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## Genre et égalité dans un monde numérique

827 - MAR 2023

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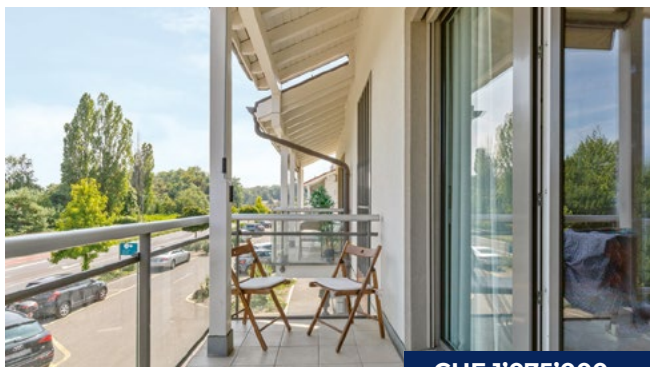
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### JOLI 3 PIÈCES VAUDOIS TRAVERSANT

IDEAL INVESTISSEUR - 3.23 % de rendement brut / Grande pièce salon-salle à manger-cuisine aménagée ouverte donnant sur un balcon / Deux chambres / Une salle de bains avec WC / Une salle de douche avec WC / Une grande cave et un parking extérieur.

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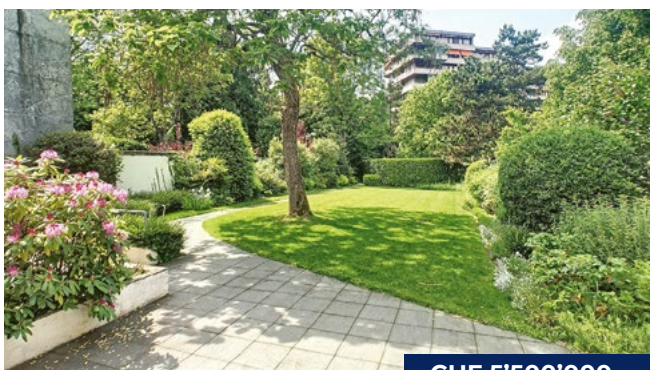
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## VESSY (GE)

### GÉNÉREUSE VILLA MITOYENNE DE 7/8 PIÈCES

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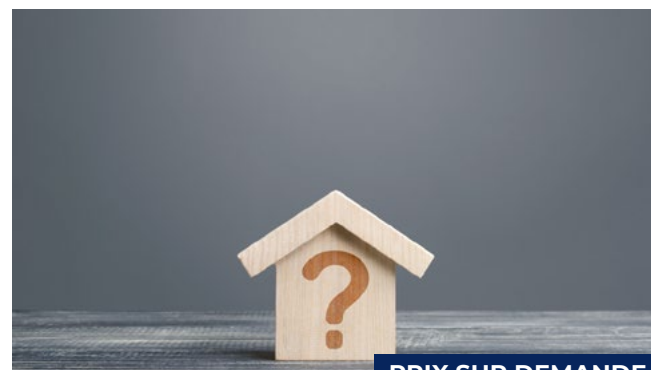
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## LE GRAND-SACONNEX (GE)

### MAGNIFIQUE TOWNHOUSE AU CALME

Au coeur du quartier des Organisations Internationales / Généreux townhouse de 11 pièces d'env. 370 m<sup>2</sup> / Parcelle arborée de 900 m<sup>2</sup> / 3 niveaux dont un sous-sol / Bel ensoleillement / 6 chambres / 4 salles d'eau / À découvrir.

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**GARRY ASLANYAN**  
Editor-in-chief /  
Rédacteur en chef

In northern Senegal as part of the training of women farmers provided by BNP Paribas in the frame of the Agrifed project aiming at empowering 16 000 women farmers to climate-smart agriculture.

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## Gender and equality in a digital world

Efforts to promote gender equality have come a long way in gaining attention and catalysing change, but there is still a long way to go. Similarly, gender identity and how we define feminism, and its role, are evolving. The increased diversity of gender, increased role for women as part of the workforce globally are all positive gains, but the workplace can be a breeding ground of inequality and violence against women and that diversity. All of this is happening in the changing digital world. But as you will learn from the article from UN Women, data show that women across the globe are less likely than men to be meaningfully connected. I hope that reading the articles of this issue will allow you to gain additional insight into these developments and inspire you in your daily life.

The International Women's Day in March is always a chance to celebrate. In the article from the United Nations Society of Writers, there is a special focus on women writers that are part of the International Geneva's literary scene. The conversation with the President of the Union for the International Francophone Press (UPF) will give you a closer look at the work done by the organization.

And as always, we have much more for you to explore. Enjoy this issue! ■

## Genre et égalité dans un monde numérique

Les efforts visant à promouvoir l'égalité des sexes ont parcouru une longue route pour attirer l'attention et catalyser le changement, mais il reste encore beaucoup de chemin à parcourir. De même, l'identité de genre et la manière dont nous définissons le féminisme, ainsi que son rôle, évoluent. L'augmentation de la diversité des genres, l'augmentation de l'implication des femmes dans le domaine professionnel au niveau mondial représentent des avancées. Cependant, un risque perdure sur le lieu de travail, qui encore constituer un terrain fertile pour l'inégalité et la violence envers les femmes et aller à l'encontre de cette diversité. Cet état de fait se déroule dans un monde numérique en pleine évolution. Mais comme vous l'apprendrez dans l'article d'ONU Femmes, les femmes sont moins connectées au domaine numérique que les hommes. J'espère que la lecture des articles de ce numéro vous permettra de mieux comprendre ces développements et vous inspirera dans votre vie quotidienne.

Tous les ans, la Journée Internationale de la Femme en mars donne une opportunité pour cette célébration. Dans l'article de la Société des écrivains des Nations Unies, un accent particulier est mis sur les femmes écrivains qui font partie de la scène littéraire de la Genève internationale. L'entretien avec la Présidente de l'Union Internationale de la presse francophone (UPF) vous permettra de mieux comprendre le travail accompli par l'organisation.


Et comme toujours, nous vous proposons beaucoup de lecture et de thématiques à découvrir. Profitez de ce numéro! ■

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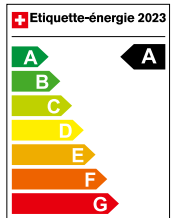
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# From CSW67 to the summit of the future: Calling for gender-equal digitalization

Data show that women across the globe are less likely than men to be meaningfully connected. At present, 76 per cent of the population living in least developed countries are covered by a mobile broadband signal; however, only 25 per cent are online, with men 52 per cent more likely to be online than women.



HELENE MOLINIER, UN WOMEN

Improvement in infrastructure alone is not sufficient to reach “meaningful access” for all women. Other factors, such as affordability, digital literacy and skills, privacy and safety, content, relevance, ownership, awareness, agency and access to electricity are equally critical. Women and girls are 25 percent less likely than men to have sufficient knowledge and digital skills to leverage digital technologies for basic purposes<sup>1</sup>. There is no singular, universal type of gender digital divide, but a confluence of factors which are context dependent limiting equal access to digital tools and services. The gender digital divide impacts groups of women

differently, especially those with low literacy or low incomes, women living in rural or remote areas, migrants, women with disabilities, and older women.

This year, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the main global intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, will examine as its priority theme: “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. This will provide an opportunity to shape a future where women and girls have equal benefits from the digitalization of our societies and economies, and equal opportunities to play a more direct and active role in shaping and leading the development of technologies that respond to their needs.

Digitalization is one of the seismic shifts shaping the 21st century. In a world that is rapidly evolving, innovation and technology play a key role in transforming societies and driving unprecedented advances towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The

ongoing digital transformation can help reduce poverty, improve healthcare, education and financial services, as well as mitigate the impact of climate change and humanitarian crises, improve energy efficiency and build smarter and more sustainable cities that contribute to a healthier environment. Digital technologies have brought unprecedented advances to improve social, economic and political outcomes for women and girls. However, they are also giving rise to profound new challenges that may perpetuate and deepen existing patterns of gender inequalities.

Digitalization was key to minimizing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic as the provision of goods and services, as well as professional and personal interactions, all shifted to the online world. However, in this process, women and girls were disproportionately affected. The pandemic magnified the existing gender digital divide and exacerbated the unequal pace of digital transformation within and across countries, amplifying structural and systemic barriers for women’s and girls’ access to technology and innovation. At the 77th session of the General Assembly

in 2022, Ms. Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, the United Nations' leading entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, stressed that the digital divide had become the new face of gender inequality.

