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State of the Art Report from Switzerland

O1: Toolkit for developing Strategies for adult education providers



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Country profile Switzerland

General Information - Context

There are more than 8.4 million people living in Switzerland, the number tending to rise. The population density is 219 per km² (BFS, 2019b).

The **unemployment rate** in Switzerland is 3.3% in April 2020. Youth unemployment (15-24 years) is 3.3% (SECO, 2020).

As to **economic sectors**, the majority of Swiss workers are employed in the service sector, mostly in business and finance and tourism. Chemical and pharmaceutical production and mechanical engineering/metals are the main branches of the industrial sector. The importance of agriculture for the economy is in decline (BFS, 2019a).

The **Gross Domestic Product** per capita in Switzerland was last recorded at 59,000 US dollars in 2018, when adjusted by purchasing power parity (PPP). This is equivalent to 332% of the world's average (SECO, 2019).

Education spending fluctuates strongly from canton to canton (regional entities). In 2017 Switzerland spent 5.7% of its GDP on education (BFS, 2018).

Adult education in Switzerland: a heterogeneous system

Swiss adult education (AE) is very diverse. Those who want to take part in AE programs have the choice between a large number of providers and many different formats. But diversity also makes it difficult to gain an overview. The first Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training (WeBiG), which has been in force since 2017, aims to increase transparency.

A varied offer

In Switzerland there is a comprehensive, diverse offer of adult education and training programs. This includes courses, seminars and AE courses, as well as learning options outside of course structures. This field includes visits to museums and workshops, readings, excursions and conferences, for example. AE also covers e-learning and blended learning, work-based learning and the independent use of learning materials or specialist literature. AE also covers learning in self-organized groups.

Private providers dominate the AE market

Not only are the forms of adult education heterogeneous, the spectrum of providers also ranges from small private schools to large enterprises financed privately, from public providers, associations or trade unions to micro-enterprises, learning studios and independent trainers. In absolute figures, private providers clearly dominate the picture: they provide around 80% of the total number of course hours, whereas public providers offer about 20% of AE hours (see page 12 for details).



How we understand the concept of adult education

At SVEB we use an integral AE concept based on the paradigm of lifelong learning.

AE includes not only organized learning offers but also informal learning. These are learning activities which explicitly serve a learning objective but do not take place as part of a learning relationship, for example reading specialist literature on one's own or learning from colleagues at work.

With the introduction of the WeBiG, the concept of non-formal education is gradually gaining in importance. This concept is also widespread internationally, but it is by no means understood the same way everywhere. In Switzerland the WeBiG defines what non-formal learning is.

Adult participation in non-formal and informal learning

Participation in learning of adults (25-64 years old) is according to Eurostat 31.7%, almost three times as much as the EU-average of 11.2% (four weeks preceding the survey, 2019). Older people in Switzerland are more likely to participate in lifelong learning (28.3% versus 7.0% in the EU), as are adults with low levels of educational attainment (10.5% versus 4.2% in the EU), and the unemployed (26.5% versus 9.6% in the EU). Participation rate in informal learning is 42.9% (Eurostat, 2016).

When non-formal learning is considered, adult participation rate is 67.8% according to Swiss statistics (12 months preceding the survey, BFS, 2017).

Nevertheless, there are differences based on the educational level and the occupational status (see figures below).

