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**Contribution by Switzerland
to the CSTD 2026-2027 priority theme on
“Data Governance for Development: From Asymmetry to Equitable Stewardship”**

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Swiss Contribution to the CSTD Consultation on Data Governance for Development

30.07.2026

The CSTD secretariat has launched a consultation among its member States to support the preparation of an issues paper on the theme ***“Data Governance for Development: From Asymmetry to Equitable Stewardship.”*** The paper will be presented at the CSTD inter-sessional panel meeting, to be held on 6 November 2026 in Geneva. Members are invited to provide country- or region-specific perspectives by responding to the attached questions and submitting any additional relevant input to the CSTD secretariat by 31 July 2026.

1. Can you share challenges that your country face in building and leveraging data capacities, including issues related to infrastructure, ownership and stewardship, free and trusted cross-border flows, and benefit-sharing? (Please provide examples and, where possible, quantitative evidence or indicators of these challenges and their impacts)

Switzerland’s principal challenge is not the availability of data itself, but the creation of institutional, technical, and legal conditions that enable data to be reused securely across organizational and sectoral boundaries. The country’s approach therefore focuses on:

- developing interoperable digital infrastructure rather than centralized databases;
- promoting trusted governance and data stewardship instead of relying solely on concepts of data ownership;
- ensuring international compatibility to facilitate secure cross-border data flows;
- supporting practical pilot and prototype projects that demonstrate value and encourage participation;
- establishing common standards and stronger coordination to address fragmentation within Switzerland’s federal system;
- improving the availability, accessibility, quality, and documentation of data;
- strengthening harmonization, standardization, and interoperability across systems;
- enabling the multiple use of data where legally and operationally appropriate;
- ensuring robust data protection, data security, and governance while adapting to technological developments; and

- addressing the growing volume of information, the increasing use of private-sector data of uncertain quality, and financial constraints affecting the production and management of reliable and comparable data and statistics.

This reflects a shift from managing isolated datasets toward building a federated, trustworthy data ecosystem that enables responsible data sharing while preserving organizational autonomy and digital self-determination. Fragmentation and insufficient interoperability remain major barriers to leveraging data across sectors and levels of government. Switzerland's federal structure means that data is generated and managed by the Confederation, 26 cantons, municipalities and numerous public and private organisations. Existing data spaces and information systems frequently lack legal, organisational, semantic and technical interoperability.

Therefore, the principal infrastructure challenge is fragmentation. Data remain distributed across public authorities, private companies, research institutions, and sector-specific platforms that often use incompatible standards, governance models, and technical architectures.

- Rather than focusing solely on legal ownership, Switzerland emphasizes data stewardship and digital self-determination.
- As a highly international economy, Switzerland depends on secure international data exchange.
- A major challenge is creating sufficient incentives for organizations to contribute data.
- Addressing them requires continued investment in high-capacity infrastructure, common standards and metadata, clear stewardship responsibilities, privacy-preserving technologies, data skills, sustainable data-space governance and mechanisms¹
- Overall, addressing all these challenges requires *common* platforms, shared standards, interoperable systems, clear responsibilities and effective governance mechanisms.

2. How are inequalities embedded in the processes through which data is generated, collected and used in your country? In particular, how do biases in data collection and use, such as gender data gap, affect policymaking, service delivery and development outcomes? (Please provide examples, evidence and any measures being taken to address these disparities)

¹ Federal Chancellery, *Swiss Data Ecosystem: Vision and Goals*, 2025

Inequalities can arise at every stage of the data life cycle, from collection and curation to processing, analysis, sharing, reuse and the application of resulting insights. Data equity therefore concerns not only whether data is available, but also whose experiences are represented, who participates in defining and governing data systems, who can access and use the data, and who benefits from the resulting decisions. Biases or omissions introduced during data collection may be difficult to remedy at later stages and can ultimately shape policymaking, access to services and the distribution of public and economic resources. These risks include underrepresentation, inappropriate categorization, unequal access to data and digital capabilities, and the use of analytical systems that reproduce historical inequalities.²