While technology seems to be a gender-neutral issue, gender gaps are rooted in long-standing and persistent stereotypes, which also fuel the underrepresentation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and careers. Women hold only two in every 10 science, engineering and information and communication technology jobs globally, and they comprise only 16.5 percent of inventors associated with a patent<sup>2</sup>. In the technology sector, globally, women face a gender pay gap of 21 percent,<sup>3</sup> and 48 percent have experienced workplace harassment.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in 2020, only two percent of global venture capital funding was invested in start-ups solely founded by women.<sup>5</sup>

Women are rarely viewed as technology creators, promoters and decision-makers, which limits their ability to build tools that respond to the priorities of women and girls, or indeed, that anticipate their potential gendered impacts. Women are often the most impacted by biases embedded in technology. A global analysis of 133 Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems across different industries found that 44.2 percent demonstrate gender bias, resulting in lower quality of service, unfair allocation of resources and reinforcement of existing, harmful stereotypes. Digitalization cannot be an equalizer of opportunities without a clear and deliberate intention to develop gender transformative innovation.

One of the most alarming trends is the rise in technology-facilitated gender-based violence. There is a continuum between

offline and online gender-based violence, with technology often aggravating the level of violence perpetrated by individuals, organized groups or institutions, with the objective of controlling, harming, silencing or discrediting a woman or a group of women. Digital activism and movements like to demonstrate the power of collective digital action, to raise awareness, advocate and mass mobilize. However, social media has also given rise to gendered disinformation, misinformation and sexist hate speech. Women and LGBTQ+ persons who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are at a greater risk of being harassed, while in many countries, women in the public eye are targeted to a much greater extent than men, especially politicians, journalists and women human rights defenders. This impacts women's lives, limits their participation in public life and undermines democracy.

Fresh thinking is needed to reassert human agency over technology and explore new avenues to adopt a human-centric approach to digitalization, with the feminist principles of inclusion, intersectionality and systemic change at its core. The 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women presents a remarkable opportunity to drive this shift. In his report on the priority theme, the Secretary General urges governments and all relevant stakeholders are to take the following actions:

- **Prioritize digital equity and inclusion in all national digital policies**, to remove the many barriers currently faced by women and girls.
- **Be more strategic in on how we leverage public and private investments** in the technology sector, so that the digital programmes, research, grants but also, procurement, expand gender analysis and interventions.
- **Focus on education**, to create the conditions for gender-responsive digital learning

environments, remove stereotypes, transform STEM education and include digital citizenship teaching in schools' curricula.

- **Promote the participation, employment and leadership of women in tech and innovation**, which requires to anticipating future job and skills needs, but also establishing labour regulations and protections.
- **Adopt gender-responsive technology design, development and deployment**, centered around human rights approaches that are informed by socio-economic, political and environmental perspectives.
- **Strengthen fairness, transparency and accountability**, by adopting mandatory measures to better identify, prevent and mitigate societal risks and the negative impacts of digital technology on women.
- **Enhance data science** to address the current gaps that are preventing us from capturing the gendered dimensions of technological change but also making sure the privacy of women's sensitive personal data is protected.
- Finally, **we need the collective action of public and private sector entities to prevent and eliminate technology-facilitated gender-based violence** and protect the rights of women and girls online, through better legislation, increased capacities and new safeguards.

The planned adoption of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) at the Summit of the Future in 2024, also provides unique opportunity for all actors to commit to ensuring that safe and relevant digital services can be accessed and used by women and girls in all their diversity, and in this respect, the discussions and the outcome of CSW67 will be instrumental in informing the development of the Compact and in ensuring the integration of a gender perspective in all areas.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives and partnerships are key to driving forward the implementation of the outcomes of these important fora and to support actors at all levels in their actions to drive gender-responsive innovation and technological change. In this respect, the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality<sup>6</sup>, to be housed at the UN Women Geneva Office includes a large number of partners from civil society, the private sector, academia, governments and a range of United Nations entities at the [Generation Equality Forum](https://forum.generationequality.org/)<sup>7</sup> in 2021, which will be a key ally to embrace, advocate and support Member States in implementing CSW recommendations. In this regard, Geneva can become a hub for technology and innovation on gender equality, where partnerships, collaboration and a multi-stakeholder approach across countries and sectors to combine knowledge, skills and resources are essential to leave no one behind and ensure that the benefits of digitalization are equally distributed in the new digital economy and society. ■

1 UNESCO, *I'd Blush if I Could* (2022).

2 UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot* (2022).

3 ILO, *Tech's persistent gender gap* (2019). <https://ilostat.ilo.org/techs-persistent-gender-gap/>.

4 *Women who Tech*, "The state of women in tech and startups" (2020).

5 *Global VC Funding To Female Founders Dropped Dramatically This Year* (2020): <https://news.crunchbase.com/venture/global-vc-funding-to-female-founders/>

6 The Generation Equality Coalition on Technology and Innovation encompasses the following countries and partners: Finland, Tunisia, Armenia, Chile, Rwanda, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Microsoft, Salesforce and Koç Holding, the Rockefeller Foundation, the <A+> Alliance network, and the organizations Global Fund for Women, Social Builder and Digital Grassroots.

7 <https://forum.generationequality.org/home>



**LOYER: CHF 1'700.-**

## CHAMPEL (GE)

### STUDIO MEUBLÉ

Proche de toutes commodités, au centre du quartier de Champel / Studio / 32 m<sup>2</sup> / Entièrement équipé / salle de bain et cuisine séparées / Cave / Place de parking en supplément / 3 mois minimum de location / Charges: CHF 140.-



**LOYER: CHF 3'200.-**

## CHAMPEL (GE)

### 3 PIÈCES MEUBLÉS

Proche de toutes commodités, au centre du quartier de Champel / 68 m<sup>2</sup> / Entièrement équipé / 1 chambre / 1 salon avec coin repas / 1 salle de bain et WC / 2 balcons / Cave / Place de parking en supplément / 3 mois minimum de location / Charges: CHF 180.-

Réf. 36934



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Dans quartier résidentiel et prisé de Florissant / 117 m<sup>2</sup> / Entièrement équipé / 2 chambres / 1 salon avec coin repas / 1 salle de bain / WC visiteurs / 1 balcon / Cave / Place de parking en supplément / 3 mois minimum de location / Charges: CHF 190.-

Réf. 40608



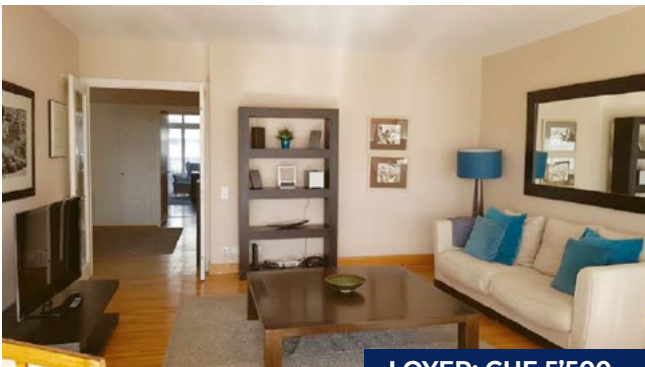
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## CHAMPEL (GE)

### 5 PIÈCES MEUBLÉS

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**LOYER: CHF 5'500.-**

## QUARTIER INTERNATIONAL (GE)

### 5 PIÈCES MEUBLÉS

En plein cœur du quartier international / 151 m<sup>2</sup> / Entièrement équipé / 3 chambres / 1 salon avec coin repas / 3 salles d'eau / WC visiteurs / 2 balcons / Toit terrasse et piscine extérieur / Grande cave / Box en sous-sol / 3 mois minimum de location / Charges: CHF 210.-

Réf. 355539



**LOYER: CHF 6'300.-**

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# A conversation with ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Doreen Bogdan-Martin took office as ITU Secretary-General on 1 January 2023. Her historic election by ITU Member States made her the first woman to head the 157-year-old organization.



Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin,  
ITU Secretary-General

**GARRY ASLANYAN, WHO**

With over three decades of experience leading global telecommunications policy, Ms. Bogdan-Martin explains how ITU is working to achieve gender equality, meaningful connectivity, and sustainable digital transformation for the benefit of all.

## **What have been your priorities on entering into office?**

My top priority is to deliver on the strong mandate ITU Member States gave us at last year's Plenipotentiary Conference. To drive universal connectivity and enabling sustainable digital transformation.

To do that is to build a *fit-for-future* ITU.

That means strengthening the organization to make sure our members can meet connectivity needs and expand digital opportunities for *everyone* – especially the 2.7 billion people who've never used the Internet.

To get there, we will focus on three pillars: thought leadership, strategic partnerships, and organizational excellence.

Implementing this vision across all three of ITU's complementary sectors – radiocommunication, standardization, and development – is my top priority.

Within the first 100 days of ITU's new leadership team taking office, we've already kickstarted some of the main reform initiatives, such as our new Young Professionals Programme, and regular briefings with our staff,

our governing body, ambassadors in Geneva and New York.