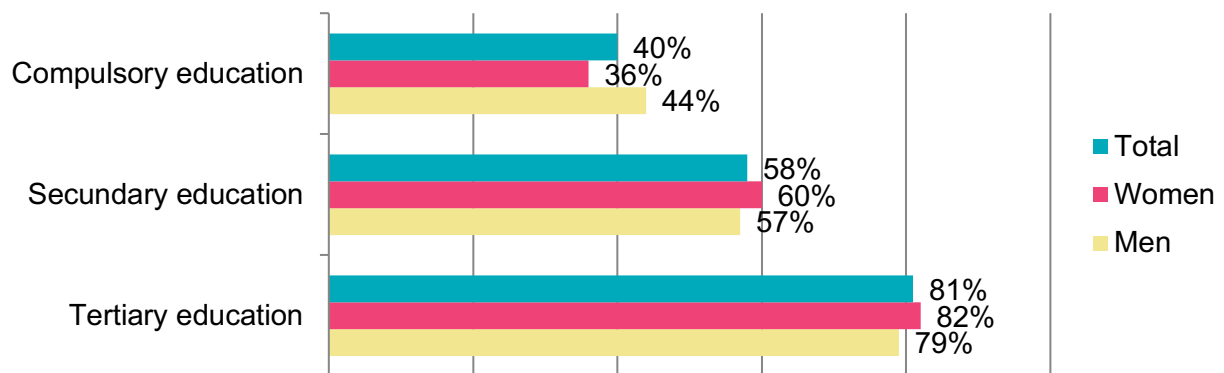


Figure 1: Participation in adult education according to educational level (BFS, 2017).

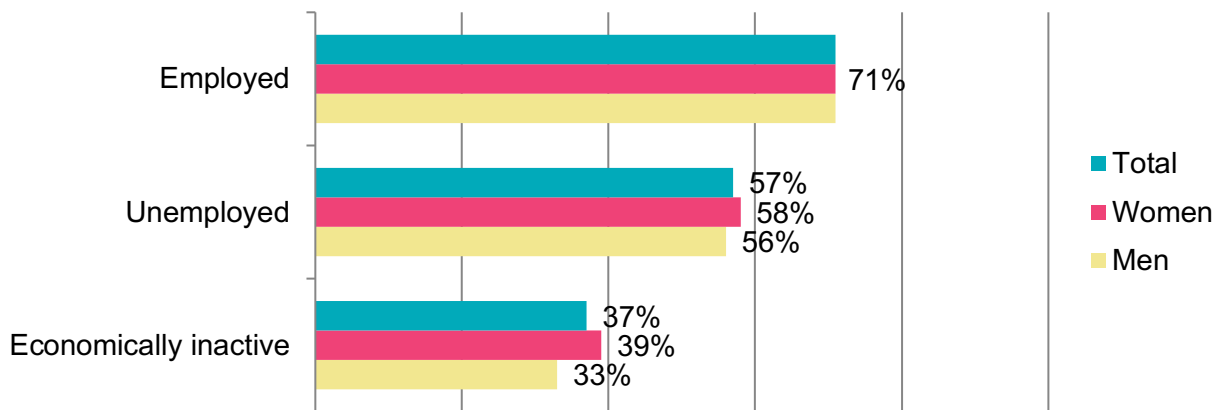


Figure 2: Participation in adult education according to occupational status (BFS, 2017).

There are also differences between the companies' AE strategies. Small and micro-enterprises in particular often lack an explicit AE strategy.

Participation in formal education and training

Formal education (excluding compulsory education) in Switzerland includes upper secondary education (initial vocational education and training (IVET) and general education) and tertiary education (including general higher education and higher VET).

According to Cedefop, Switzerland has higher levels of participation in IVET than the EU average. The share of upper secondary students enrolled in IVET programs is 65.3%, higher than the EU average of 47.3% (data for 2015). Combined work- and school-based programs account for 90.4% of students in upper secondary IVET, much higher than the EU average of 28.4%. A relatively large share (41.0%) of young VET graduates in Switzerland is in further education and training, as compared with the EU (at 32.8%, Cedefop, 2017).

The smaller share, 34.7%, of upper secondary enrollment in general education.

When the educational qualifications per year are considered, IVET and general higher education certificates are the most frequent issued (s. Figure 3).

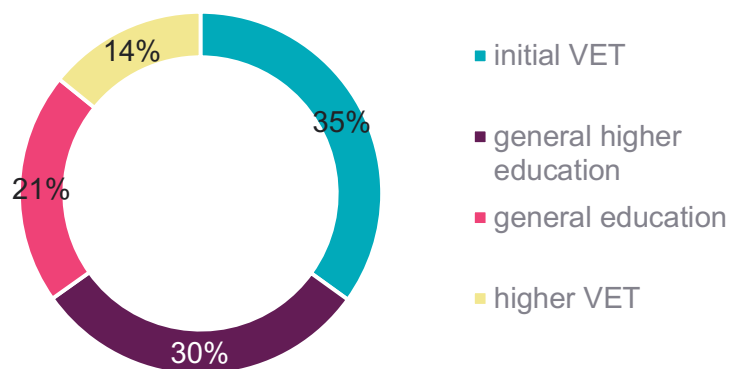


Figure 3: Share of educational qualifications (BFS, 2017).

