

## **I. Introduction**

### **Background to the Initiative**

The Swiss philanthropic sector has a long and rich history and tradition. In many ways, Switzerland has been a role model for other European countries in this respect. In addition, there has been momentum in the last decade to elevate the scale and impact of philanthropy even further, for example: the efforts of SwissFoundations, proFonds, Verbandsmanagement Institut (VMI), and ZEWO;<sup>1</sup> the creation of the Centre for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS); and the foundation law reforms of 2006, 2008, and most recently, the pending reforms inspired by the Motion Luginbühl. Building on this momentum, and understanding that there is a sense across the country that Swiss philanthropy has not fully reached its potential for impact, this initiative was formed to develop a prioritised list of action steps that will result in an even stronger philanthropic sector in Switzerland.

The initiative was conceived and is supported by the partners of Lombard Odier Darier Hentsch & Cie and their foundation, Fondation 1796, and led by a Steering Group of representatives from the Swiss philanthropic sector with the following members:

- Beate Eckhardt, General Manager, *SwissFoundations*
- Philipp Egger / Pascale Vonmont, Director / Deputy Director, *Gebert Rüt Stiftung*
- Katja Gentinetta, Deputy Managing Director and Head Strategic Planning, *Avenir Suisse*
- Michel Glauser, President, *Fondation Leenaards*
- Dominique Jakob, Director, *Center for Foundation Law, University of Zürich*
- Karin Jestin, Secretary General, *Fondation 1796*
- Charles Kleiber, Former State Secretary
- Thierry Lombard, President, *Fondation 1796*
- Georg von Schnurbein, Director, *Centre for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS)*

### **Methodology**

This initiative is divided in two phases of work: I) gathering input and II) action planning. This document and Phase I are informed by three source of information:

1. Interviews with each member of the Steering Group to understand their vision for the Swiss philanthropic sector and their ideas for how to achieve that vision
2. A review of more than 20 studies and articles about the Swiss philanthropic sector (see *Appendix for complete list*)
3. Input from nearly 50 stakeholders in Swiss philanthropy through interviews and an online survey (see *Appendix for complete list*)

Our conclusions are informed by all of these sources. Indeed, we found a high level of consistency in the ideas and insights that were gathered from each. This consistency implies a strong base of agreement from which to launch the results of this initiative.

### **Purpose of this Document**

This document provides an update of our findings and progress to the stakeholders in Swiss philanthropy who generously committed their time and insights to this initiative to-date. We appreciate the thought that went into each interview and survey and want to provide the aggregation of those thoughts for everyone's benefit. In addition, we believe that the data that was collected through the study of studies may be informative to this group.

The findings set out below provide a starting point for the next phase of work: to create a roadmap to capitalise on opportunities to further strengthen the Swiss philanthropic sector. This roadmap, and the supporting analysis, will also be shared in a public report, which will be available in several languages by the spring.

We welcome your reactions to this document, as well as ideas for how to move forward. Please send comments and questions to Valerie Bockstette of the international consulting firm FSG Social Impact Advisors, who are managing the project process on behalf of Fondation 1796. Valerie can be reached at [Valerie.Bockstette@fsg-impact.org](mailto:Valerie.Bockstette@fsg-impact.org).

## II. Key Findings

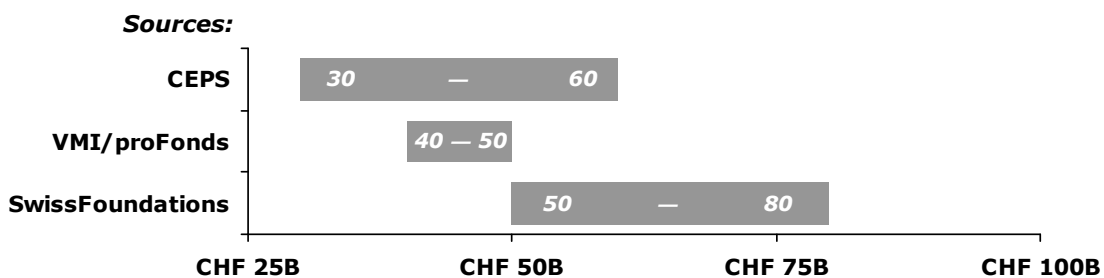
### Philanthropy in Switzerland Today

Switzerland has a rich tradition of philanthropy, dating back hundreds of years. One of the oldest registered foundations, the Inselspital in Bern, was founded in 1354 and is still operating today, more than 650 years later.<sup>2</sup> The Zürich foundation law of 1835, and the federal law that followed it in 1907, made Switzerland one of the most welcoming places to establish a philanthropic foundation in Europe for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Switzerland's preeminent position in humanitarianism and international cooperation has led to many well-respected NGOs being headquartered here, from WWF International to Médecins Sans Frontières International. Switzerland also hosts dynamic and groundbreaking global initiatives such as the World Economic Forum, the Global Fund fighting AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, among many others.