On a recent trip there, I met with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who called on ITU to help shape the digital agenda within the UN system, together with our Member States.

I aim to rise to that challenge as Secretary-General by pushing this institution to be even more agile, innovative and relevant – to ultimately help everyone, everywhere, embrace the huge opportunities connectivity and digital transformation bring.

## **You recently became an International Gender Champion – how will that inform your work as head of the UN's tech agency?**

I am fully committed to gender equality – and have been for a long time.

In fact, when the Geneva Gender Champions initiative (as it was initially called) was launched back in 2015, I was part of the initial discussions.

I also helped organize the Chief Executives Board session that ITU co-hosted with WMO in 2012, when we adopted the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) gender equality scorecard. Let's just say that ITU's score wasn't so good.

Six years later, I became the first woman to lead an ITU bureau

– we have five elected officials. When I was elected as Secretary-General of ITU last year, I broke a 157-year-old glass ceiling.

So yes, I'm proud to be an International Gender Champion.

But there's still so much to do. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres pointed out in Davos this year, we heard how deepening inequalities “are affecting women and girls the most.”<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted women and girls<sup>2</sup>, and too many countries are backsliding on gender equality.<sup>3</sup> At this rate, it will take another 286 years to close the global gender gap!<sup>4</sup>

Not to mention the staggering digital gender divide: close to 260 million more women are offline than men.<sup>5</sup> In the developing world, just 1 in 4 women are online, LDCs 1 in 5<sup>6</sup> – these are the stark realities that inform our work at ITU.

## **Are you seeing progress in terms of women's representation, both in leadership and other roles?**

Put simply, progress towards gender equality is not being made fast enough.

Don't get me wrong – there have been promising starts. International Geneva has made excellent progress, with women now

leading WTO, UNCTAD, UNAIDS, ITC and ITU.

But stronger action is urgently needed – particularly in the tech sector, where the representation of women is far too low – especially in leadership roles in emerging fields such as AI, quantum computing, cybersecurity, the metaverse, just to name a few.

The lack of women in these fields can have major socio-economic consequences. This can also lead to the widespread gender bias we're seeing in machine learning and AI applications, from medical imaging to algorithmic decision-making. The examples are many.

**Faced with such challenges, what concrete steps is ITU taking to promote gender equality in the digital sphere?** Closing the gender digital divide is at the heart of ITU's work to achieve digital inclusion.

ITU is working on several initiatives. Let me share just three examples:

– ITU co-founded **EQUALS**, a global, multi-stakeholder initiative of over 100 partners focused on closing the gender digital divide. We highlight women-led initiatives doing this on the ground through the EQUALS in Tech Awards, which recognize women's leadership in tech SMEs, digital skills, access to technology and research.

– We're also behind **Girls in ICT Day** – an annual global celebration encouraging more young women and girls to study STEM – this year, it is coming up on April 27th.

This year's theme – “digital skills for life” – is all about equipping young women and girls with the competencies they need to excel in STEM and STEAM, whether by pursuing education in those fields or embarking on a tech career.

– We also need more women at

the digital policy table – not just sitting there to make some kind of quota or to get the photo op right – but to actually *lead* those key conversations and decisions.

That's why ITU has launched Networks to support women in our radiocommunication, standardization and development sectors. These communities aim to train, support and mentor women delegates to take on leadership roles in ITU's major conferences – including the treaty-making ones, such as the World Radiocommunication Conference coming up at the end of this year.

Finally, when it comes to bridging the digital gender gap – and achieving our strategic objectives more generally – we must move from words to action.

This is the idea behind our Partner2Connect Digital Coalition, which has already mobilized

over 17 billion USD<sup>7</sup> worth of gender-focused initiatives to close the digital divide.


That level of investment, backed by gender-disaggregated data and multilateral cooperation, can and does create tangible impact on the ground.

I'm convinced this is the way forward to ensure that everyone – women *and* men, girls and boys – has an equal chance at benefiting from and building our shared digital future. ■

- <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-01-18/secretary-generals-remarks-the-world-economic-forum>
- <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/women-and-girls-left-behind-glaring-gaps-pandemic-responses>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2022/08/in-focus-sustainable-development-goal-5>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/announcement/2023/01/un-women-at-davos-2023>
- <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2022/11/24/ff22-the-gender-digital-divide/>
- Id.
- <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/partner2connect/pledges/explore-pledges/>

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# The gold ring

“Why do you support gender identity rights for trans persons?”



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## ERIC STENER CARLSON, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

A friend of mine asked me that question recently. I’ve been thinking about it a lot, and I decided to write this article in response.

I think it’s a good question for all of us to ask ourselves, particularly now when trans rights seem to be under fire all over the world.

But let’s be clear, the question isn’t why do *the organizations* for which we work support these rights. This isn’t about mandates or policies or constitutions. It’s about us, as private persons, as individuals. And, actually, I think that’s the best way to approach the topic, because gender identity is something felt, and lived, at a very personal level.

Maybe we’re not all familiar with these terms, so I’ll explain a bit. Basically, “gender identity” is our own personal sense of gender (defined by us, not society). And “trans” is an umbrella term for persons whose gender doesn’t fit (or, as some say, doesn’t fit comfortably) with the sex they got assigned at birth.

So, a trans person’s right to gender identity is the right to live their gender as they perceive it – as a man, as a woman, as both, neither, or perhaps in ways altogether different.

Now, to understand my answer to the question, I have to explain a bit about myself. I’m a man. I’m heterosexual (what we used to call “straight”). I’m cisgender (meaning, my gender aligns with my sex). And I’m comfortable with that whole package.

So, at first glance, perhaps I’m not the most obvious person to write an article about trans rights. But just stay with me a bit longer, because I’m getting to the most important part: I’m married.

I love being married. Maybe that sounds old-fashioned, some sort of 1950s throwback. I know it’s much more acceptable these days to be non-committal and “free”. But being married means freedom for me, the freedom to love one person *forever*, and it’s fundamental to my identity. The almost three decades I’ve shared with my wife, raising our children together, travelling the world, have been the joy of my life.

I’m not a fashionable person. I don’t know anything about clothing or perfumes. I only own one piece of jewellery – the gold ring my wife gave me on our wedding day. I wear the ring all the time. In fact, sometimes bits of soap get caked in it, because I keep it on even when I wash my hands. Just looking at the ring makes me happy, because it reminds me of when we were young and fell in love, and it’s a symbol of everything we’ve gone through together since.

So, now you know how much the ring means to me, let me take you back about twenty-five years ago. My wife and I are in California, where I’m studying for my Ph.D. in Political Science. We share a cheap apartment in student housing. We’re poor, we’re happy. And then something strange happens.

For some reason, my throat starts swelling up. It’s painful, I can hardly swallow. I go to the doctor; he thinks it’s some sort of food allergy. As the days go by, it gets worse and worse. My tongue swells so much, I lose the power of speech. I go to the university clinic for pain relief, but no one can tell me what’s happening.

One night, my wife comes home from work, my tongue’s swollen to the roof of my mouth. I can only breathe through my nose, and I’m afraid I’m going to swallow my tongue. We get in the car and speed to the emergency room. Everything is rushed, everything is horrible. I can’t speak, and my hand’s trembling so much I can’t respond to the doctor’s questions when he hands me a pen and paper.

It’s so bad, they start prepping me for an emergency tracheotomy – they’re going to puncture my throat and put a tube in, so I can breathe. I’m so cold, shaking all over. I’m afraid I’m going to die before surgery, I’m afraid *of* surgery. While all of this is going on, the nurse is methodically, professionally taking all my possessions – my wallet, my keys – and describing them out loud as she writes them down.

The nurse removes my wedding ring, and I suddenly feel naked. She says, “One gold-coloured ring.” I look at her from where I’m shivering on the gurney, and she knows what I’m thinking. She says something like, “Look, I can’t say ‘gold ring’, because I don’t know if it’s really gold or not. And if it’s not gold, and I write it down, then I can be accused of stealing it afterwards.”

Maybe this sounds stupid, but amidst all the pain and cold and fear, the thing that’s upsetting me most is the fact that she says, “gold-coloured”. I know the nurse means well, but I feel she’s doubting a fundamental part of me, cheapening it, saying that what I always believed about myself and my marriage isn’t really true. I want to scream, “It’s a gold ring!



It's pure gold." But I can't, and now they're going to cut open my throat.

...

It turns out, I was still getting enough air through my nose, so they stop the operation at the last moment. The large abscess in my salivary gland bursts (that was what was causing the problem). I spend the next week in intensive care under an oxygen mask, the swelling slowly subsiding, and I begin to recover my voice. It's a long recovery, and I'm constantly pumped through with bags of saline and antibiotics.