Swiss Federation of Adult Learning SVEB

SVEB is the Swiss national umbrella organization for adult education and operates as a professional association and advocacy organization. SVEB manages the national training-of-trainers system and is responsible for eduQua, the national quality label for adult learning providers.

In addition, SVEB leads and contributes to innovative projects for the development and research in adult education in Switzerland and Europe. Target groups of these projects are adult education providers and trainers as well as (non-)participants in adult education, such as marginalized adults, older people or migrants.

The 750 SVEB members represent private and state institutions for adult education, associations, in-house training departments and individuals.

Current strategies and policies on AE provision in Switzerland

Legal Framework, priorities and financing structures of AE

As of January 2017, the first national law on adult education entered into force (Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training, WeBiG). This framework act defines goals, principles, and responsibilities for the promotion of adult education in Switzerland. The Federal Act foresees two funding possibilities: adult basic skills promotion and contributions to national organizations for services on the system level.

The five principles of the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training are: responsibility of the individuals, employers and the public sector; quality assurance and development; validation of prior learning; improvement of equality of opportunity and prevention of competitive distortions by public funding (SBFI, 2019b).

Moreover, in addition to the funding by the Federal Act, in November 2017 the national government has decided to allocate 13 million CHF to the promotion of basic skills at the workplace until 2020 (for 3 years, SBFI, 2019a).

Moreover, beginning of 2018 a vision and basic principles on "vocational education and training 2030" have been adopted by the government, social partners and civil society representatives. In a lifelong learning perspective, VET shall be increasingly promoted also for adults.

Financing of AE

Adult education in Switzerland is largely financed by private means. Apart from the participants themselves, companies also make a significant contribution to co-financing



training for their employees. In Switzerland, 5.3 billion francs are spent on adult education each year.

It is not known how high the financial contributions from the federal government and cantons are in the field of adult education. What we do know is that it is difficult for a large part of the adult population to finance their own training themselves. Very time-consuming and costly adult education programs are hardly possible without financial support. Apart from the co-financing by employers, virtually no other support possibilities exist. Employers, however, tend to support especially their well-qualified full-time employees in senior positions.

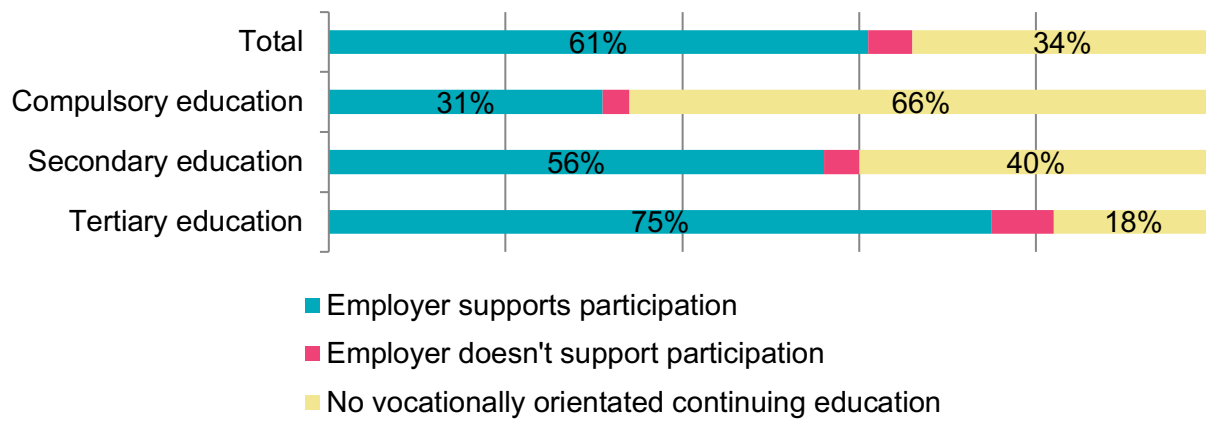


Figure 4: Funding of vocational adult education (BFS, 2017).