Today, Switzerland ranks among the most generous nations in Europe. Excluding church taxes, private giving in the confederation amounts to an estimated 1.2% of annual disposable income – more than in either the UK or the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Over two thirds of households give regularly;<sup>4</sup> while a typical Deutschschweizer donates twice as much per year as a Romand (400-500 CHF vs 200 CHF),<sup>5</sup> both are around four times more generous than their nearest neighbours (Germany and France, respectively).<sup>6</sup> The international philanthropic response to the tsunami of December 2004 underlines this point: the Swiss gave around 45 CHF per head, the most of any nation.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Switzerland donated twice as much per capita from private funds as second-ranked Norway, nearly four times as much as France and Germany, and more than twelve times as much as the U.S.

Giving by established foundations also appears healthy overall. Foundations represent a large philanthropic resource in Switzerland: estimates for total assets vary from 30 to 80 billion CHF (see chart 1 below) – double the amount per capita found in England and Wales, and around three times the level in Germany.<sup>8</sup> These foundations pay out an estimated 1-2 billion CHF per year in grants and charitable operating expenses, around 2-3% of assets<sup>9</sup> – this is comparable with payout rates in other European countries, and indeed with the U.S. if the lower interest rates and more conservative investment style found in Switzerland are taken into account.<sup>10</sup> In addition, half of federally-registered foundations give internationally<sup>11</sup> (although only 15% of total capital is dedicated to this purpose<sup>12</sup>). The lack of a comprehensive, publicly available data source that lists all of Switzerland's foundations, their assets, and their activities makes it challenging to arrive at an overall estimate for key data points, hence the discrepancy in the three asset estimates shown below. In addition, while there are several studies and data sources that list the thematic focus areas of foundations (for example, ~40% of foundations fund social issues, ~35% fund education and science / research, ~25% fund culture, and ~20% fund health)<sup>13</sup>, there is no comprehensive data available on the actual *amount* of annual giving to each focus area.

**Chart 1 – Estimated Assets of Public Interest Foundations in Switzerland**

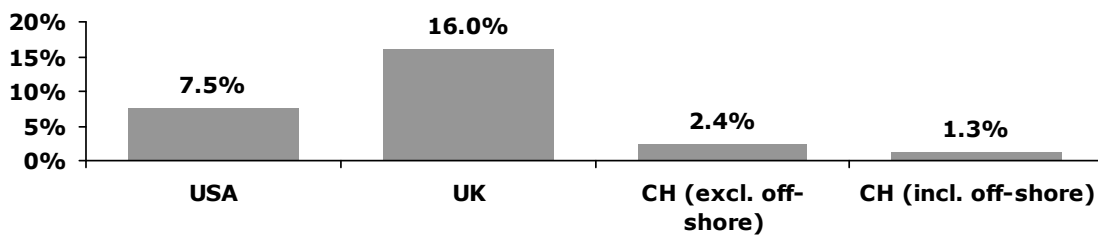


Swiss companies are also highly engaged. More than three quarters engage in corporate citizenship (giving and / or employee volunteering)<sup>14</sup> – among larger companies, with more than 1,000 employees, this figures rises to 93%.<sup>15</sup> The country hosts a number of world leaders in corporate philanthropy, including the efforts of many private banks. Moreover, corporate

engagement looks set to expand further: fully 95% of companies intend to maintain or increase their activity in the coming year.<sup>16</sup>

However, given the concentration of wealth in the country, there is a sense that, despite doing well in comparison to European countries, Switzerland still has room to improve – particularly in terms of inspiring wealthy people to give. Due to the tradition of banking secrecy, good data on high net-worth (HNW) giving is harder to find than for other sectors. Nevertheless, a crude indicator – comparing foundation assets to total HNW assets under management – suggests that Switzerland’s wealthiest residents could do more: total foundation assets are around 1/6 the size of total HNW assets under management in the UK, but the equivalent ratio in Switzerland is just 1-2% (see *chart 2 below*).<sup>17</sup> The survey and interviews conducted for this initiative reinforce this point. When asked to select priorities for this initiative, more than half of respondents identified spurring philanthropic activity by HNW donors as a priority – the third most popular choice selected.

