

**Swiss-Japan Scholarship Fund -
powered by SCCIJ and SJCC**

MIDTERM REPORT FOR A “YEAR IN SWITZERLAND”



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Canton of Zurich

Appreciation

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the SCCIJ and the SJCC, as well as their respective members for this generous scholarship opportunity. Furthermore, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr. Luca Orduña at SCCIJ, who managed my onboarding on the Japanese side and Mr. Philip Saurer at SJCC, whose valuable support facilitated my move to Switzerland. During the first half of the “Year in Switzerland”, Ms. Jacqueline Tschumi and Mr. Philip Saurer gave advice on the Swiss workplace, provided networking opportunities, and helped me to get acquainted with Swiss companies for my internship-hunting. Last but certainly not least my thanks go to my partner Roman, who has given me many opportunities and supported me whenever I needed his support.

Mariko Kanaji
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Picture 1: A view of amazing Lake Brienz from Harder Kulm

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Introduction

Before diving into my experiences during the first six months of the “Year in Switzerland” scholarship program jointly offered by the Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (SCCIJ) and the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce (SJCC) I would like to open this mid-term report by introducing my connection to Switzerland and by outlining my original motivation for applying for this program.

Why Switzerland? My personal connection to this alpine country at the heart of Europe dates back to 2017. My first encounter came through working at KJUS, a Swiss luxury apparel company active in Japan. In my function in the import and marketing department I acted as a communicator between headquarters and our office. This also included business trips to Switzerland. Therefore, I have been acquainted with the advantages of the country, such as its diverse population, comfortable work-life balance, and efficient working culture. Even after moving on to another company, Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, I have continued to maintain my network of Swiss work colleagues and friends. As my partner is from Switzerland, I have also been fortunate to discover and fall in love with the country by experiencing it through his eyes and as a tourist.

As I had planned to move to Switzerland in the coming years, I actively started learning German from summer in 2022 and gradually looked for work opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry in Switzerland. In the situation, I fortunately found this amazing scholarship program, which would allow me to make significant progress on both fronts. Therefore, I decided to apply in the summer of 2022 and went through all application procedures in the autumn of 2022. Before long I was extremely happy to get the scholarship for a "Year in Switzerland" offered by the "Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce" and "Swiss Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan". I left Switzerland on May 30th due to my preparations, especially to get my permit and level up my German.

This report will have two main parts: Part 1 describes my personal experiences during the first half of this journey, whereas Part 2 is a study on the different approaches on aging societies and immigration between Switzerland and Japan.

PART 1: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

1. Preparation (Before going to Switzerland)

Before starting my adventure in Switzerland, I needed to complete a host of tasks in preparation for my arrival. The following chapters deal with the most important items, including an explanation of my decision-making process, tips and tricks, as well as general recommendations for future scholarship recipients.

1.1 Looking for apartment

Switzerland is an expensive country. This is especially true for the cost of living. But there are quite remarkable differences across the country. Major cities like Geneva or Zurich, where most of the Japanese companies and community reside, are notoriously high-priced. At the same time, the suburbs offer more apartments at lower prices. To bring down costs and to mitigate the lack of apartments in the cities, people often like to share apartments in a so-called Wohngemeinschaft (“WG”). Looking for an apartment can be done online on pages such as “immoscout24.ch” or through social media. Another method is by asking around in your community. In my case I was incredibly lucky. As my Swiss partner and I started planning our move to Switzerland, we were offered to form a WG by my partner’s cousin, who lived in a large apartment all by himself and was looking for people to share the cost. All we needed to do was to sign a sublease agreement (“Untermietvertrag”) and we were in! As we already knew the location of our residence well in advance, I could now focus on finding the language school for my German classes.

1.2 Looking for language school

There are many language schools in Zurich. In order to choose a suitable language course, I found a useful list on the [website](#) of the city of Zurich. The list includes most of the big language schools present in the city and allows for the comparison of indicators such as cost per lesson, course level, course intensity, and number of lessons per week. To be granted an entry permit by the canton of Zurich, I had to find an intensive German course with a minimum of 20 lessons per week. In addition, I was looking for a course within my scholarship requirements and financial means. Another important indicator is the ability to book classes for a longer period well in advance. This is needed for the entry permit as well.