Therefore, equal access to adult education is not guaranteed. There is a clear need for action and a demand for funding models which are geared to the needs of adults. This means that financial support must directly benefit the people who want to continue their education. This is not the case with subsidizing the providers of adult education – as has traditionally been done.

Strategies for the provision of basic skills and employability

Employability

The lack of post-compulsory education (upper secondary) entails high costs both for the individuals as well as for the society as a whole. A research study from Switzerland estimates that the economic cost of the lack of upper secondary education amounts to 10'000.- Swiss Francs per Person per year (Fritschi, Oesch, & Jann, 2009). As a consequence, there exist several initiatives to promote second chance education for adults. Again, these initiatives vary between the local authorities, the Cantons. One track of second chance education, which is promoted on a national level, is the validation of prior learning in order to receive a formal IVET diploma (SBFI, 2016). Employability is often equated to IVET in Switzerland. As mentioned before, two thirds

of the students from compulsory education enter IVET. For non-formal validation-initiatives, see next chapter.

Basic skills education

Second chance education is just one way of trying to promote employability of adult learners. For many adult learners the threshold to start IVET is too high. One reason is the lack of basic skills. As mentioned before, the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training stipulates the promotion of basic skills. These skills are defined in Art. 13:

- a) Reading, writing and oral expression in a national language;
- b) Basic knowledge of mathematics;
- c) Application of ICT.

Together with the Cantons, the Federal Government promotes AE-courses to promote basic skills. Despite the allocation of funding, the education offer is expanding only slowly. The big challenge remains to reach the target groups.

Therefore, a national campaign is trying to reach the target groups via their employers (IKW, 2020). It is estimated that 67% of adults with a low level of basic skills are employed. This is why, the workplace is one possible access point to the target group. With this in mind, SVEB has developed the GO model, which allows to promote basic skills at the workplace (SVEB, 2019a).

Another national initiative by SVEB is to promote basic skills of social welfare recipients. The goal is to engage these adults in education and guide them step by step to IVET. The "Adult education initiative in the welfare system" is a national pilot program implemented together with the local public authorities (SVEB, 2019b).

NQF and Validation

In Switzerland there are two National Qualification Frameworks: one for VET and one for tertiary education. They are not directly comparable neither with each other nor with the European Qualification Framework. The main purpose of the NQF in VET is to valorise and position Swiss initial and higher VET abroad (Jäger, 2013).

Validation of prior learning is, as mentioned above, a principle of the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training. However, in the context of this act, little effort has been made so far. It is especially in the context of VET that initiatives exist, varying vastly from one canton to the other. In a limited number of professions adults can have their vocational experience recognized and receive a diploma of initial VET.

As to validation of informal learning and pre-vocational training, there is a broad offer of sector certificates, which are provided by sector organizations. An example is a [sector certificate in nursing and care](#), which is a recognized and widespread



steppingstone to a job in this sector. See also this [publication on the recognition of sector certificates](#) (in German).

A critical review of current strategies and policies on adult education provision

The Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training was a milestone strengthening the recognition of adult education. However, the act is a paper winner: the only issue tackled with the act is the promotion of basic skills of adults. The Swiss adult education market being highly privatized and competitive, the state and the cantons intervene little in order to e.g. promote education offers with spillover effects for society.

Status of the AE actors

Legal frameworks relevant for AE providers

On the national level there is the above-mentioned Federal Act (WeBiG), which has little influence, so far, on the AE offer. As to publicly financed offers of AE (e.g. concerning labour market integration or language courses for refugees), there exist a variety of national and cantonal laws regulating funding of these offers. Accordingly, the responsibilities for funding of the various offers lie in the responsibility in a number of national and cantonal bodies. Therefore, the support, collaboration and status of AE providers vary according to their location and field of activity.

Professional status of adult educators

The Swiss AE market being very heterogenous and highly privatized, the professional status of adult educators varies accordingly. As to the education of adult educators, around 69% of the employers (adult educating providers) expect an andragogic background of their employed adult educators. The most common and widely recognized andragogic education is the modular [Training of Trainers](#) (ToT) system run by SVEB and offered by over 120 education providers throughout Switzerland. The entry level is the SVEB Trainer Certificate, currently held by more than 40,000 trainers. Over 10,000 experts now hold a Federal Diploma in Adult Education and Training (the second level) and around 100 managers have graduated with an Advanced Federal Diploma in Adult Education and Training (the third level).

