and drives calls for tenders on the market to respond to specific needs.

- The new organisation Digital Administration Switzerland (DAS) will aim to accelerate the Swiss digital transformation. To this end, the DAS coordinates the management of digital transformation at all levels of government. As a first step, eGovernment Switzerland and SIK will be merged as of 1 January 2022. Thereafter, the DAS will be strengthened in further stages. The government will examine the integration of further organisations and the expansion of competencies, for example, in the area of standard setting. Looking to the future, eGovernment Switzerland, SIK, eCH and eOperations are planned to merge.

### *Strategic players*

- The CH Open association<sup>8</sup> has been promoting open systems and standards in the Swiss ICT landscape since 1982. With numerous active working groups and events, CH Open informs and networks companies, public administration, educational institutions and individuals, and organises political campaigns calling for more openness and sustainability in IT. CH Open has around 200 individual members, 54 collective members (companies and public authorities) and 52 sponsors. Numerous instances of cooperation with Swiss and foreign ICT associations, communities as well as universities and public authorities contribute to the implementation of CH Open's interests at all levels. CH Open also runs the portal [www.opensource.ch](http://www.opensource.ch). It is aimed at all those interested and involved in OSS. Open source news, white papers and best practices, events and training courses, job offers for open source professionals, videos and more are published on this platform. CH Open also operates the OSS Directory<sup>9</sup>, a database of companies, products, references, and events among others. It is operated as part of the CH Open portal.
- The Open Source Specialist Group (SwissICT Fachsgruppe)<sup>10</sup> is based on a collaboration between SwissICT and CH Open. The group's main aim is to strengthen technical competence in the field of OSS and bring attention to the topic. Activities include the organisation of workshops and specialist days. Every three years, the group conducts and publishes the Open Source Study Switzerland, in which companies, public authorities and organisations take part. The 2021 report is available on the website<sup>11</sup>.
- Gull<sup>12</sup> is a non-profit, association focused on the French-speaking communities in Switzerland. The association's aim is to promote open source computing in civil society. The association's roles are, in particular, to bring together users of OSS in French-speaking Switzerland and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ch-open.ch/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ossdirectory.com/che/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.swissict.ch/professional-group/open-source/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://oss-studie.ch/#/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.linux-gull.ch/>

neighbouring France and to promote discussions within civil society on free software issues, such as freedom of choice, quality assurance, sustainability, compliance with standards and the economic model. They also examine the specific needs of public authorities and education, for example, by means of debates, public statements and independent expert reports.

## Policy and legal framework

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This section summarises the main open source software related policies and legal acts of the last ten years, including the first known milestone in this domain. The list is presented in a chronological order, starting from the most recent milestone.

- The 2019 Swiss OSS strategic guidelines titled "Open-Source-Software in the federal administration"<sup>13</sup> replaced the 2005 OSS strategy. On 22 March 2017, the Federal Council decided to renew the open source sub-strategy of 15 March 2005. During the work to redraft the sub-strategy, most departments believed the sub-strategy should be replaced by strategic guidelines. Against this background, the open source sub-strategy was replaced by the strategic guidelines on 1 February 2019, supplemented by concrete recommendations for action in the accompanying practical guide. The strategy defines how OSS will be promoted at the federal level in the future.<sup>14</sup>
- The eGovernment strategy<sup>15</sup> was adopted at the end of 2019, replacing the 2016 eGovernment strategy<sup>16</sup>. In the strategy, the Confederation, cantons and communes have defined their common objectives and key areas for action in digitalisation, with a view to actively steering the digital transformation of the administration. The mission statement is: *Digital First*. The aim is for public authorities to offer their information and services electronically by default, and wherever possible, to adapt them for use on mobile devices. They will improve access to their electronic service offering, ensure their accessibility and rely on end-to-end electronic processes. Openness is a key feature of the strategy, with a commitment to use standardised solutions and open interfaces in order to enable the sustainable and cost-effective digitalisation of public services.
- OSS legislation can also be determined at the cantonal level. Below is a list of such cases:
  - The Government Council of the Canton of Bern approved the Ordinance on Information and Telecommunications Technology in the Administration (ICTV) on 24 January 2018. It regulates the tasks, responsibilities and bodies regarding ICT in the administration. The ICTV also creates a legal basis for the publication of OSS developed by the administration. In 2017, the Bernese parliament unanimously supported a motion that

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/digitale-transformation-ikt-lenkung/bundesarchitektur/open\\_source\\_software.html](https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/digitale-transformation-ikt-lenkung/bundesarchitektur/open_source_software.html)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/digitale-transformation-ikt-lenkung.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.egovernment.ch/en/umsetzung/e-government-strategie/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/42782.pdf>

the canton of Bern should, in principle, publish its software developments as open source.<sup>17</sup>