A high point of my week is when my Political Philosophy professor comes to visit. (Besides my wife, he's the only person who comes to see me.) I'm a Teaching Assistant in his philosophy class; he's a fantastic professor and a great person to work for. He has such an exceptionally-fine intellect, and everything I know about Plato, Socrates and Aristotle, I owe to him. But the important thing is that he came to visit me. I've always found in life that kindness in moments when you need it most stays with you forever.

In the fog of that week, thoughts of losing my wedding ring, and him sitting on the chair next to my bed swirl together in my mind.

...

Fast-forward a few years. I've long since graduated, and I'm working for the UN system in Asia now. I'm pleased to get an e-mail from my old philosophy professor, the one who visited me in hospital, only this time it's she, not he.

It's her coming-out e-mail, where she tells her fellow professors, students and friends that she's transitioned to being a woman. It's such a powerful, beautiful (and actually very funny) e-mail, in which she says her students shouldn't expect her to be any less tough on grading, and that nothing has changed in the quality of who she is.

What strikes me most is the way she describes the necessity of the transition, that it's

something she's struggled with for decades, that it's difficult, but that she has to do it, to be true to herself.

I think back to when she comforted me at my hospital bedside. I think back to that moment when I felt I was going to die, when my gold ring was being taken from me, when it was being called cheap and meaningless, and I didn't have the voice to defend myself. It was the moment when everything about who I was and what mattered most became perfectly clear.

And then something just clicks. In my mind, her letter and my ring mirror each other. Both are a reflection of who we are - the expression of our true selves.

...

A few years ago, I had the good fortune to work with a coalition of trans rights organizations in Latin America; we were working together on gender identity legislation. Because of discrimination for the ways they expressed their gender identity, many of the members had been kicked out of their homes, their schools, their jobs, their houses of worship. They were ridiculed, denied access to healthcare, and, for many of them, the only way to survive was to sell sex, often in the most unsafe conditions.

[In fact, only a few weeks before I began writing this article, I read that one of the colleagues I'd worked with most closely in that coalition (an activist and a trans leader I admire) was set on fire in the street.]

Within this context of violence, I remember one of my trans colleagues saying something like, "Eric, it's not like you wake one day on a whim and say, 'I want to transition.'" They said, because of the abuse you're going to receive at the hands of society, you've got to feel it. You've got to need it.

...

Before I sent this article to press, I contacted my former philosophy professor (her name is Paige, by the way), and I asked permission to mention her part in this story. She kindly

agreed, but she also set me a challenge, as good professors do. Paige asked me to consider whether it made any difference to my support of trans persons' rights that she had been kind to me. That is, what if she had never visited me in hospital? Moreover, what if she'd been *unkind*? Would I not have supported the right to gender identity?

That's a good point. It's always easier to respect people who respect you, to be kind to people who are kind to you. And, indeed, her kindness, and her mentorship have meant the world to me. But it's much more than that. It's about who I am.

I'm not going to pretend I know anything about the trans experience. Trans persons themselves are the ones - the only ones - who can speak about that with authority. After all, I'm a man, I'm hetero, I'm cis, and no society I've ever lived or worked in has ever criticized or judged me because of that. In fact, I've probably received a number of benefits.

But I do know that if being able to freely choose, and freely express, one's own gender identity is anything as essential, as powerful and as meaningful as my right to be married to the woman I love, and to openly wear a symbol of that love, and to be able to shout from the rafters that it is pure, unquestionably pure and good, and that no one else but me can make a judgment call about its worth, then that is why I support gender identity rights for trans persons, that is why I will always support their rights.

So, in response to my friend's question, I have only to show my wedding ring - *which is pure gold*. This is the only answer that makes sense to me. ■



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People of all genders matter

# Breaking down gender

As we learn more as a society, we find that not everyone fits in the same categories of 'gender' as we do. It's important to understand the different terms for gender identification.

## LISANNE HOPKIN, NEWSPECIAL EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

The World Health Organization refers to gender as 'the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed'.<sup>1</sup> WHO then goes on to state that gender 'varies from society to society and changes over time'.<sup>2</sup> It's important to acknowledge and clarify that gender does not equal sex. Sex is defined as 'biological attributes [...] and how those attributes are expressed'.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Institutes of Health Research state that sex is 'primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy'.<sup>4</sup>

Still with me? Good. I get that understanding gender nowadays can be a bit complicated. There always seems to be a lot to learn.

So, I'm going to try and break it down a bit more. I don't personally have a lot of experience in this field, but I would like to share and help understand what I do know.

We know that gender is something that is socially constructed, so it's an idea that changes based on people, surroundings and upbringing. Gender is not something that you are born with or something that is physically a part of who you are. I think that is the biggest difference between sex and gender. Sex is all about biology. It's how your body is made up. It's physical traits. Whereas, gender is more of a concept.

Now, we know the genders male and female. However, as our society is becoming more educated, and possibly slightly more considerate too, more genders and terms are being introduced.

Planned Parenthood state that 'transgender means your gender identity is different from the gender that the doctor gave you when you were born, based on the way your body looked'.<sup>5</sup> For instance, if you were born with male genitalia and assigned the gender 'male' at birth, but felt like you were a woman and wanted to identify as one, then you would be a transgender woman. If you were born with female genitalia and assigned the gender 'female' at birth, but felt like you were a man and wanted to identify as one, then you would be a transgender man. However, it's important to note that you must refer to people however they identify. Respect people's wishes and treat them like the human beings that they are.

A little side note: if you're 'cis-gender' that means you identify as the gender you were assigned at birth.





© Brian Cvetanovic

**Be vocal about the importance of all genders**

A slightly newer term than transgender is 'nonbinary'. Nonbinary people are people whose gender 'doesn't fit under the label of either "male" or "female" [...] your gender identity may be nonbinary if you're: both a man and a woman, in between, or totally outside of those categories'.<sup>6</sup> I think for people who identify as nonbinary, their gender can often be on a spectrum and can often change. Some days they may feel more masculine, other days they feel more feminine. The great thing about being nonbinary is that there is no one way to 'identify'. I think it's beautiful that we are allowing people to explore and define their gender in the ways that they wish.

Unfortunately, not everyone is on the same page. Donald

Trump has decided to go back on transgender rights in the United States. If elected, 'he will push Congress to pass a law to ban gender-affirming care for minors nationwide'.<sup>7</sup> This could lead to serious depression and suicide rates in transgender teens. And it's not just Trump who is banning transgender youth health care. In Tennessee, 'lawmakers advanced the bill to ban transgender youth health care through the Senate Health and Welfare Committee'.<sup>8</sup> And recently, the UK government vetoed Scotland's Gender Recognition Reform bill. This bill would have 'made it easier for trans people in Scotland to get a certificate legally recognising that their gender is different from the one they were assigned at birth, without having a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria'.<sup>9</sup>

Children and teenagers shouldn't be scared for their lives. They shouldn't be afraid of being who they are. They shouldn't have to suffer the decisions that adults are making for them. Why would you willingly put someone's life at risk by forcing them to be someone they are not?

In some ways, we have advanced so much as human beings. We are growing to be more compassionate and understanding. But why is it that some people in charge seem to be evolving backwards? Why should they be making decisions for someone else? It doesn't make sense. Please be better and do better for the future generations. For your kids. Do your research and support others. There is so much more information that I haven't covered, these

are just the basics. You can educate yourself and become a more supportive person. ■

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# Is feminism getting anywhere?



Mrs. H. Riordan, suffragette, New York.

## PHILLIPPA BIGGS, ITU

Feminism means many different things to different people, depending in large part on their upbringing, background and cultural context. According to Rebecca West in 1913, “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is... I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or prostitute”. Notions of feminism and ‘feminist ideas’ or language are changing all the time, but often share concepts of standing up for gender equality and standing against prevailing patriarchal systems, beliefs or values.

Feminism in some of its early forms originally meant asserting women’s rights morally and legally in a range of spheres – rights to divorce, education, suffragism in voting by women, the right to work, rights to sexual emancipation, equal healthcare or reproductive choice (although interestingly enough, the word ‘feminism’ was not widely used or applied to these movements). Gender equality is a big concept, manifest in millions of different

ways... It may include, for example, equal opportunities and equal pay between sexes, seeking control and decision-making powers over life choices or jobs historically given to men, standing up against common stereotypes and judgments, offensive opinions or even jokes condoning discrimination or Violence Against Women and Girls.

Historically, nearly every culture has had strong stereotypes and gender-defined behaviours ingrained into our thinking, attitudes and behaviour from a very early age. Although many studies debate whether this is due to biological ‘nature’ versus cognitive differences or socialization and the ‘nurture’ of upbringing, various studies have consistently found significant statistical differences in behaviour, determined by sex.