The majority of adult educators work with a temporary working contract and a salary that is linked to the number of course hours carried out (Sgier, 2015). There is no collective labour agreement or any other sort of reregulation on the salary of adult educators.



Quality assessment procedures applied in AE provision

Quality management plays a central role in AE. Many AE providers have themselves accredited with a quality label. In addition to the main reason for accreditation, namely, to improve quality, quality labels also grant access to public funding.

There is a variety of [quality labels for AE](#) providers, such as eduQua, IN-Qualis or ISO 29990:2010. [EduQua](#) being the only recognised Swiss quality label specifically tailored to providers of AE, it is also the most common and recognized quality label in AE. More than 40% of the AE providers are certified with the eduQua label. The Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB) is the holder of the label.

In the field of basic skills, there is a quality label – the [fide-Label](#) – for courses of the national languages for foreigners. Despite its official recognition, there are only few courses accredited, yet.

Main Programmes in AE

Topics of AE

As mentioned above, adult education is diverse regarding the topics of the education offers. The main topics of non-formal adult education courses are economic and job-related, science and engineering as well as health. Other topics are listed in Figure 5.

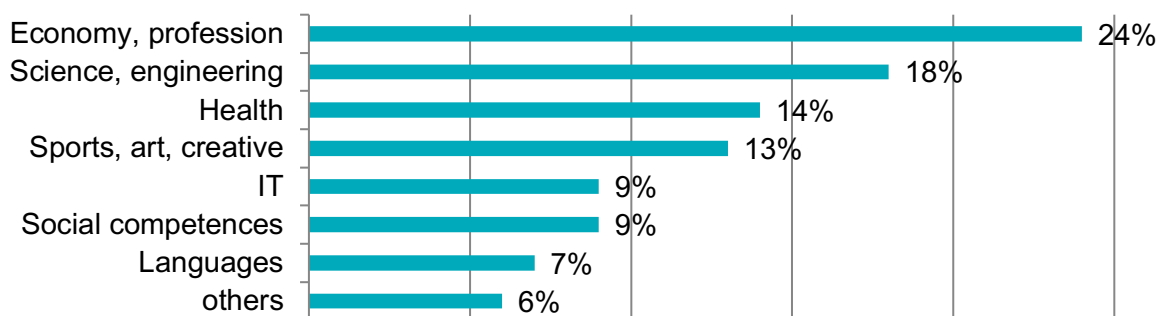


Figure 5: Topics of visited courses in adult education (BFS, 2017).

Providers of AE

The spectrum of providers of AE ranges from small private schools to large enterprises financed privately, from public providers, associations or trade unions to micro-enterprises, learning studios and independent trainers. In absolute figures, private providers clearly dominate the picture: they provide around 80% of the total number of

course hours, whereas public providers – above all universities, universities of applied sciences and VET schools – offer about 20% of AE hours.

According to estimates, there are between 2,500 and 3,000 training providers throughout Switzerland.

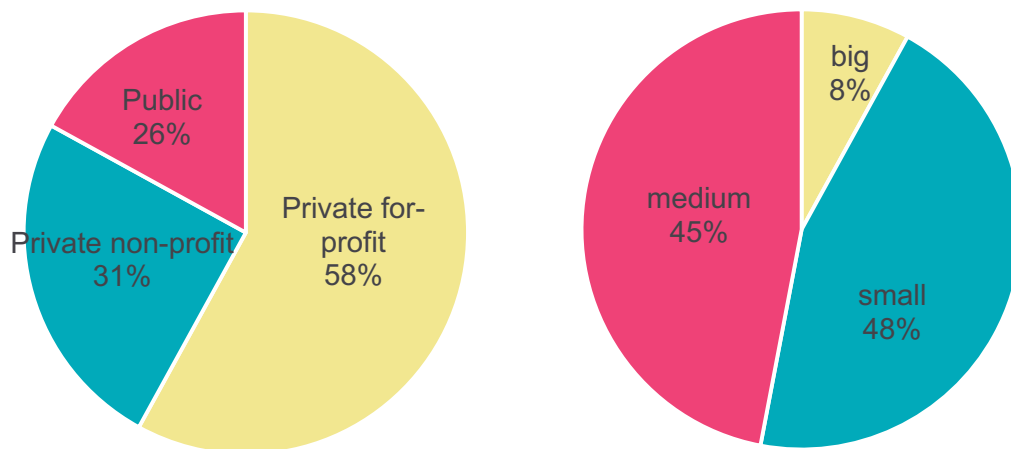


Figure 6: Types of providers of adult education (Sgier, Schläfli, & Gollob, 2016).