School name	Intensive course	Tuition fee per week	20 lessons per week	Allowing me to book classes for a longer period
ILS- Zurich	✓	✓	45min	No
ECAP	✓	✓	✓	No
Bellingua	✓	CHF310	✓	✓
LSI Education	✓	CHF390 ~	✓	✓

Table 1: Comparison between major language schools (Source: Mariko Kanaji)

Taking the above indicators and requirements into account, I decided to take my German courses at a school called “Bellingua”. One of the main reasons why I made this choice is that I was eligible to book classes for a longer period and for longer class hours. This is important because I had to prove to the authorities that I would study German for 20 lessons per week during 6-8 months. Another reason was the price advantage. The third reason was the friendly and helpful staff. I was a little nervous whether I would be able to keep up with the lessons after taking the placement test. However, Bellingua staff answered my questions clearly and reassured me.

1.3 Preparing for Permit Application

As a Japanese citizen, you can stay up to 90 days in Switzerland. But for the purposes of the Year in Switzerland program (study and work), a permit of entry is needed. Due to the decentralized nature of Swiss governance, the cantons oversee matters of immigration. Since I decided to live in Zurich, I contacted the authorities of the canton of Zurich (チューリッヒ州) and inquired about the application procedure. The whole process to get the assurance of the entry permit took almost 3 months. Below you will find a step-by-step list of the procedure:

1. Fill out and submit the online form called [“Gesuch um Einreisebewilligung”](#) on the website of the immigration department („Migrationsamt“) of the canton of Zurich.
2. A letter from the canton of Zurich is sent to your email account. It includes concrete questions regarding your application and a demand for the submission of a list of required documents. The submission can be done with the same online form as before. The required documents are the following:
 - Diplomas
 - Scholarship agreement
 - Certificate of employment
 - Financial status
 - Language certificates
 - Detailed CV
3. Once approved, the canton of Zurich sends the documents needed to enter Switzerland. Those are called “Gültiges Reisedokument” (Valid travel document) and “Zusicherung Aufenthaltsbewilligung” (Assurance residence permit).

It is important to note that the above information is only true for the canton of Zurich. In other cantons the application procedures might differ.

1.4 Studying German

Even before applying for the scholarship program, I have started to study German. I originally started in summer 2022, to better communicate with my partner's family. The award of the scholarship strengthened my resolve and led me to seek out increasingly structured coaching. Before the departure to Switzerland, I passed the Goethe A1 level test and thus got my first German language diploma. On the way there I have used several learning techniques. My experiences might hopefully be useful for future applicants. At first, I bought textbooks written in Japanese. But progress was rather slow. So, I started going to a guided studying class at a school called "KUMON". While the classes there were rather unorganized, my teacher advised me to use the German textbooks "Netzwerk neu" A1.1 and A1.2. In the end I realized that studying with these German textbooks was the best tool for me. All questions and explanations are written in German. Therefore, it gave me the opportunity to gain more vocabulary and keep my motivation to study because I got to know different cultures in German from the textbook. Studying German before my departure turned out to be a great decision since it helped me gain my footing once I moved to Switzerland. This made for a comfortable arrival.

1.5 Searching for internships

Since I now had figured out where to live, which school to go to, and which permit I needed, I started screening the web for potential internships. For this I chose an organized approach. I created a table and inquired of interested internships/jobs from Japan. I also updated my LinkedIn profile, which is one of the most popular recruiting tools in Switzerland.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- For the future recipients, it might be helpful to receive a rough guideline for permit applications by the Chamber. In my case, it was not clear for which visa or which residence permit I am eligible to apply for in my situation, as I was not seeking to be a student or applying for a work visa. Furthermore, the important pages of the cantonal immigration website were only available in German, so information is difficult to come by. I overcame this by calling different offices and through the translation assistance of my partner. But for prospective scholarship applicants without the language skills needed a guide might be an advantage.
- My second recommendation thus covers the study of the national language one aims to learn through the scholarship. Having a basic understanding of German helped me to adjust to life in Switzerland.

2. Arriving in Switzerland

At the end of May 2023, the time to leave Japan finally came around the corner. My partner and I left our jobs, sold our furniture, sent stuff back home, and packed our bags. After a long flight we arrived for a stop-over at Istanbul Airport, where we took a free tour of the city offered by Turkish Airlines. Then we pressed on to Zurich. After moving into our new home, a new list of tasks awaited.