Concepts of feminism gathered pace philosophically, politically and in literature throughout the end of the nineteenth century and start of the twentieth century, with the development of ideals of female equality, rejecting conformity with traditional values

and expectations and promoting women’s right to choose their lives and futures. (Interestingly enough, communist philosophy and political movements accepted female equality as a key tenet from the start).

Feminist movements promote the celebration of the strong positive ‘feminine’ values of nurturing, caring, support, love and guardianship (for families and nature). More recently, feminism has evolved to embrace an array of additional rights – women’s rights over their bodies, sexuality and far more complicated life choices, including the right to reproduce as and when they wish to. ‘Militant’ feminism has included perceived reactionary values of rebellion, rejection and overthrow of the patriarchy.

My mother, grandmother and great-grandmother all worked, and I am happy and proud of what they achieved and contributed to their societies. I am the fourth generation of women in formal employment (obviously, women have worked and raised children throughout history, it was just not formally recognized). As the mother of two young daughters, I still worry about whether my daughters can walk the street safely and how their partners will treat them. I know that when they enter the job market, my daughters will still have to work harder, for less pay, to prove themselves at work, relative to male colleagues. Whilst some women reveal their pregnancies to employers for protection from redundancy, other women are still unable to reveal their pregnancy for contractual reasons.

The Internet is changing perceptions of feminism. The Internet

has enabled feminist organizations to develop an online presence, enhance their messaging and reach new audiences. Movements such as the Body Positive movement (promoting acceptance of all body shapes) or gay, lesbian and rights, have gained momentum, recognizing the expansion of gender identity to include non-binary gender identities. Our thinking about gender has become more nuanced and more diverse.

Social media enables the development of grassroots movements, such as the #MeToo movement and #Thisisnotconsent movement which went viral online, when a teenager’s underwear was included as evidence in an Irish rape trial. Choice of underwear can never imply or indicate consent to a subsequent situation. Entrenched opinions, stereotypes and prejudices are all old; what is new is the size and scale of communications reach using social media and the Internet.

Although social media includes many more voices, it has also fractured feminism and dissipated its focus, making it harder to make progress on any single issue. Social media has also given rise to influencer culture with examples of toxic masculinity and extreme misogynists making the headlines. Young boys may admire Andrew Tate and wish to emulate his lifestyle and values, without being fully aware of all his alleged activities.

Feminism continues to evolve, but the fight for equal rights, in actions, attitudes and thinking, is far from over, and we cannot become complacent. ■

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# International Women's Day and UN writers

After a two-year cautionary Covid-19 pause, the United Nations Society of Writers, Société des Écrivains des Nations Unies (UNSW/SENU) again held its traditional January literary salon, on 27 January 2023, with 25 persons reading and listening to poetry, essays and short stories.

## MARKO STANOVIC AND ALFRED DE ZAYAS, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

We were honoured by the presence of the President of P.E.N. International Centre Suisse Romand, Alix Parodi, formerly with the ILO, and by PEN's Secretary-General, Martine Thevenot, formerly with WIPO, who both proactively contributed their own literary productions to the delight of the audience.

Of course, UN writers did not entirely rest in the years 2020-22. The literary journal *Ex Tempore* was published on schedule in 2020, 2021 and 2022. Besides, in lieu of the in-door salon, UNSW/SENU organized literary tea reunions under the lime trees in the garden of *Ex Tempore's* editor-in-chief and his spouse Carla Edelenbos, known to *newSpecial* readers through her series of 26 essays on "La Suisse inconnue". Literary reunions were safely held in summer and early autumn in the fresh air without having to wear masks. Throughout this period UNSW also entertained fruitful synergies with the Société Genevoise des Écrivains, as well as its counterparts from Vaud and the Valais.

With a view to International Women's Day 2023, let us commemorate the huge contribution that UN women writers have made to 33 issues of *Ex Tempore*. The UN library, the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque nationale Suisse and many other libraries have the entire collection, in which we can rediscover the original writings of Marie José Astre-Démoulin, Jo-Christiane Ledakis, Karin Kaminker, Natalia Beglova, Aline Dedeyan, Rosita de Cabrera, Mirtha Teitelbaum, Sarah Jordan-Nikitin, Françoise Mianda, Ngozi Ibekwe, Isabelle Roubaux, Livia Varju, Noemy Barrita-Chagoya, Beth Peoch, Cecile Barayre, Ingrid Mondet, Colette Somaya, Joanne Hansen, Ita Marguet, Raymonde Morizot, Solonange Behoteguy, Stefanie Appenzeller, Mae Cayir, Petia Vangelova, Beatrice Ory, Maria Manuela Bailao, Maria Elena Blanco, Marlyn Czajkowski-Zaiden, Elisabeth Lara, Liana Archaia-Atanasova, Paule Rey, Yasmine Sherif... and so many others. Our authors come not only from UNOG, but also from UN New York, Vienna, Nairobi, UNMIK, UNODC, UNHCR field offices, etc.

Their contributions  
are in all UN  
languages.

For those who do not know about UNSW and *Ex Tempore*, we recall that nearly 34 years ago, on 14 August 1989, a young and energetic Leonor Sampaio from Brazil, a professional at the UN Centre for Human Rights (now office of the High Commissioner), sat with the loquacious Argentinian interpreter Sergio Chavez and the American lawyer Alfred de Zayas in the Press Bar at door 6 of the C Building of the Palais des Nations. Out of a spontaneous discussion on Latin American literature, focusing on Gabriel García Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda, emerged the idea of founding a UN literary circle and to publish a yearly journal. The founders started organizing events at the Palais des Nations, invited colleagues from New York and Vienna to poetry readings, and on two occasions, enjoyed the acting and music playing by Antony Hequet, a frequent contributor to *Ex Tempore*.

In March 2023, we intend to celebrate "International Day of Happiness" (an initiative of Bhutan) with a poetry event at the UN library, a tradition we started thanks to the contribution of the late Irina Gerasimova. In these days of international turmoil, it is good to turn to literature and to draw strength from the beautiful things that still surround us. ■

Those of you who would like to join UNSW, please write to the President of the Society, Marko Stanovic ([marko.stanovic@un.org](mailto:marko.stanovic@un.org)) or to the Vice-President, Carla Edelenbos ([edelenbos@bluewin.ch](mailto:edelenbos@bluewin.ch)).

Number 34 of *Ex Tempore* awaits your crisp, original literary contributions in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish and Russian. Deadline for submissions is 30 September.

Please consult our website [www.extempore.ch](http://www.extempore.ch) and feel free to edit and add text and photos to our Wikipedia entries for UN Society of Writers and *ExTempore*.



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# Talent assessment as an agent for gender equity

Without ever having met you, I can tell you something you have in common with your great-great-grandfather.

**JAPMAN BAJAJ, EXECUTIVE VICE  
PRESIDENT, VAMETRIC**

You have both taken the same kinds of tests. While we have repeatedly innovated content delivery mechanisms, introduced presentation software, learning management systems, and any number of other technological and procedural innovations to disseminate learning content, society has failed to put forward the same intention on assessment innovation. The collateral damage of traditional assessments are well-studied; they overwhelmingly discriminate against newcomers, women, disabled people, Indigenous People, and other equity-deserving groups.

“Each new craze proclaims that the house is falling, even as it does nothing to repair the real foundational problems. Digital white boards that promised to usher in Twenty-First-Century Learning™ now bear ghost-town witness in ten thousand classrooms to the foibles of wasting budgets on flashy, non-transformative technology, rather than investing in people and training. MOOCs have proven so hollow that even Udacity has sworn off. Like the flat-earth myth of ‘learning styles,’ Dr John Hattie’s “visible learning” is as academically rigorous as Dr Pepper and as credible as Dr Oz. Even most STEM programs — promising to give learners The Modern Skills They Need® — are as intellectually nutritious as Styrofoam, more focused on improving a school’s testing rank than giving learners meaningful experiences and skills. The common feature all these failed educational panaceas share is a focus on facilitating and verifying the transfer of information. In other words, they’re all built on the same lie.”

Rankin (2020)



For over 300 years, we have pursued and implemented the same assessment modicums with limited improvement in outcomes for under-represented groups. Unsurprisingly, in nearly every case, women of all population segments have faced the greatest harm, discrimination, and barriers to success.

### Setting the context

Let's step back. To appreciate the gravity of the challenge, we must first recognize that assessment is the greatest gatekeeper to achieving career success. Put plainly, if a learner does not pass enough tests, they will not pass a course, earn a degree, nor qualify for most jobs in the market. While employers are increasingly riding themselves of degree-based requirements for recruitment, these initiatives are still nascent and limited.

In the era of democratized information, the dawn and proliferation of the Internet, and novel tools like ChatGPT, memorization tests remain the single greatest systemic tool employed by institutions of all types (government, educational, regulatory, industry credentialing bodies, etc) to determine whether an individual has earned the right to work and/or grow in their chosen field.