In Switzerland, these issues were discussed during the Swiss IGF 2026³, which provides an open, multistakeholder forum for identifying challenges and developing possible solutions. One session highlighted several ways in which inequalities may become embedded in data systems, including:

- Specifically, actors with greater financial and technical resources may exert more influence over standards while smaller organisations and public-interest stakeholders may struggle to participate.
- In addition, federal fragmentation can also result in incompatible cantonal systems and unequal service quality. In the archival context, decisions about whether to preserve social media, changing online content or research datasets determine whose experiences remain visible to future policymakers and researchers.
- According to experts working in the field, public institutions face significant resource constraints in preserving digital information.
- Finally, it was mentioned that payment systems illustrate how individuals and small businesses may generate valuable data while having limited control over its use and bearing higher proportional transaction costs than large market actors.
- Measures that were proposed include:
 - o Representative multilevel governance bodies, binding open standards, public financing standardization, decentralized archival selection, open source infrastructure and greater transparency concerning software and data processing.
- Inequalities can be embedded in data processes when certain groups (e.g. migrants or low-income populations etc.) are underrepresented or inadequately captured in datasets. This can lead to biased analyses and algorithms that reproduce existing social disparities in some areas. Unequal access to data and digital skills further concentrates benefits among institutions with greater resources. Ensuring representative data collection, transparency and participation of affected communities is therefore essential to achieve equitable outcomes

² World Economic Forum, *Advancing Data Equity: An Action-Oriented Framework*, 2024

³ Swiss Internet Governance Forum, *Programme Swiss IGF 2026*, 16 June 2026

3. Has your country implemented national strategies, regulatory frameworks or policy instruments to promote equitable and interoperable data governance? What are the lessons learned? (Please describe any specific challenges, failures or successes encountered during implementation)

In a report conducted by the federal chancellery on Switzerland's vision and goals for the Swiss data ecosystem⁴, Switzerland has adopted the vision of a trustworthy and interoperable Swiss data ecosystem to enable the multiple use of data across business, academia, government and the public.

- The initiative is embedded in the Swiss Digital Administration agenda and the Digital Federal Administration Strategy.
- The federal Council established initial policy foundations through its decision of 30 March 2022 on trustworthy data spaces and digital self-determination and
- Its decision of 8 December 2023 laying the foundations for the Swiss data ecosystem.
- Its objectives include:
 - o Interoperability across legal, organizational, semantic and technical dimensions;
 - o Trust, transparency and digital self-determination
 - o International compatibility
 - o Efficient reuse of existing standards and infrastructure
 - o Stronger data-management skills
 - o Participation by actors from government, research, business and the publics.
- Framework law for secondary data use:
 - o Switzerland is implementing motion 22.3890⁵ named the *framework law for the secondary use of data*.
 - o The federal department of Justice and Police is tasked with developing a legal basis for secondary data use, for which a consultation draft is due to be submitted to the Federal Council by the end of 2026.
 - o This responds to the problem that current legislation may either prohibit secondary use or fail to provide the necessary legal authority, particularly in the public sector, where authorities are bound by the legality principle.
- The Federal Council also approved a Code of Conduct for the operation of trustworthy data spaces⁶ as a recommendation for the Federal Administration in 2023.
- It is based on four principles:
 - o Transparency
 - o Control
 - o Fairness
 - o Effectiveness

⁴ Federal Chancellery, *Swiss Data Ecosystem: Vision and Goals*, 2025

⁵ Swiss Parliament, *22.3890 — Framework Act on the Secondary Use of Data*, parliamentary motion, 22 August 2022.

⁶ OFCOM, *Code of Conduct for Operating Trustworthy Data Spaces*, 2025

- The fairness principle explicitly requires equitable treatment of all actors participating in a data space.
- The control and transparency principles aim to ensure that actors understand how data are used and can manage data and access rights according to their respective roles.
- The Code is open to actors from business, academia, government and the public, but it is not legally binding.

The Swiss data ecosystem proposes a common governance model defining the roles and obligations of the Swiss data ecosystem contact point, data-space governance authorities, data providers, data users, data intermediaries.