2.1 Health Insurance

Just like in Japan, it is mandatory for every person in Switzerland to have health insurance. This also includes most foreigners on a visa or entry permit. It is compulsory to apply within a period of three months. Compared to health insurance costs in Japan, Switzerland comes in rather expensive. Depending on the place of residence, insured persons pay an average monthly premium between CHF 270~430 according to my research on the comparison website [comparis.ch](https://www.comparis.ch). Therefore, the insurance service [swisscare](https://www.swisscare.ch) was truly a lifesaver. This service specializes on foreign students and is only applicable during the visit of the language school. A previous scholarship recipient kindly recommended it to me. I applied for student insurance for CHF 61 per month. To do so I needed to receive an exemption from compulsory insurance under the KVG (“Krankenversicherungsgesetz”) from the canton of Zurich.

2.2 Permit

After arrival, one of the first tasks is to get registered at the municipality where one resides. To do so I went to the city hall with the following documents: “Gültiges Reisedokument” (Valid travel document) and “Zusicherung Aufenthaltsbewilligung” (Assurance residence permit). Additionally, I had to pay an issuing and registration fee (CHF 182). I also got an appointment date in July to go to the immigration department to get my actual residence permit. Once the appointment came around, I brought the following documents;

- a resident registration document issued by city hall
- passport
- “Gültiges Reisedokument” (Valid travel document)
- “Zusicherung Aufenthaltsbewilligung” (Assurance residence permit)

A few weeks later, the physical Permit L card was sent by mail.

2.3 Bank account

To be able to receive the scholarship money, I needed to open a Swiss bank account. I decided to use UBS due to it being also present in Japan and thus an easy and flexible bank for the foreign transactions back home. To set up the account, I visited their website and completed all procedures through video call. Shortly after, all bank cards and important documents were sent by mail.

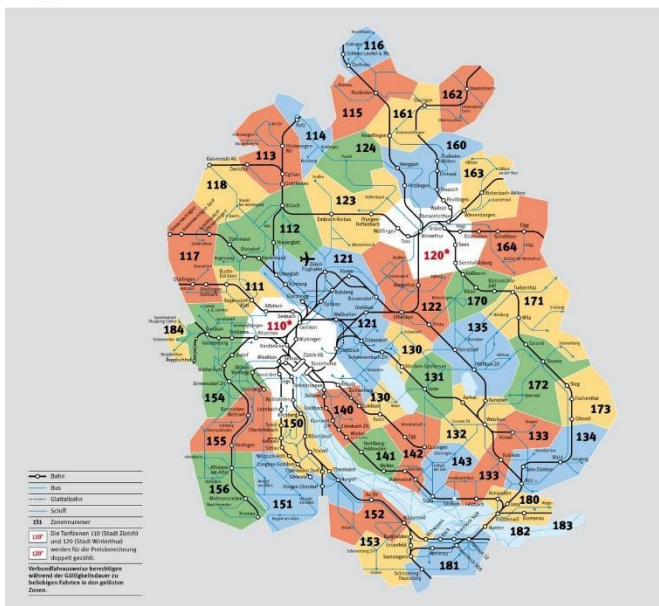
2.4 SIM card

To stay connected I decided to use my Japanese smartphone with a Swiss SIM card. This allowed me to save money and the set-up procedures were quite straightforward. The average cost for basic calling service and data is around CHF 19 per month. There were several choices: Talk Talk, Teleboy, etc. but I decided to use M-budget and selected a monthly plan (ABO MINI, CHF 19). This included 2GB per month, unlimited calls, and SMS/ MMS. As free WIFI is available almost everywhere in Switzerland, more data is not needed for my average usage. M-budget is also attractive because I can add data through my online account (comes with the SIM) when traveling abroad.

2.5 Transportation

Transportation in Switzerland is comparatively expensive. To save money, I can highly recommend buying the half fare travelcard (“Halbtax”) for CHF 185 per year at any SBB Travel Centre. This enables travel for half the original price on all SBB routes and most other railways, as well as on boats, postbuses, and trams. The half fare travelcard comes in the form of the so-called “SwissPass”, which can also be acquired at the Travel Centre. To get around the country I also downloaded the very practical SBB App. This application shows you how to get from A to B in detail and how much it will cost. You can also comfortably buy the tickets via the app as well. For local transport in Zurich, I bought a NetworkPass at the ZVV counter, which gives me a discount on my daily commute to the school. The monthly subscription for my two fare zones is CHF 125 and the total amount is CHF 11 cheaper compared to just buying a ticket (CHF 3.40) each time. Furthermore, the network ticket enables me to travel on all means of transport and use unlimited times within the relevant zones. Please refer to the zone map below and check out my zones, 110 and 121.