**Chart 2 – Foundation Assets as % of High Net-Worth Assets under Management**

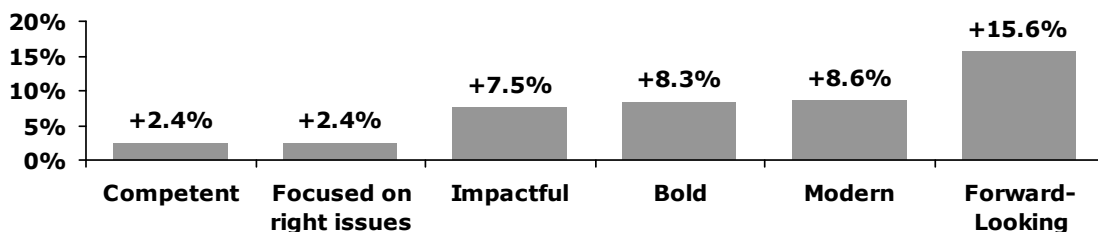


**Quality of Nonprofits**

The nonprofit sector in Switzerland is a key strength. Most are professionally run: 70% of nonprofit directors have a university degree.<sup>18</sup> The ZEWO certification program, among the first of its kind in Europe, is increasing in popularity both among nonprofits and among donors – last year, ZEWO-registered associations and foundations had around 2/3rds market share of donations.<sup>19</sup> Earned income – an indicator of more sophisticated nonprofit management – is the fastest growing segment of revenue, increasing at an annualised rate of nearly 5% in 2008 among ZEWO nonprofits.<sup>20</sup> They are also becoming more efficient: income devoted to projects increased from 75% in 2005 to 78% in 2008.<sup>21</sup>

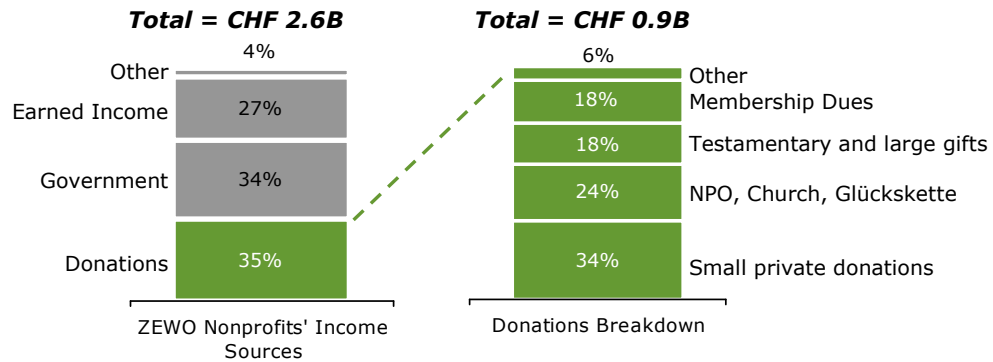
Nonprofits are also effective at communicating their value to donors and potential donors. Just 9% of non-givers say they don’t trust nonprofits.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, between 2007 and 2008, nonprofits successfully improved perception scores on a range of criteria – notably being seen as more bold, modern, and forward-looking (see *chart 3 below*).<sup>23</sup>

**Chart 3 – Nonprofit Perception Score Improvements 2007 to 2008 (Nonprofits are...)**



Perhaps reflecting this relative sophistication, philanthropy represents only a third of ZEWO nonprofits’ income, with legacies and major gifts accounting for only around 6% of the overall total (see *chart 4 on the next page*).

**Chart 4 – ZEWO Nonprofits’ Income Sources**



Interestingly, there is a perception that donors are lagging behind nonprofits in terms of professionalisation and sophistication. As Purtschert, von Schnurbein and Beccarelli<sup>24</sup> put it, “later than NPOs, foundations are recognising that management and public interest are not mutually exclusive.”

