

Annual Report AFS Switzerland 2025

Introduction: A Year Defined by Quality and Growth

The year 2025 was a period of significant milestones, structural advancements, and a renewed commitment to the core values of intercultural exchange. AFS Switzerland began the year on a high note in February, when the organization was once again successfully re-certified with the **Intermundo Q-Label**. This prestigious certification is based on approximately 50 rigorous criteria that non-profit youth exchange organizations must meet to ensure the highest standards of safety and education. During the official handover of the certificate, Christine Leimgruber, the Managing Director of Intermundo, specifically praised the exceptional quality of our internal audits. This recognition served as a powerful validation of our team's hard work and set a positive, professional tone for the months that followed.



Operational Success and Program Diversity

Our primary mission of facilitating transformative exchanges remained vibrant and robust throughout the year. The statistics for the 2025 cycles demonstrate the significant reach of our programs, with a total of **186 students sent** abroad and **85 students welcomed** into Swiss homes. Specifically, the SH25 cycle saw 56 participants going abroad and 21 arriving in Switzerland, while the NH25 cycle grew to 130 outgoing and 64 incoming participants.

From a strategic perspective, our Hosting team focused heavily on strengthening internal processes and further refining the host family experience to ensure long-term stability. On the Sending side, our priority was to achieve the highest possible level of diversity. The multitude of destinations is named as the primary reason participants choose AFS, and we are very proud of the diverse AFS Network. We also observed a strong season for school information events, being present at 36 schools compared to 25 in the previous year, thanks to the combined efforts of our volunteers, staff, and Intermundo partners.

A recurring highlight for our exchange students were visits to the **Federal Palace** in Bern. The November delegation was personally received by Federal Councilor Beat Jans for an engaging Q&A session, following an intensive workshop where the students prepared by studying the Swiss political system. We hope to continue this AFS element for future visits. In November 2025 this was complemented by the **"Geneva Camp"** where, in a first, all hosted students travelled together in one group to get a flavor of the international peacemaking side of Switzerland.



This milestone event saw 80 hosted students, led by Sarah Money and ten volunteers, enjoy two days in Geneva to explore international dimensions of Active Global Citizenship. They benefited from several sessions at the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP) by invitation of alumnus Ambassador Thomas Greminger and the following day an inspiring guided visit to the United Nations.

Governance and Leadership Transitions



The General Assembly in April, held at the historic Schloss Sargans, brought a turning point for our leadership structure. The event was held under the moving theme of **"Rebuilding Peace,"** featuring a presentation by two courageous young AFS scholarship holders from Israel and Palestine. Having spent a school year together in Liechtenstein, they shared their personal journey of reconciliation and mutual understanding, which left a lasting impression on all attendees.

This assembly also marked a significant change in the Board of Directors. We bid a grateful farewell to Felix Mundwiler, Michael Bader, and Christian Herter, thanking them for their years of dedicated service. In their place, we

welcomed Stephan Schad, Simon Geiser, and Adrian Merkofer as new members. In a first for AFS Switzerland, the Board is now led by **Co-Presidents Cléo Schwerzmann and Regula Gerber**, marking the first time this role is shared between two people. Additionally, Suzanne Weigelt was awarded honorary membership for her extraordinary lifelong contributions to AFS. The Board concluded its productive year with a retreat in Wildhaus in November, where the project phase for the **Regional Volunteer Coordinators** was officially and successfully concluded; this role is now embedded in the operational team at AFS Switzerland.



Empowering Our Volunteer Network

Volunteers continue to be the heartbeat of AFS Switzerland: on a local level we see events every week including museum nights, winter outings, and ice-skating events, which foster community spirit and invite new volunteers to join our mission.

At the Chapter Leaders Meeting in Olten in May, we were proud to honor Jennifer Petrée and Christiane Schmidt as **"Volunteers of the Year"** for their exceptional dedication. Throughout the year, we invested in our people in various ways, including a specialized **Volunteer Training** in Vorderwald and the participation of six volunteers at the **Global Chapter Leadership Summit** in Malaga, Spain, in



November. Despite some rainy weather, the **Volunteer Summer Party** in Zurich proved that the bonds within our community are strong, as the group enjoyed intensive and meaningful conversations indoors and on the terrace.

Education, Strategic Partnerships, and Global Reach

AFS Switzerland continues to position itself as a leading expert in intercultural learning and global citizenship. In the realm of formal education, we successfully conducted a pilot of the "Global Up for Educators" online program.



The feedback from participating teachers has provided us with invaluable insights on how to better tailor our educational offerings to the specific needs of schools and students. Our expertise was also sought after externally; for example, Andrea Rüegg, Regional Volunteer Coordinator for the West of Switzerland, represented AFS at the **Benevol Impulstag** at the Fachhochschule OST, where she delivered a keynote on the complexities of community building.

Our international influence was further highlighted by the visit of a high-level **delegation** of school directors from **China** in October. Led by our Board member Adrian Merkofer, the group visited the Gymnasium Interlaken to gain a deeper understanding of the Swiss education system. On a global level, we maintained strong ties within the AFS network by attending the Network Meeting in Cairo and the EFIL GA in Bratislava. Furthermore, AFS Switzerland had the honor of hosting an EFIL Governance & Leadership seminar in Dornach, marking our return as a host for international EFIL events.



Alumni, Fundraising & Innovation



The year 2025 saw the launch of innovative new ways broaden our impact. The **AFS Entrepreneurs Club** held its first dinner in July. This circle of AFS alumni connects changemakers and entrepreneurs to network and promote "Global Citizenship" in the modern professional world. Complementary to this was the soft-launch of an initiative to grow intergenerational connections in the AFS alumni community, the "**Oldies help Newbies**" career advice offering. We are growing the panel of experts happy to help younger returnees with support and underscoring the value of the AFS network. This year we were also able to resume **Alumni Anniversary Parties** after a two-year hiatus, celebrating those who went on exchange between 5 to 60 years ago.

In fundraising we had a novel project to benefit from synergies with the AICZ (**American International Club of Zurich**). AFS worked closely with and were the beneficiaries of their Charity Golf Tournament. The event in Holzhausen, was additionally bolstered by over 15 AFS participants and resulted in a generous donation to fund future scholarships.



Media Presence and Public Impact

Our message of peace and understanding reached a wide audience through various media channels this year. The *Sonntagsblick* featured a prominent double-page story titled "Friends instead of Enemies," highlighting the Liechtenstein **"Rebuilding Peace"** project. The NZZ shared a touching "AFS Love Story," and our exchange programs were the subject of interviews on RTS radio. These features, along with our active presence on LinkedIn and local newspapers like the *Zürcher Oberländer*, help ensure that the "AFS Effect" remains visible to the Swiss public.

Conclusion

In summary, 2025 was a year of consolidation, innovation, and renewed energy. With a historic new leadership team, a certified standard of quality, and a deeply committed network of volunteers and partners, AFS Switzerland is well positioned to navigate the challenges of the future. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all host families, volunteers, members and supporters who make our work possible.

Regula Gerber & Cléo Schwerzmann

Co-Chairs, AFS Switzerland

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