 ZVV Tarifzonen



Picture 2: Tariff zones in the canton of Zurich (Source: [ZVV](http://www.zvv.ch))

My impression of the train system is that it is comfortable and convenient. Trains depart and arrive on time in most cases. Another convenience is that the more central the area is, the shorter the waiting time. Furthermore, the trains are barrier-free, with a single board coming out from the train between the vehicle door and the platform, making it easy for anyone to get on and off and with spaces for prams and wheelchairs to be positioned comfortably in the train car.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Swisscare provides insurance for travelers. If you go abroad a few times a year, this might be a good choice for your insurance. Usually, insurance companies provide a yearly plan.
- To make a payment easy, I highly recommend downloading TWINT, which is a convenient payment app in Switzerland. It works like PayPay or similar payment apps in Japan.
- If you want to use long-distance travel in Switzerland, you can save money by cumulating different passes strategically. In my case as a NetworkPass owner, it means only buying the ticket from the shortest distance included in your zones. For example, if I go from Zurich Airport to Bern with the NetworkPass that I have bought, I only have to get a ticket from Zurich HB to Bern.

3. Life in Switzerland

3.1 Life at the language school

Currently I study German in an intensive course that takes place every Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 11.40am. At Bellingua, classes usually have 1-9 students, thus creating a great learning environment. At times it feels like private tutoring. There is also flexibility to join the class from home but I prefer to attend in person since the interaction with other people is also part of the experience. Most students are from Europe and thus allow me to get acquainted with other cultures. Based on the result of the placement test, all students are placed in classes at the appropriate level. During class, students must speak only in German. The most attractive point is that every Friday, we have to do a small test on the material learned that week including grammar, reading, writing, and vocabulary. Also, the teacher checks the speaking level during the class and students receive their scores separately. At the end of the level awaits a final test. The final grade is calculated by taking the average of the small tests, the speaking score, and the final test into account. Switzerland grades on a six-point scale from 1.0 to 6.0 as the maximum grade. Passing grade is 4.0. If students fail to reach the latter, they need to repeat the same level again. The second attractive point is the good teachers, due to which I was able to level up quickly.

3.2. Job-hunting

After five months of schooling, I now start to focus intensely on the search for an internship. One big change from Japan is that the Swiss job market does not have any specific time for changing jobs (e.g. the start of the new financial year in Japan each April). This allows anybody to do job-hunting anytime. My approach so far has been the following: At first, I redesigned and updated my CV and my LinkedIn profile. The latter is important since LinkedIn and [Jobs.ch](https://www.jobs.ch) are some of the common recruiting tools in Switzerland. Second, I looked up companies in my field and checked if they have suitable positions. I then documented my efforts and the status of applications in a useful list. This list was also shared with the SJCC to ask for possible introductions. Third, I built up my network. Through SJCC officials, the Young Professionals, as well as friends/family of my partner and my own friends and contacts, I made more connections to get useful advice and check the availability of positions. This is still a work in process, for which I greatly appreciate the support by the SJCC and its members.

Year in Switzerland for Internship application					
		Direct contact with the company			
		Sent resume			
		Negative response			
		Positive response			
	Company	Status	Position	Location	Contact
1	Nippon Express Switzerland	Jacqueline san checking		Bassersdorf	rech-global_sales@nipponexpress.com
2	Yusen Logistics			Kloten	https://www.yusen-logistics.com/ch_en/
3	Reishauer AG	Philip san checking		Wallisellen	https://www.reishauer.com/unternehmen
4	Ricoh Switzerland			Wallisellen	https://www.ricoh.ch/en/about-us/careers/career-opportunities/
5	Canon Schweiz	Negative response: Philipp san checked		Wallisellen	Search Resulte_foepoleclick.eu.com
6	Hitachi Energy	Jacqueline san checking		Dietlikon	https://www.hitachienergy.com/ch/de/careers/open-jobs/details/ID3-29116
7	Sony Europe	Jacqueline san checking	Marketing Intern	Schlieren, Zurich	https://www.sony.ch/de
8	Takeda	Sent resume	Global Supply Chain Excellence Intern	Opfikon	https://jobs.takeda.com/job/020101/apply-to-our-supply-chain-excellence-0118-9030098
9	ABB				
10	Swissairline	Sent resume	Internship in Cargo Offer Development	Zurich	internship.in.cargo.offer.development@swissairline.com
12	Kintetsu World Express (Switzerland) Ltd. - Zurich			Bassersdorf	https://www.kwx.com/
13	Toyota AG		Sales Assitant	Aargau	https://www.emilfray.ch/de/emil-frey-Gruppe/karriere/detail/7b2273b7-942d-4835-8
14	Nissan Switzerland			Dietlikon	https://de.nissan.ch/
15	Mitsubishi Motors				
16	Sunster	Negative response: Wieland san checked		Schlieren	https://www.sunstar.com/