Reasons for participation and time spent AE

The reason for participation in AE can be professional or nonprofessional. More than half of the 62% of the Swiss population who are active in AE are continuing their education for purely professional reasons. A quarter of the population active in AE attends activities motivated by both professional and nonprofessional reasons. Among men, the proportion who attend AE exclusively for professional reasons is clearly higher than among women. In contrast, women are more likely to attend AE outside the workplace or for both reasons. The difference is partly explained by the different levels of integration in the labour market (BFS, 2017).

40% of the population active in AE attended only one AE course in the year prior to the 2016 survey, the average being 2.3 continuing education activities. If the duration of all the AE courses attended is added together, it can be seen that 46% of the people who attended one or more AE courses spent a total of more than 40 hours on them.

Reasons for not participating

A national survey showed various reasons for not participating in AE (BFS, 2017). By far the most frequently cited obstacle to participation was lack of time (65%), followed by high costs (34%), unfavourable times and family demands (31% each). When asked

about the most important obstacle to participation, the most frequently cited were lack of time (37%), course costs (14%) and family demands (12%).

For both younger and older people, the family demands, as one of the three most common obstacles to participation, is no longer present. In these cases, it is often "other personal reasons" that have led to a refusal to participate. In the case of older persons, health reasons are cited as the second most frequent reason for not taking part in AE and training after a lack of time rather than too high costs. Even when analysing separately according to gender, migration status, disability status, labour market status or educational level, there is hardly any change in the three most important reasons for foregoing AE and training. Lack of time is usually mentioned first, followed by excessive costs or family demands. Only in individual groups does health (for example, among people with disabilities, or among the unemployed and inactive) displace excessive costs or family demands from the three main reasons for giving up training.

Challenges

The main challenge in Swiss adult education remains the **access to and the participation in lifelong learning** and therefore equity. Participation is heavily depending on qualification, employment status, age and migration/social background. People with a tertiary degree participate twice as much (80%) in adult education as graduates of upper secondary education (40%, BFS, 2017). Public initiatives are necessary to tackle this challenge.

Another challenge in the market of adult education provision is **the assurance and development of quality** of the education offers. Providers of further education are also challenged to keep up to the newest trends, such as digitalization, and adapt their offers accordingly.

In the field of **basic skills promotion**, regulated by the Federal Act on Continuing Education and Training, the challenge consists in a **nationwide implementation** of the act. The regional governments, the cantons, are challenged to develop specific programs to promote basic skills of adults. Currently, the policies implemented in the cantons vary vastly: Some cantons adopted comprehensive measures to promote adults' basic skills in a lifelong perspective, others haven't foreseen any change in policy at all.

In this regard, it is a challenge that the federal government assumes the role of a national coordinating and guiding body.

Another challenge consists in **generating data** concerning adult education in Switzerland. In order to assure a data-based policy, it would be important to know

more about key figures in adult education: who participates, who finances and which offers exist already? General data is available, but detail information is missing.

Recommendations

The best trainers for the least qualified: Professional adult educators and quality teaching are essential for a fruitful adult education. Especially for the promotion of a target group with little educational background a solid andragogic education of the adult educators is fundamental. The [Swiss ToT qualifications](#), which are independent of the subjects thought, are a solid basis for professional adult educators. In the field of [basic skills promotion](#) there are various initiatives by SVEB to promote adult educators competences.

A major challenge consists in promoting participation in **basic skills** education. Even though the political will to support these education offers has increased recently, reaching the target group remains a challenge. **Information campaigns** could help to reveal the benefit and need of basic skills education not only to the target group but also to the employers and the wider public.

In Switzerland, adult education is often reduced to education for employability and job market integration. Adult education is thus the economy's "right-hand man". However, **promoting active citizenship** or intercultural awareness is just as well a public duty.



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