The memorization-driven exam is pervasive in every corner of our societies and economies. In

North America, apprenticeship programmes prohibit apprentices from progressing through their apprenticeship if they fail a multiple-choice exam. Women are overwhelmingly underrepresented in the construction trades, even in countries like Germany where apprenticeship and the building trades are relatively sought-after careers.

Traditional assessment models are institution-centered. As opposed to taking learner-centered approaches, our current assessment models are evaluated for their efficiency first and foremost, with learner outcomes an afterthought. This is evidenced multiple times a year when hundreds and thousands of students convene in gymnasiums around the world for their high-stakes final exams. While there exists no scientific basis that this assessment design improves or enhances learner outcomes, we repeat the ritual year after year, semester after semester, perpetuating and propagating gender, ethnic, and ability-based discrimination.

### Where's the discrimination?

The American Physical Society observed that "women and underrepresented minorities typically score significantly lower than men on the standardized tests designed to predict performance." There are sociological

reasons that help explain this. One such reason originates in the way society tends to raise boys versus girls. Boys are rewarded for risk-taking behaviour, where as girls are inadvertently raised to be thoughtful and to make sure they aren't disturbing anyone with their words, thoughts, or actions. As such, the APS remarked that one reason boys tend to perform better on standardized tests are because they feel more empowered to guess than girls do.

Gender bias is evident in many assessment designs. There is significant evidence, for example, that multiple-choice assessments favour males over females (Griselda, 2021a, 2021b). Additionally, assessment design has been seen to intentionally limit female learners. The below example from the Educational Testing Society (ETS) is indicative.

In 2012, long before the arrival of Uber and other similar

businesses, the Migration Policy Institute estimated \$39 billion in lost wages - and thus \$10 billion in lost income tax revenue - every year due to college-educated immigrants being mired in low skilled jobs or unemployment lines in the United States. With immigration rates dramatically higher since 2012, this inequity has persisted and expanded.

Vametric, a world-renowned innovator in talent assessment, helped usher Europe forward in this regard, with the transformational overhaul of NHS Care Sector jobs in the mid-2000's. The introduction of the Care Standards Act required all existing and new workers to meet a competency threshold to help ensure quality of care across the entire system. Through equitable assessments, the entire system flourished, resulting in a ten-fold increase in the number of workers, high levels of worker engagement, and a reduction in

"For example, for the first several years when the SAT was offered, boys scored higher than girls on the math section, while girls achieved higher scores on the verbal section. The ETS decided the verbal test needed to be balanced more in favor of boys, and added more questions pertaining to politics, business and sports. No similar efforts were made to balance the math section. "Since then, boys have outscored girls on both the math and verbal sections," said Zappardino. "So when girls show a superior performance, balancing is required; when boys show the superior performance, no adjustment is necessary".

(APS, 2020)

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time for foreign-trained workers to recertify and engage in work, from an average of two years to as low as six weeks.

Similar work is being undertaken in the United States, where Vametric's VALID-8 assessments are so powerful they are overturning state regulatory exams. In one case, all of those appeals came from newcomer women. They had failed the mandated exams, but when their vocational expertise in their equitable assessments were reviewed by the regulator, the learner's knowledge, skills, and abilities were exceptional and legally defensible, and their exam results were overturned.

What do we do from here?

The future remains uncertain for the global economy, particularly as we think about the talent required to sustain and grow it. In the western world, low birth rates and talent and skills shortages are compounded by the rapidly-retiring workforce, with approximately 30% of all workers set to retire by 2030. In other parts of the world, lower relative wages are compounded by geopolitical risk and/or

International research indicates that assessment processes may be influenced by cultural, racial, and gender biases that favour white male apprentices, and this further complicates the assessment process for those in the skilled trades from under-represented groups. Research from the United Kingdom has found white male apprentices to be perceived as "good blokes" who may receive informal mentoring and extra help, so they will not fail an assessment, while apprentices from equity groups may not receive the same level of support.

(Colley & Jarvis, 2007)

climate change migration risks. Migration patterns will serve as an overarching theme of the global economy's talent pool and those countries and employers who get it right will thrive socially and economically.

This means finding a fairer, more transparent, and faster path to legally-defensible, validated assessments of a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Competency-based learning is growing in popularity, and apprenticeship is making a comeback as a learning model that can be applied to nearly any sector. However, learning is only the input. Assessment represents the output, and has an overweight impact on the outcome; that is, poor assessment is resulting in poor labour outcomes.

Competency-based assessment, however, offers a great opportunity for companies, nations, and intermediaries. Rewarding mastery over memorization yields greater results and greater equity by removing gender-based discrimination in traditional assessments. In Canada, companies like Vametric are pairing their assessment approaches with national charitable and resettlement organizations who are providing additional wrap-around supports, such as language, transportation, housing, and career services to address the other systemic barriers that may result in inequities between newcomers and residents, and between men and women.

Assessment is a significantly overlooked lever to greater equity and can be instituted by every

organization and employer. The pathway to increasing gender equity and broader equity in the workforce for all can be enhanced with assessments that are transparent, competency-based, and designed in a way that individuals can advocate for their skills and abilities.

In this model, everyone wins; learners and workers are more empowered and engaged, employers have strong and reliable talent funnels from which to draw highly skilled workers, and governments and training providers can efficiently allocate resources to optimize learner outcomes. It's already happening; we just need to move faster. ■

**GLOBAL HEALTH MATTERS**  
the podcast

Episode 21:  
**SCIENCE AND DIPLOMACY FOR GLOBAL HEALTH**

with your host,  
**GARRY ASLANYAN**

**FEATURING:**

**ILONA KICKBUSCH**  
Founder and Chair, International Advisory Board, Global Health Centre, Geneva Graduate Institute

**AIDA MENCÍA RIPLEY**  
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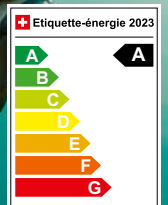
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**ATHÉNÉE COINTRIN ÉTOILE GENÈVE MARBRERIE CAROUGE A&S CHEVALLEY NYON**



# Three years of pandemic learning response: Reimagining innovation in online learning

HEINI UTUNEN AND MELISSA  
ATTIAS, HEALTH EMERGENCIES  
PROGRAMME, WHO

When WHO launched an open-access learning platform in 2017 to prepare for the next pandemic, we hoped that day was a long way away. Less than three years later, COVID-19 had spread across the globe and a public health emergency was declared.

Three more years have since passed, allowing us to reflect on [OpenWHO.org](https://openwho.org)'s<sup>1</sup> pandemic learning journey and how we have tackled our key challenge: providing accessible, up-to-date health knowledge that is informative for a diverse global audience during a fast-evolving, high-stakes emergency.

Our approach has centred on leveraging existing technologies and simple, accessible formats to have the widest possible impact, reaching learners from remote communities to high-tech metropolises.

OpenWHO learning materials are increasingly optimized for a multilingual world in which many rely on mobile phones to stay informed, which is particularly critical in health emergency contexts.

This means that our online courses lack many of the bells and whistles of other learning platforms – but it has also helped us stay true to WHO's goal of

supporting everyone, everywhere, in attaining the highest level of health.

“Our focus is on operationalizing learning to keep people healthy and safe. Innovation is not necessarily about being at the cutting edge of technology for the few, but about reaching and empowering the many,” said Dr. Michael Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.

## Prioritizing access

Years before the emergence of COVID-19, WHO anticipated that a global health emergency would bring massive demand for trusted information and set out to create a learning platform that breaks down as many barriers to access as possible.

OpenWHO courses are provided in self-paced, multi-use formats, so learners have the option to participate whenever and however works best for them, in alignment with the universal design for learning framework. Videos can be streamed or downloaded in video and audio formats, and presentations and handouts can be downloaded and shared with people who lack a computer or a stable internet connection. The OpenWHO app allows learners to access all downloaded content with the tap of a finger on a mobile phone, even if no connection is available.

By focusing on easily adaptable formats, courses have been

produced in 65 diverse languages to serve the affected global population. Translation priority has been given to languages that can reach populations who may lack access to trusted information, in recognition that it is easier to learn and understand in one's native tongue. Country-specific learning channels<sup>2</sup> have been added to provide learners in partnering countries with one-stop access to courses in their official languages.