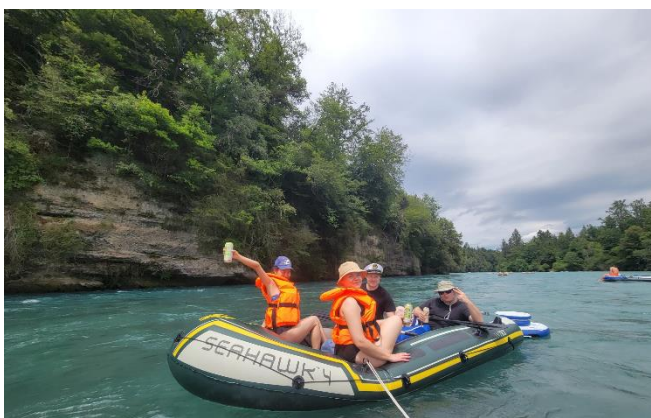
Picture 3: Internship list (Source: Mariko Kanaji)

3.3. Other activities

During the first six months in Switzerland, I have found many amazing places and experienced fun activities in Switzerland through friends, acquaintances, and my partner.



Picture 4: Joining the Monthly Meet-up of SJCC Young Professionals *downloaded from LinkedIn of SJCC Young Professionals



Picture 5: Floating down the Aare River from Thun to Bern

day in July, I floated down the Aare River from Thun to Bern on a rubber raft

In June, I joined the Monthly Meet-up of the SJCC Young Professionals and met Ms. Shimizu (the previous scholarship recipient) to make connections and get advice for job hunting and life in Switzerland generally. In July, thanks to a friend at Switzerland Tourism I stayed at the chalet on the top of the famous Mt. Niesen (2362m) - which looks a bit like a smaller version of Mt. Fuji - and enjoyed views over Lake Thun and the Alps. The sunset and sunrise were especially unforgettable. I also explored Interlaken and hiked to Harder Kulm (1323m). Many tourists visited these areas except for Mt. Niesen, which seems to be known mostly to Swiss locals. On another

with new and old friends. This so-called “Aareböötli” is a popular summer activity in the canton of Bern. The experience was very adventurous. We had to construct the boats by ourselves and bring food and drinks. Sometimes we needed to navigate to stay on the right track. This experience made me feel in touch with Switzerland's beautiful nature and I enjoyed the relaxing time. On 1st August, I joined my partner's relatives to celebrate the Swiss National Day. Everyone brought their handmade food and enjoyed conversations from afternoon to midnight, when we finished the celebration by singing the anthem and watching some fireworks. In September, I joined a wine hike in the canton of Luzern, which is a typical activity in autumn. It was organized by some friends and there were several riddles and rules. Every group of participants had to bring a wine bottle and food for a Swiss appetizer called Apéro. We enjoyed a glass of wine with amazing foods surrounded by nature and pretty weather while walking from place to place. On another day in September, I visited the Lindt factory and learned about the history and the sweet process of chocolate-making. I also connected with my home country by attending the annual Japanese festival in Bern. It was very exciting to see so many people who are interested in Japanese culture and food and I really enjoyed the atmosphere of friendship between the two countries. In October, I hiked along Lake Biel, which is famous for its vineyards. I was able to experience the change of the seasons while learning about wine-making. On the way back to Biel we even took a ship across the lake. In mid-October, it was time to start exploring Europe further. My partner and I traveled to the beautiful island of Mallorca, which sits in the warm Mediterranean Sea and belongs to Spain. The weather was nice and warm and we enjoyed hiking in the mountains, exploring caves and medieval cities, and swimming in the sea. As Switzerland sits in the middle of Europe it is an excellent hub for traveling around. It was also a good experience to know how easy and hassle-free it is to get on and off the plane within Europe. In November, I finally went to indulge in my favorite hobby of playing golf as I was invited to Nyon in the canton of Vaud by a friend. The golf course was amazingly beautiful and well maintained like a Japanese golf course. The most surprising thing was that in Switzerland, people do not use carts during a round and mainly walk with an electronic trolley no matter the weather. I am deeply grateful for the privilege of being able to experience all these amazing moments and I can't wait for the second part of my Year in Switzerland!