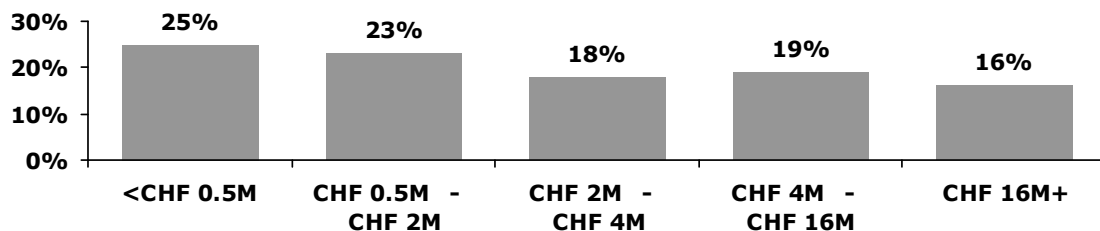
**Structure of the Foundation Sector**

The Swiss foundation sector is diverse, numerous and growing in number, although foundations are mostly small. There are over 12,000 foundations in Switzerland,<sup>25</sup> with one new one being started nearly every day.<sup>26</sup> Of these, around 3,000 are operating foundations,<sup>27</sup> and an estimated 3,000 are inactive,<sup>28</sup> meaning there are at least 6,000 active grantmaking foundations. Around 3,000 are registered at the federal level<sup>29</sup>, and this number is growing faster than cantonally-registered foundations (6% vs. 2% annualised rate).<sup>30</sup>

In part, this is a function of the favourable legal environment for Swiss foundations. Foundations are simple to set up: they require only a founding document that includes a defined purpose (which does not necessarily have to be for public benefit); and to be listed on the Register of Commerce. Moreover, little capital is needed to do so – 50’000 CHF for foundations that register at federal level, and as low as 10’000 CHF for those that do so at canton level. They are also flexible; Switzerland is among the few countries in Europe that allows – under certain conditions – foundations to be repurposed after having been established. Survey respondents and interviewees celebrate this, citing “strong acceptance of the role of foundations in the social fabric,” “generous and liberal” tax laws and an “efficient,” “straightforward” and “stable” legal system.

However, foundations are often small, and the landscape is somewhat opaque. More than a third have assets of less than 1 million CHF<sup>31</sup> (see chart 5 below), and 80% have no paid staff.<sup>32</sup> In addition, SwissFoundations’ dictionary of the Swiss foundation sector lists more than a dozen different types of foundation,<sup>33</sup> of which only some qualify as being public interest.

**Chart 5 – Foundation Assets Distribution (based on sample of 275 Foundations)<sup>34</sup>**



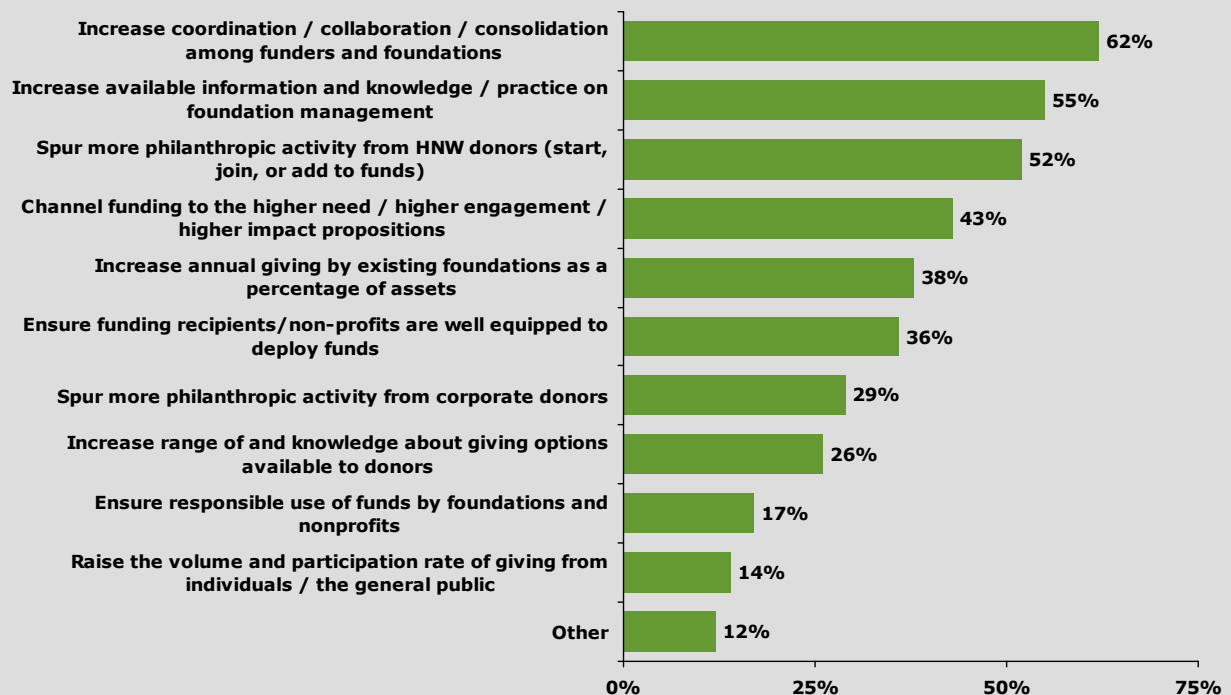
While the light regulatory structure is welcomed, some studies and respondents worry that oversight could be stronger. Only larger foundations need to conduct a full audit<sup>35</sup> and data disclosure requirements are minimal<sup>36</sup> – while this reduces the administrative burden on small foundations, it also reduces their accountability to wider society. Authorities have limited powers of intervention<sup>37</sup> and are perceived as reluctant to initiate sanctions against inactive foundations, as is required by current legislation<sup>38</sup>. Finally, several respondents commented that