- The Canton of Bern published the “Analysis of OSS Potential” report (*Potenzialanalyse Open-Source-Software*) in 2019. The report states that a complete switch to OSS would not be appropriate at this time. Rather, the proven mixed operation of proprietary products and OSS products should be continued. However, future measures should create the basis to rely even more on OSS solutions in the future.<sup>18</sup>
- The city of Zurich established OSS guidelines in 2005, stating that open source and proprietary software should be treated as equivalents, but open source would be the preferred option.<sup>19</sup>
- The Geneva Cantonal Administration has been using a range of OSS such as Linux, Drupal, MySQL and Apache Tomcat. The State of Geneva, however, wishes to broaden its role to become a real player in the open source field, by giving free access to the source code of the software it develops for its own needs. The State of Geneva aims at promoting its capacity to innovate, principally targeting other public domains whilst also benefitting from developer communities wishing to contribute to the evolution of its software.<sup>20</sup>

## Open source software initiatives

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This section presents an overview of the main open source software related initiatives in Switzerland. The list is presented in a chronological order, starting with the most recent initiative.

- Swisscovid application, 2020<sup>21</sup>: The SwissCovid application for mobile phones is helping to contain the spread of COVID-19 by complementing other contact-tracing efforts. All code programmed for SwissCovid is available as open source.
- Opendata.swiss, 2019 <sup>22</sup>: opendata.swiss is a portal created by the Swiss public authorities for open and freely available data. The portal itself based on an OSS solution.
- Open Source Platform Bern, 2018<sup>23</sup>: Since 2018, the cantonal ICT ordinance has explicitly allowed the Canton of Bern to offer its software as open source and thus make it accessible to everyone free of charge. In principle, however, it is up to each directorate itself whether it wants to release its applications. Companies and administrations of other cantons are also able

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<sup>17</sup> [https://oss-studie.ch/download\\_Study\\_page\\_39](https://oss-studie.ch/download_Study_page_39)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.bern.ch/mediencenter/medienmitteilungen/aktuell\\_ptk/stadt-will-staerker-auf-open-source-software-setzen](https://www.bern.ch/mediencenter/medienmitteilungen/aktuell_ptk/stadt-will-staerker-auf-open-source-software-setzen)

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.itreseller.ch/Artikel/21396/Open\\_Source\\_fuer\\_die\\_Stadt\\_Zuerich.html](https://www.itreseller.ch/Artikel/21396/Open_Source_fuer_die_Stadt_Zuerich.html)

<sup>20</sup> <https://republique-et-canton-de-geneve.github.io/index-en.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/swisscovid-app-und-contact-tracing.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://opendata.swiss/de/> and <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/dienstleistungen/oqd/portal.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://kanton-bern.github.io/oss/>



to use and adapt the templates and processes. All content is available under an open licence (BSD-3).

- Ki-Tax, 2017<sup>24</sup>: Ki-Tax is an online portal through which parents can apply for financial support for childcare. It was implemented in 2017 in the City of Bern and has been published on GitHub.
- Awareness of the concepts of open source and free software in public education, 2017<sup>25,26</sup>: As part of the teaching of media, images and information and communication technologies, the French-speaking school curriculum ensures that the concepts of open source and free software are taught to students.
- Open Education Day, 2016<sup>27</sup>: The Open Education Day is an annual event organized by CH Open that shows which showcases various OSS applications, learning programmes and IT training resources and highlights how students, teachers and administrations can make use of them.
- ÖREB-Kataster Smart-Auszug, 2014<sup>28</sup>: The pilot application for the Cadastre of Restrictions on Landownership under Public Law (PLR-cadastre) has been presenting state restrictions on land ownership (e.g. building zones) centrally, officially and reliably online since 2014. The application is based on OSS.
- OneGov GEVER, 2009<sup>29</sup>: OneGov GEVER is a widely used OSS solution that offers electronic dossier management for public authorities in accordance with the requirements of the cantonal state archives and integrated meeting and protocol management.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.bern.ch/themen/kinder-jugendliche-und-familie/kinderbetreuung/kibon/oss-lizenz-ki-tax>

<sup>25</sup> <https://edu.ge.ch/sem/connaissances/outils/sensibilisation-aux-notions-dopen-source-et-de-logiciels-libres-1745>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ge.ch/dossier/geneve-numerique/demarche-open-source-administration-cantonale/logiciels-libres-au-dip>

<sup>27</sup> <https://openeducationday.ch/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.geo.apps.be.ch/de/oereb-kataster-4.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.onegov.ch/>