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The negative point about this school is that it has a high tuition fee. In fact, the price lies above the scholarship money. Cheaper schools usually do not meet the requirements from the canton for the entry permit. Due to this fact, as well as the weak yen and ongoing higher-than-usual rates of inflation it would be helpful to increase the scholarship grant. Moving to Switzerland and the high cost of living quickly started cutting into my Japanese savings. Changing from yen to Swiss francs leads to a prohibitive loss of purchasing power that could be remedied through a higher stipend.

PART 2: CASE STUDY

Facing the challenge of aging societies: A comparison between Switzerland and Japan

Introduction

As I have been living in Switzerland for almost half a year, I have noticed many commonalities and differences between Japan and Switzerland. For example, both countries are fond of cleanliness, provide world-class infrastructure for their citizens, and have overall wealthy and well-educated societies. But there is one topic that both nations cannot run away from. Their societies are aging and there are not enough births per woman to replace the current population. In Japan, this problem is known as “shoushi-koureika” or “lack of children-aging population”. While this problem dominates headlines and political thinking back home, this does not seem to be the case here in Switzerland. Therefore, I dedicate this second part of my midterm report to a comparison of how Japan and Switzerland deal with the challenges of demographic decline. As the biggest difference lies in immigration policy, this will be my focus. The first chapter looks at the demographics of Japan and Switzerland while the second chapter focuses on the differences in mitigation. This includes mainly immigration policy and economic openness.

Chapter 1: Demographic Situation

Japan’s Demography

Japan is one of the world's biggest economies with a world-class health care system. But there is trouble in paradise. According to the International Monetary Fund’s nominal GDP estimates for 2023, Germany is set to surpass Japan, which will become the fourth largest global economy. This is another step down from 2010, when the People’s Republic of China surpassed Japan as number 2. But why is Japan losing ground? Aside from slow economic growth, experts and politicians alike agree that its demographic situation is dire. With an average of 84.5 years, Japanese people have the highest life expectancy in the world owing to several factors such as healthcare, lifestyle, and cultural practices. At the same time, the number of births per woman has dramatically fallen from an average of 2.2 children in 1967 to 1.3 children in 2021 - one of the lowest in the world. Possible reasons for this drop lie in female emancipation. This might include the introduction of the pill as contraceptive, rising labor participation rates, decisions such as non-marriage and late marriage. Also, difficulties in balancing work and childcare due to inadequate childcare support systems, as well as the large income lost when leaving work due to childcare, etc., may have influenced the choice to have children. These long-term trends led to a dramatic change in the makeup of the population. According to the latest numbers (2022; see table below), the share of people aged 65 years and above currently stands at a world-record of 29% of the total population. Concurrently the share of the working age population came in at 59.4% and - especially worrying - the share of the people

under age 15 reaches only 11.6% of the total. The result is a colossal manpower shortage and a declining GDP, which - in per capita terms - stands at the same spot as 20 years ago. If the situation does not change, the government estimates that the total population will sharply decline to 88,080,000 people in 2065 - a 30% decrease from the current population.

Switzerland's Demography

Switzerland is also considered one of the safest countries in the world, with low crime rates and its reputation for cleanliness is well-deserved and contributes to the country's high quality of life. Just like Japan, the alpine nation has experienced a steady growth in life expectancy. It currently stands at an average of 83.9 years, which is also one of highest in the world. On the other hand, the number of births per woman have declined from 2.6 in 1964 to a low 1.5 in 2021. The current makeup of the population thus looks similar to Japan's (see table below), but the situation does not look as grave. Likely causes are akin to the reasons laid out in the previous paragraph. The effects of these trends also create a high demand for manpower. An amazing fact I have learned, according to 2020 IMF statistics, is that Switzerland's GDP is one of highest in the world because 99% of the companies are SMEs. This means that productivity levels and employment are very high. On the other hand, businesses complain that they increasingly have difficulties filling their job vacancies. As many as 120,000 job openings are left unfilled, especially in the manufacturing, health, commerce, hospitality, construction, and IT sectors. Despite all that, the Swiss population has steadily increased, reaching a record of almost nine million inhabitants. Similar trends go for the GDP. The main reason lies in Switzerland's immigration policy.