too many foundations are controlled by banks and lawyers – a point echoed by Benno Schubiger of SwissFoundations<sup>39</sup> – and particularly noted their financial interest in having many small foundations, rather than fewer, larger ones. As one interviewee put it, “*philanthropy is the hostage of bankers and lawyers.*”

### A Note on Prioritisation of Goals for this Initiative

All participants in this initiative – both those that filled out the online survey, and those who were interviewed in person – were asked to identify up to 5 potential goals to be prioritised in the Swiss context (or to suggest others). 42 responded to this particular question, representing a broad range of perspectives that included funders, nonprofits, intermediaries and other actors, from both of the main linguistic regions. The results of this prioritisation are shown below. While overall conclusions were not solely based on the results of this question, the responses are well aligned with the bigger picture of what was found.

#### Overview of Prioritisation Results



### Opportunities for Further Development

Through the survey, interviews, studies, and conversations with Steering Group members, three areas were identified as opportunities to build on and further develop the Swiss philanthropic sector.

First, building on the great start made by organisations such as proFonds and SwissFoundations, participants are keen to see **more cooperation between foundations, and with companies and the public sector**. SwissFoundations represents ~20% of annual foundation giving, but still has plenty of room to grow – only 1.5% of foundations are members of either SwissFoundations or proFonds.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, just 1 in 5 foundations report frequently cooperating with other foundations.<sup>41</sup> Recognising this growth potential, increasing collaboration, coordination and consolidation among funders and foundations was the most popular selection to be a priority for this initiative, being chosen by 62% of respondents. A “*fragmented*” philanthropic landscape was referenced by many; leading to concerns that donors are “*inefficient*” and are missing out on opportunities to have a greater impact.

Second, respondents and interviewees felt quite strongly that donors could do a better job of managing their **giving more strategically**, expressing concern that donors “*lack a strategic*

focus," that "there is no demonstrated impact," and that "funding is not always allocated to the most effective and sustainable projects." 55% identified improving the availability of information and knowledge / practices on foundation management as a priority – the second most popular choice. The available data backs up this viewpoint: just 16% of foundations frequently analyse project portfolios<sup>42</sup> and 72% of companies don't evaluate their corporate citizenship activities.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, HNW individuals often have little knowledge of how to engage in philanthropy, and although a nascent (and growing) pool of advisors exists, many find it hard to access information and guidance.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, there was a broad consensus of the **need for better data on philanthropy** – less as an end in itself, and more to facilitate cooperation and more strategic giving. Study participants recognised that the lack of information in the sector reflected a "sense of modesty and privacy; people do not want to show off their wealth." While respecting this desire for discretion, there was nevertheless widespread concern at the lack of "peer level exchange of ideas and lessons" and at the "difficult[y] for NGOs to find interested donors." Several respondents and interviewees called for a more complete and up-to-date database of foundations (including those registered at cantonal level) that included details on giving. Better needs assessment was also raised as a potential action point by several participants.