- Data providers retain the capacity to determine who may use their data and under what conditions.
- Data users are responsible for protecting obtained data against unauthorized use.
- Data spaces involving personal information may add a specific data-protection role.
- A minimum set of common rules is considered necessary to ensure interoperability and basic trustworthiness across different data spaces.

In addition, the Swiss data Ecosystem Contact Point was established with the intend to:

- Coordinate sectoral data spaces
- Advising actors
- Develop interoperability measures
- Support implementation of standards
- Develop tools for trustworthy data spaces
- Coordinate international cooperation
- Promote the use of common components.

Challenges:

- Switzerland's data ecosystem has developed organically and remains fragmented.
- Existing sectoral data spaces often lack interoperability, making exchange between them difficult.
- Historically developed data silos remain in place, and different organisations continue to operate incompatible systems and interfaces.

Furthermore, organizational weaknesses have also been identified:

- no established processes for sharing data across organisational boundaries;
- insufficient maturity in data management;
- inadequate data quality;
- difficulty locating available data;
- requirements to provide the same data in different formats to different organisations;
- unclear or insufficient incentives for sharing;
- fragmented initiatives described as “many actors, many directions”;
- insufficient transparency and control, leading to distrust of secondary data use.

Many of these barriers frequently occur together, increasing implementation costs and limiting innovation and international connectivity. However, successes can be identified as well in the work that has been done until now. These include the establishment of a common national vision and terminology for trustworthy and interoperable data spaces, the recognition that interoperability must cover legal, organisational, semantic and technical dimensions, and the integration of principles such as fairness, transparency, control and digital self-determination.

4. Can you share your country’s experience in reducing asymmetries and promoting more equitable data stewardship in development sectors such as public services, education, health and agriculture? (Please provide examples, lessons learned and remaining challenges where possible)

- Switzerland has reduced data asymmetries by strengthening data stewardship through the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), which promotes data reuse, interoperability and secure data exchange across government levels.
- Through the National Data Management Programme (NaDB), Switzerland is implementing the “once-only principle”, so citizens and businesses only need to provide information once, reducing administrative burdens and improving the quality and consistency of public-sector data. The [I14Y interoperability platform](#) further improves equitable access to data and supports evidence-based policies.
- Public services: Switzerland is working to reduce information asymmetries between federal, cantonal and municipal authorities through shared data infrastructures and the once-only principle. The [I14Y interoperability platform](#) provides a common catalogue of datasets, interfaces and administrative services, making public-sector data easier to find, understandable and reusable.
- Education: The Confederation and the cantons have jointly developed measures to support the secure and responsible use of education data. Educa serves as the specialist agency jointly mandated by the Confederation and the cantons for digital education. It acts as an interface between education policy, administration and technological development, mediates among stakeholders and provides expertise on data use, data protection, digital identity and educational technologies. Through Educa, authorities have worked to clarify

data-protection responsibilities, support practical data-use projects and develop a more coherent national approach to education data.

- Health: The Swiss Personalized Health Network has created common standards, secure infrastructure and governance arrangements to support the responsible reuse of clinical data for research. It promotes harmonized access procedures and the use of FAIR principles, while patient representatives and patient organizations have increasingly been included in discussions on data sharing.
- Agriculture: The agridata.ch initiative seeks to give farmers greater control over data generated through agricultural production and administration. Farmers currently must provide similar information to cantonal authorities, certification bodies and farm-management systems. The initiative aims to apply the one-only principle and introduce consent-based data sharing, allowing farmers to authorize specific transfers between systems.

5. What mechanisms or institutional arrangements are in place in your country to foster collaboration around data governance for development among different stakeholders (e.g., university-industry, private-public, or multi-stakeholder initiatives)?

The primary institutional mechanism is the Swiss Data Ecosystem Coordination Office, established within the Federal Chancellery and operational since early 2025. It is organized as a matrix structure with staff from the Federal Chancellery, the Federal Office of Communications (BAKOM), the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), and the Directorate of International Law, reflecting a whole-of-government approach.

