

avenir analysis

Postal Services: Relevance over Nostalgia

How to modernize public services

Postal services may no longer play the central role in daily life they once did. But they remain an important thread in Switzerland's social fabric. A new analysis by Avenir Suisse explores what a sustainable, modern public service model for postal delivery could look like in the years ahead.

In Denmark, regular letter delivery will be discontinued at the end of the year. In Norway, mail carriers may soon deliver only once a week. By contrast, daily mail service in Switzerland remains part of the national identity. Yet even here, the shift in habits is impossible to ignore: while the average person received 400 letters per year in 2000, that figure is projected to fall to just 100 by 2030.

It helps to picture typical users today: they message friends via apps or email. They mostly receive letters from advertisers or public authorities, making the daily walk to the mailbox feel pointless. They read the news online during their morning commute. On the way home, they pick up their parcels from an automated locker. They pay their bills with a QR code. In all, they no longer need to go to the post office.

Guidelines for reform

This changing behavior must be reflected in how the public service mandate is defined. In his new analysis "*Postal Services: Relevance over Nostalgia*", Christoph Eisenring outlines a forward-looking vision for postal services in 2030 and beyond. The analysis highlights where state involvement is still needed, and where the market or technologies can offer better alternatives. In concrete terms, this entails the following for each area:

- **Letters:**
With letter volumes down to just two per week per person, daily delivery is increasingly hard to justify. Starting in 2030, non-priority (B Mail) service should be sufficient to meet the public service mandate. This would still ensure delivery at least twice a week. Priority (A Mail) would become a premium, market-based product.
- **Parcel delivery:**
E-commerce has raised expectations: next-day delivery and uniform national pricing are now standard. Given that the Swiss Post faces full-fledged competition in this segment, there is no

longer a need for regulation. As of 2030, the parcel market should be fully liberalized.

- **Payment services:**

Both analog and digital payment options are widely available through banks. The key is ensuring universal access to a basic account and a digital payment method. If that cannot be guaranteed by the market, the federal government should issue a public tender ensuring cost transparency and fair competition.

- **Post office locations:**

Post offices have accumulated CHF 1.1 billion in losses over the past ten years. But that need not continue. Agencies, home delivery services, and automated parcel stations can act as access points. Outdated rules requiring staffed locations in cities or in every planning region should be dropped.

- **Newspaper delivery:**

In today's digital era, access to news no longer depends on home delivery of print newspapers. Media policy is overdue for modernization. If the daily delivery obligation is to be maintained for political reasons, it too should be subject to open competition and transparent compensation.

Focus on reforming the analog, not expanding the digital

The goal of these measures is clear: to keep postal public services both relevant and financially viable well beyond 2030. What would be a mistake, however, is to respond to declining mail volumes by simply adding digital services to the mandate. In digital services, the market leads and the national infrastructure is already ensured via telecom public service.

Rather than pivoting to digital as a reflex, policymakers should focus on thoughtfully modernizing the analog public service. Postal services continue to connect communities and regions across Switzerland. That role remains meaningful, but only if we resist both digital quick fixes and romanticized nostalgia. What is needed is the courage to modernize what is analog.

avenir analysis: "Post: Relevanz statt Nostalgie" ("Postal Services: Relevance over Nostalgia"), Christoph Eisenring, 17 pages, available online in German and French from Monday 28 July 2025, 5:00am at avenir-suisse.ch/en/

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