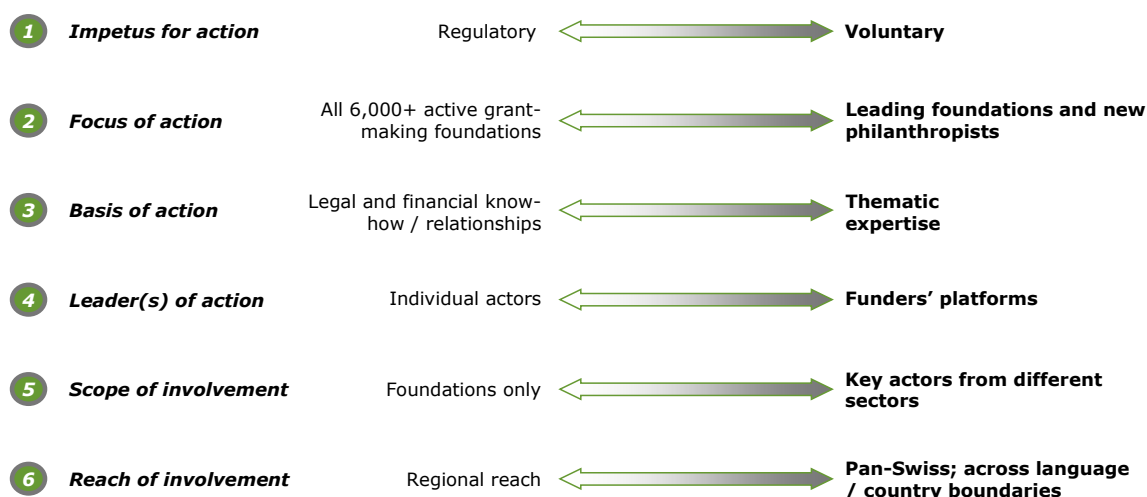
### III. Conclusions & Next Steps

#### Prospective Focus of this Initiative

As indicated in the Key Findings section, the research highlighted the themes of cooperation, strategic impact-orientation, and the availability of information (in order to facilitate the former two) as focal points of this initiative. These themes will be explored further in the second phase of work.

#### Key Principles for Moving Forward

In addition to these findings, several principles became clear during the course of the research that should guide future action – and which will inform the development of concrete action steps in Phase II. These principles are drawn from a series of trade-offs – illustrated below – that should be considered in order to proceed.



In short: voluntary mechanisms seem more suited to the Swiss context than strict regulatory mechanisms; it may not be possible to engage all active grant-making foundations but the largest and / or most active ones could be targeted first; thematic expertise and focus should drive philanthropy rather than banking / legal relationships; implementation of action steps should leverage multi-funder platforms that already exists; this initiative should involve and engage the private and public sectors as well; and finally, action steps should be pan-Swiss and potentially beyond.

**Overview of Next Steps**

During the next few months, initiatives and programs (from both Switzerland and abroad) will be benchmarked to better understand the options available for promoting greater cooperation, information exchange and strategic giving. From this research, concrete action steps, as well as recommendations on how to implement them will be developed for discussion with the Steering Group in March. In parallel, as recommendations are developed and solidified, we will continue reaching out to, and engaging, key stakeholders in Swiss philanthropy to gather their ideas and input. The plan is to develop a longer, multi-language report that features both the action steps and the contents of this document, to be made public in the spring.

## **IV. Appendix**

### **Bibliography of Studies**

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## **Stakeholders Consulted**

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Bettina Ferdman, *Philiias*  
Christelle Huwiler, *Switcher*  
Christoph Bärlocher, *VMI*  
Christoph Schmocker, *UBS Optimus Foundation*  
Dominique Dunant, *Carigest*  
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Steffen Bethmann, *CEPS*  
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Stephan Oetiker, *Pro Juventute*  
Steve Bernard, *Genève Place Financière*  
Thomas Sprecher, *ETH*  
Walter Fust, *Global Humanitarian Forum*  
Wolfgang Hafenmayer, *LGT Venture Philanthropy*  
Yann Borgstedt, *Fondation Smiling Children*

- <sup>1</sup> An upcoming study from the Centre for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) will provide more detail on these and other organizations and initiatives that are playing a role in supporting and strengthening the Swiss philanthropic sector
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