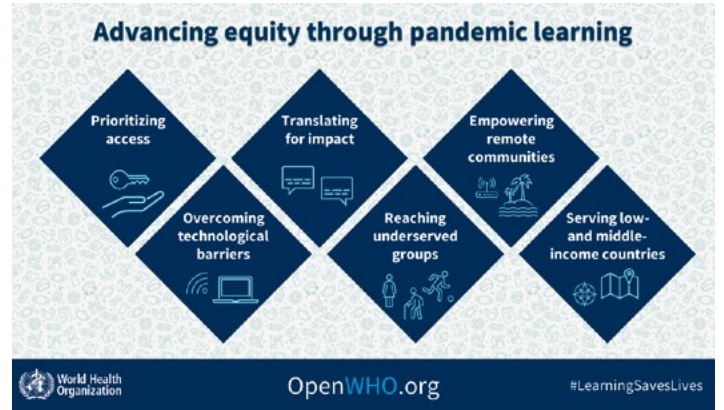
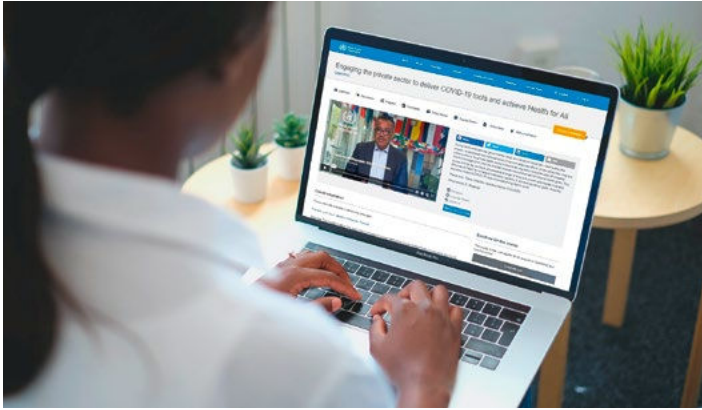
A modular course structure also allows materials to be quickly updated as new WHO guidance becomes available. For example, OpenWHO's introductory COVID-19 course<sup>3</sup> has been updated more than a dozen times and is available in 45 languages with 1.1 million enrolments.

“For me, every course was a great experience,” said one OpenWHO learner. “I know that all information is true and up to date.”

**Serving the underserved**  
Prioritizing access has enabled OpenWHO to have tremendous reach during the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with WHO's mission to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable. Enrolments in the platform's public health courses surged from 160 000 in January 2020 to more than 7.3 million in January 2023 – a 4500% increase.

The platform became a growing source of knowledge for demographics typically underserved





online as they sought information about COVID-19, representing a key achievement for a platform designed to advance equity.

The proportion of women learning on the platform has grown from 40% to 52% during the pandemic. Participation has also increased among learners younger than age 20 (from 3% to 19% of users during the pandemic) and ages 70 and older (from 0% to 2%), signaling progress towards inclusive learning. Learning reach has further extended beyond the online platform as communities adapt materials to local contexts and key learners impart the knowledge they gained, creating a multiplier effect.

“I have learned many things about the COVID-19 pandemic from courses of the OpenWHO programme,” one learner said. “It literally helps me to speak with my local community. Because I am a pharmacist, I have been asked so many questions about risk, possibilities and about medications, and I have shared the knowledge that I got

from professionals from these courses.”

### Measuring impact

With dramatic growth in production and uptake, new and effective tools were needed to better capture, monitor, and document the evolution of the platform’s global learning. OpenWHO invested in custom-fit data analysis to meet this need, allowing dynamic exploration of user metrics and key performance indicators. Findings have highlighted the platform’s contributions to equity, which inform course production strategies and are shared through scientific publications<sup>4</sup> to ensure that lessons learned are communicated with the global public health community.

Quantitative and qualitative feedback have also demonstrated the platform’s impact, particularly on health workers. An analysis of two exit surveys in the platform’s second most popular course – Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in the context of COVID-19<sup>5</sup> – confirmed high user satisfaction, with learning needs overwhelmingly met.

More than 95% of participants said they would change at least some IPC practices after the course, a majority of whom were women ages 20 to 39 working in a health-related profession.

In addition, survey results from learners in COVID-19 vaccination training for health workers<sup>6</sup> confirmed the positive impact of the course on their professional skills. Learners verified the effectiveness of self-paced, multi-use formats from the user perspective, as well as the value of modular and low-bandwidth friendly materials to reduce barriers to access.

Feedback shared by OpenWHO learners in webinars and discussion forums also help capture impact at the individual and community levels, which is no easy task for a platform that aims to serve the world.

“I got to learn of this learning platform in late 2021, then serving as a volunteer frontline epidemiologist in the COVID-19 response in Uganda. Today, I wish I had learned of it earlier,” an

OpenWHO learner said. “I have found it to be a one-stop knowledge centre, enriching and offering solutions and guidance to real public health problems arising in my local context.”

Three years into the COVID-19 emergency, OpenWHO has harnessed the potential of simple formats and technologies to empower millions of people across the globe with knowledge to protect themselves and their communities, furthering WHO’s goal of health for all. The platform’s use case has established OpenWHO as an effective knowledge-transfer platform for future pandemics, whenever they arise. ■

- 1 <https://openwho.org>
- 2 <https://openwho.org/pages/serving-countries>
- 3 <https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov>
- 4 <https://openwho.org/pages/publications>
- 5 <https://openwho.org/courses/COVID-19-IPC-EN>
- 6 <https://openwho.org/courses/covid-19-vaccination-healthworkers-en>



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# Calling for gender-equal digitalization

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Women in Senegal



Blockchain Lab and simulation event.



UN Women Kenya and Blockbonds piloted a block chain-based payment solution, Spenn, in the Kakuma refugee camp in 2018.

© James Ochwerk





The Spenn payment solution empowers the women in the camp and contributes to financial independence and empowerment.



© UN Women/Ryan Brown

Seychelles women thrive in male-dominated industry.



© Darlam Mendez/UN Women

Women strengthening their digital skills in a course of UN Women's Second Chance Education Programme, with the support of HP and ProSociedad.



# A conversation about mentoring with Véronique and Kevin

The United Nations offers the Together Mentoring and Networking Programme to connect colleagues from any member organisations in a mentor-mentee relationship. The approach offers a great deal of flexibility in terms of goals, frequency of meetings, benefits of the connection, etc. In this article, Véronique from ITU shares her thoughts as a mentee after concluding a year of working with Kevin from WHO as her mentor.



## KEVIN CRAMPTON, WHO

**KEVIN** What brought you to the mentoring program initially?

**VÉRONIQUE** In 2022, I was responsible, as a business owner, for a long-term IT project and I wanted to strengthen my IT knowledge with the advice and input of an expert with knowledge of the UN system. I was looking for a mentor with experience in IT and Agile project management who could advise me on my concerns and worries to prevent the project from falling behind schedule. My perception though is that the

UN family is a very specific environment. We have a strong set of ambitions and missions. Running an IT project within our culture poses some unique challenges. Because of those specificities, I didn't think I could learn what I needed to know about efficient management of an IT project from a university course or from books on management and leadership. So, the mentoring program was a good opportunity to meet someone in the UN system with the experience that I wanted to learn.

**κ. Fair enough. And it was naturally to the UN mentoring program that you therefore turned, with mentors available from across the whole UN system?**

**v.** Yes.

**κ. And was it easy to find an appropriate mentor? How did the search go?**

**v.** There are some initial criteria questions on the UN mentoring website, and then there's an automatic mechanism to propose a match between mentee and the mentor corresponding to the needs. For me, I described myself as having three main priorities:

- The first one was having a mentor who was a mother-tongue-level English speaker. I wanted the mentor to help me assess my level of English and my French accent, if it was acceptable for the UN system or not.
- I wanted someone in Geneva to be able to meet face-to-face after a long period of teleworking, so having something more human than a Zoom call!
- And the third, was to meet an "expert" in leading Agile IT projects because I wanted to refresh and enhance my knowledge for my own project.

In your case, Kevin, I was happy to contact you, because in addition to fulfilling all those three criteria, you had a fun and welcoming way to introduce yourself and it looked like our exchanges wouldn't be too formal. You have sold the promise of a pleasant and fruitful experience!

**κ.** Thank you and great stuff. It certainly helped me that you arrived with a very specific kind of objective in mind - addressing your IT project concerns. I imagine than most people are looking for general mentoring around their career direction



Véronique and Kevin and virtual mentoring in the time of COVID.

and their delivery of their job, but in your case, it was interesting because you did have a specific business challenge that you wanted to discuss. I think that placed our relationship on a really firm footing in terms of setting goals and clear objectives for the sessions.

v. Yes, my main goal was to gain confidence in my English and my knowledge of Agile IT projects and that's exactly what we concentrated on.

κ. **So how did it progress? We had meetings every two weeks, didn't we? They were very much focused around your project and the pain points.**

v. Yes, it worked well because you didn't coach me directly or tell me what to do, but helped me develop confidence to lead and put the project on track through open discussions and brainstorming about different ways to approach the problem. That was based on your background and experience in IT of course, but it was about suggesting solutions together, and every fortnight we could progress to the next stage.