Its functions include :

- advising public authorities, companies and civil society organizations on legal, technical and governance issues;
- developing common standards, guidance and tools;
- monitoring existing and planned data spaces;
- facilitating exchange of experience and good practices;
- coordinating national and international cooperation on trusted data spaces.

The Coordination Office serves as a neutral facilitator rather than as the operator of individual data spaces.

Switzerland also uses prototypes, pilot data spaces and early adopters to test governance and technical arrangements before they are applied more broadly. The Swiss Data Ecosystem Contact Point invites organisations to propose prototype projects, while common principles are revised through stakeholder

feedback and practical implementation. This allows government, academia, business and civil society to identify legal, organisational and technical problems jointly.

Switzerland has established Communities of Practice (CoPs) as permanent multi-stakeholder collaboration platforms. Participants include representatives from government, academia, private companies and sectoral data-space initiatives. The Communities of Practice validate concepts, exchange experience and jointly develop common solutions, ensuring that governance and technical foundations reflect practical needs across sectors.

Two Communities of Practice currently exist:

- Strategic Community of Practice, addressing topics such as:
 - governance;
 - legal frameworks;
 - vision and policy development;
 - interaction between different data spaces.
- Technical Community of Practice, focusing on:
 - interoperability;
 - reference architecture ;
 - technical standards ;
 - practical implementation issues.

6. What major bilateral, regional, or international partnership has your country engaged in to foster equitable and interoperable data governance? (Please describe the benefits of participating in these partnerships, as well as any challenges related to coordination, capacity, trust, interoperability or benefit-sharing)

Switzerland also promotes collaboration beyond its national borders by aligning the Swiss Data Ecosystem with international developments.

The Federal Council has emphasized:

1. compatibility with European data governance initiatives;
2. preservation of EU data protection adequacy;
3. participation in international discussions on digital self-determination and trusted data spaces.

This international engagement supports cross-border interoperability while enabling Swiss stakeholders to contribute to emerging international standards.

- Council of Europe Convention 108+: Switzerland ratified the modernized Convention 108+ in September 2023. The Convention provides a common, legally binding international framework for protecting individuals when personal data is processed and transferred across borders. Participation supports equitable data governance by strengthening rights, transparency and independent oversight, while also building the trust needed for international data sharing. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner participate actively in the Convention's Consultative Committee. A key challenge is ensuring that international data exchange remains operational while different jurisdictions maintain effective and comparable safeguards, enforcement capacities and interpretations of data-protection rules.
- Gaia-X and European data-space cooperation: The Gaia-X Hub Switzerland was inaugurated in March 2025 and is coordinated by the Swiss Data Alliance. It connects Swiss public authorities, research institutions, companies and civil society with a wider European network developing open, secure and interoperable data spaces.
- Participation in the UN CSTD, and in OECD initiatives for international data governance, as well as [the working group on data governance](#) established by the UN Statistical Commission, where Switzerland are members of the working groups.
- In certain bilateral agreements data stewardship can be included.

7. How can international cooperation strengthen equitable and interoperable data governance to ensure that data contributes to shared prosperity and sustainable development? In what ways can the UN CSTD contribute to this effort?

- International cooperation can help strengthen equitable and interoperable data governance by promoting common principles, compatible standards and trusted mechanisms for cross-border data sharing.
- The UN CSTD can play an important role by providing an inclusive and evidence-based platform for governments, the private sector, academia, civil society and other stakeholders to work towards consensus. In line with its mandate under Article 48 of the Global Digital Compact, the CSTD working group can help define principles of data governance, develop interoperability frameworks, examine equitable benefit-sharing and identify options for safe and trusted data flows. To do this effectively, the process should remain transparent, inclusive and regionally balanced, including within drafting groups and intersessional work.
- The CSTD should also ensure that recommendations are based on factual evidence, reflect the diversity of views expressed by members and stakeholders, and support practical cooperation rather than imposing a single global model
- Most importantly, the credibility of this process will depend strongly on its inclusiveness and working methods. Regional and stakeholder balance should be ensured within drafting groups and intersessional work, and participants should have transparent access to documents, discussions and decision-making processes.