	GDP per capita, current US\$ (2022)	Fertility rate, total births per woman (2021)	Life expectancy, at birth (2021)	Elderly population, ages 65 and above (2022)	Young population, ages 15 and under (2022)	Working age population, 15-64 years old (2022)
Japan	33,815	1.3 children	84.5 years	29.0%	11.6%	59.4%
Switzerland	92,101	1.5 children	83.9 years	19.1%	15.1%	65.8%

Table 2: Demographic Indicators (Source: OECD Data, World Bank Data)

Chapter 2: Immigration

How Switzerland tries to solve the manpower shortage problem

Since the 1960s, when it reluctantly welcomed seasonal workers for its farms and construction sites, Switzerland has become a hub for immigration. This is partly due to its humanitarian tradition, which includes a generous asylum policy. But the main reason is the evolution of its relationship with the European Union (EU) - Switzerland's neighbor and major economic partner. On 21 June 1999, the EU and Switzerland signed the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), which "lifts restrictions on EU citizens wishing to live or work in Switzerland. The right of free movement is complemented by the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, by the right to buy property, and by the coordination of social insurance system". This agreement, which came into force in 2002, has since transformed Switzerland into the country with the second highest share of foreigners in Europe. In 2019, 24.2% of the population did not hold a Swiss passport (for Japan, this was 2.2%). Immigration therefore contributes to compensate for the declining birth rate. But can this go on? According to Dr. Philippe Wanner, a professor at the University of Geneva, finding highly skilled candidates in Switzerland and in European countries is getting more difficult as the required training level is gradually rising. Therefore, it might become increasingly necessary to recruit from outside the European Union. A look at the population pyramid sketched out before gives additional gravity to the situation. A large chunk of the working age population ("baby boomers") is set to retire in the coming decade. But immigration always required two sides. Pull and push factors determine where a worker moves to. For highly-skilled laborers, Switzerland offers economic openness, ease of doing business, an ecosystem of innovation, world-class infrastructure, and its exemplary dual education system, as well as a secure environment. Other points are important too: the labor union and OECD encourage more chances to provide unskilled workers with upskilling opportunities (リカレント教育) on the job. It will be better for employee and employer to continuously educate the staff who can then generate additional value to the company, according to Mr. Dubuis from the Swiss syndicate Unia.

Conclusion

Both Japan and Switzerland are wealthy economies with a healthy but aging population. Even though the root causes for this demographic trend likely lie in female emancipation, medical breakthroughs, and the shift in priorities caused by decades of growth in the 20th century, the trajectories for these two countries differ greatly. While Japan's economy is dealing with slow growth and a decreasing population, Switzerland can show moderate growth in both areas. This difference can be mainly traced back to the respective immigration policies. Tokyo has historically followed a cautious and restrictive approach, but the rising pressure on the government has induced new visa programs. On the contrary, Switzerland has gradually opened its gates from the seasonal workers of the 1960s to the free flow of people etched into its bilateral agreements with the European Union. This high rate of immigration has led to unprecedented economic growth while also changing the makeup of the population. This has made the question of more or less immigration one of the defining issues of the Swiss political system, as shown by the 2023 parliamentary elections. Left wing parties underscore the value of diversity, liberals emphasize the need for more immigration due to the country's manpower shortage, and right-wing parties focus on rising crime rates and the abuse of social security systems. On the central issue of manpower shortages, Switzerland has a positive track record of integrating immigrants, which - albeit costly - has created a fruitful environment for foreign specialists. Should Japan's demographic outlook continue to worsen, the pressure to introduce a more open immigration policy will continue to rise. Due to the many similarities between the two countries, Switzerland provides a useful insight into the possible consequences of such a move. Over the past decades, it has learned many lessons on immigration, which might help Japan model its own answers to the demographic challenge ahead.

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