

Switzerland accepts historic social solidarity initiative

Friday 29 March 2024, by [IndustriAll Global Union](#) (Date first published: 6 March 2024).

In Switzerland, for the first time, a popular initiative was accepted that fundamentally enhances the country's 1st pillar old-age pension insurance (AVS) by introducing a 13th pension payment. In an encouraging move, led by the Swiss Trade Union Federation (USS) and supported by women's and retirees' organizations, this initiative addresses the pressing issue of inflation that has hit pensioners hard.

The adjustment, mirrors the concept of a 13th monthly salary for workers and aims to provide a necessary boost to the living standards of current and future retirees, it represents an 8.3 per cent increase in their monthly pension.

This initiative is a significant victory for social solidarity in Switzerland, securing a more balanced and equitable approach to old-age provisions. With a decisive public vote on 3 March, 2024, Swiss citizens prioritized social welfare over attempts in a separate initiative to make the age of retirement more flexible, which faced overwhelming rejection, with 75 per cent voting against an increased retirement age.

IndustriALL affiliate UNIA mobilized members throughout the country around the campaign:

"It was well worth the effort. This result is a major social step for Switzerland, and it gives us confidence in the future of our old-age pension scheme. It helps our fight for better wages, affordable health insurance premiums and our fight against the theft of second-pillar pensions," said Vania Alleva, president of UNIA.

This public mandate highlights a widespread demand for immediate action to safeguard against the erosion of purchasing power among pensioners and calls for broader compensatory measures for other groups affected by economic disparities.

This decision, endorsed by a majority through a higher-than-usual turnout, sends a strong message about the population's trust in a solidarity-based pension system.

The support for the 13th pension payment initiative reflects a broad consensus on the need for progressive policies that ensure dignity in retirement without compromising the social fabric of the country.

"We stand in solidarity with our Swiss affiliates and celebrate this triumph as a testament to the power of collective action and the importance of union-led initiatives in defending the rights and well-being of workers and retirees alike. This victory not only strengthens confidence in Switzerland's pension system but also could set an example for similar advocacy efforts globally, reiterating the need for a fair and just economic system that truly serves the needs of all its citizens." said Atle Høie, IndustriALL general secretary.

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