κ. Great stuff, and I am really pleased that it helped. I fully agree that it's about the journey together, isn't it? It's about setting some clear goals at the start, and then working towards that in what is always a two-way relationship. I think the mentor gains as much, if not more, than

the mentee when it works well! It's about being a sounding board for ideas, brainstorming together rather than a mentor arriving with a pre-baked and fixed set of ideas.

What were your main takeaways at the end? What would you say was the principal benefits around the year of interaction that we enjoyed?

v. The value was in that shared experience; bringing the mentor as an impartial colleague into my professional life to get a second opinion.

The mentoring format worked well because you only have the goals that you decide on together. Nobody else has to know what we are discussing or how we organise ourselves. You have complete ownership of the process and the pace and no obligation of results.

So, it offers freedom and neutrality, confidentiality, and trust.

My main takeaway is to call on a mentor again whenever I need to unblock or accelerate a situation within the UN system. I feel a great benefit is that you're working with a mentor from that same UN, which is different from that of the industry or academia or other work environments.

κ. Yeah, it's a really good point. I wholeheartedly agree that when it works well, it is a safe space, as you say, that's outside of the day-to-day

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Individual United Nations agencies run their own mentoring programs and the UN as a whole offers the Together initiative that was discussed here.

Training is available to mentors, and they do get support and guidance from the program to maximise their effectiveness. Each mentor provides a biography and their areas of interest to help potential mentees find someone that fits their needs.

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work, but linked to it enough to be effective. As a result, the sessions can be tailored and used for anything that's useful for the mentee. And coming from a background of private business and government work, I also think that the UN system is quite specific. I am not a formally trained mentor, but hope I brought a willing ear and an ability to connect thanks to our shared history and experience of the UN way of working! In your case, you had a very specific ask in terms of your project, but I guess the great benefit of the mentoring program is that whether you're blocked on a project, or feel blocked in your career, it's a safe space just to have a discussion around your concerns and aspirations with somebody, as you said, that knows the same culture.

So, it sounds like you would recommend it to others then in terms of a useful experience and a worthwhile investment of time?

v. Absolutely, I would recommend it, so you don't feel alone, avoid feeling blocked, and also to brainstorm ways to reopen doors within our unique UN system and values. ■



# Embracing a prosperous, equitable and sustainable future

## From science to political action

**RUZANNA TARVERDYAN<sup>1</sup>**

Multiple crises and the quest for shared prosperity

Our world is in the midst of unprecedented multiple crises, in the grim new reality that emerged after Covid-19, the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and the Ukraine war, which has escalated into a global economic disaster – threatening the well-being of people everywhere. This imminent danger justifies an urgent need for a paradigm shift to avoid further casualties and substantial structural changes at various levels of governance; global, national and local. There is a widespread hope for a more pragmatic, active, global governance. The need to embrace a prosperous, equitable, secure and sustainable future that has now become an imperative and not an option!

The calculus of consent and group rationality

**James M. Buchanan** is considered one of the greatest scholars of liberty of the 20th century, an eminent economist who won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 1986 as a pioneer, in the new field of research that is now generally called *Public Choice* or the new political economy. He earned his prize: as he showed that, contrary to the conventional wisdom that public-sector actors act in the public's best interest (as "public servants"), politicians and bureaucrats tend to act in their own self-interest, just like private-sector actors (e.g., consumers and entrepreneurs).

The economist as such does not advocate criteria of optimality. He may invent them. He will discuss their pros and cons, sometimes before but preferably after trying out their implications [...] But the ultimate choice is made [...] by the procedures of decision making inherent in the institutions, laws and customs of society [...] To the extent that the economist takes part in this decisive phase, he does so in a double role, as economist, and as a citizen of his polity: local polity, national polity, or world polity.

Tjalling C. Koopmans, Nobel Memorial Laureate, 1975

Buchanan and Tullock's "Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy", represents a major step towards formulating a scientific theory of democracy. The Calculus of Consent is a vital contribution to literature concerning the analysis of political decision-making processes with the application of economical methods. All individuals as members of households or of firms act mainly in their self-interest. The same individuals that act mainly in their self-interest as members of households and firms and seek to increase utility or profit are also members of the political system. An important conclusion of this strain of research is that attempts to correct different economic coordination or "market failures" might instead create new and possibly equally serious "policy failures". A further consequence is a social theory that not only integrates political and economic decision-making, but also includes important parts of the legal rule-system.

Pareto-Koopmans optimality – criteria of fairness and justice

In this classic, the relevance of Pareto's general theory of social interaction for contemporary Public Choice analysis was elaborated. Buchanan and Tullock submit that the welfare-political-economist approach indicates that a specific choice is Pareto-optimal. Full agreement must be possible if the action is to be justified by the Pareto rule.

**Unanimity** has always been perceived as an agreement by all people in a given situation, whereby groups may consider unanimous decisions as a sign of e.g. social, political or procedural agreement, solidarity, and unity. Another fundamental point raised by Buchanan and Tullock was that: "*only constitutional changes, which can be shown to be in the interest of all interested parties, can be judged as "improvements" and therefore consider conceptual unanimity as the only legitimate decision-making rule.*"



### Consensus as a norm

Both Pareto efficiency and consent have an inherent appeal. At the heart of Paretian analysis is the win-win paradigm, and the conclusion that consented-to arrangements are to everyone's perceived self-interest. As a result, there is a tendency to assume that both Pareto efficiency and consent enjoy a significant connection to justice.

In their work in democratic theory, by describing the individual calculus on the constitutional level, Buchanan and Tullock come up with innovative techniques to solve the fundamental problem of democratic justification, suggesting a strong condition for consensus building:

*Any rule for collective choice embodying less than full consensus must impose some external costs on the individual, since resources will tend to be allocated "inefficiently" because of the choice mechanism. One means of escape from what appears to be a hopeless methodological dilemma is that of introducing some rule for unanimity or full consensus at the ultimate constitutional level of decision-making.*

Buchanan and Tullock believe that the formation of a "social contract" on the basis of unanimous agreement becomes possible, insofar as participation in the organization of a community, a State, is mutually advantageous to all parties. Moreover, the only

test of the mutuality of advantage is the measure of agreement reached.

### A utility function nonexistent until discovered

In his other book, *"The Constitutional Way of Thinking"* published in *Supreme Court Economic Review*, Buchanan submitted that: *"the economists have been forced into the sometimes tortuous searches for nonexistent social welfare functions..."*

Pareto-Koopmans' efficiency is a fundamental property used in the original development of data envelopment analysis (DEA), first introduced by A. Charnes, W. Cooper, and E. Rhodes, in 1978. Our close collaboration with William Cooper culminated in a discovery of a surprising connection between maximizing a social welfare function and DEA, published in a joint article entitled *"A utility function approach for evaluating country performances with DEA - the twin goals of decent work and a fair globalization,"* in 2010. Applying the original DEA Model, a new interpretation of the fractional programming problem of DEA emerged: maximizing the utility/cost ratio for a single unit to be ranked, subject to the condition that this ratio remains feasible for every other unit.

### Sustainable development and pareto optionality

From an analytical perspective, leaving no one behind and attaining Sustainable Development

Goals makes a case for looking for Pareto-Koopmans efficient solutions. Reverting back to the Brundtland Commission report definition of *Sustainable Development*, as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs"*, ensuring the "shared prosperity" makes a case for looking for Pareto optimum solutions.

The answer lies at the heart of DEA-based models that deliver a new Calculus of Consent: a logical foundation for forging the Geneva Consensus for Sustainable Development. Based on the available statistical data, DEA models empirically derive optimal solutions for all DMUs involved, that jointly and individually satisfy conditions of Pareto-Koopmans efficiency.

### Why "Geneva consensus"?

Considering DEA derived Pareto Optimal Solutions as an analytical underpinning for group decision-making towards consensus building, in January 2013, we constituted the Geneva Consensus Foundation. The GCF is a tribute to Bill Cooper, aimed at carrying out his vision of using the DEA in International Decision-Making. The name "Geneva Consensus," assigned to the foundation, is found to be very appealing by many. However, hardly anyone sees the profound scientific foundation behind the purely declarative nature of the name of our NGO.



As mentioned in the preface to our first joint book “Diagnostics for a Globalized World<sup>2</sup>” by Sten Thore,

*“This book examines the promise, in this regard, that is offered by data envelopment analysis (DEA), a quantitative technique invented by A. Charnes and W.W. (Bill) Cooper and their PhD students. This promise is documented in publications spanning a twenty-year period and in the chapters to follow — but the large-scale practical application is still awaiting. To prepare for this practical phase, my co-author Ruzanna Tarverdyan has established the foundation “The Geneva Consensus”, which operates out of Geneva, Switzerland.”*

The Geneva Consensus, as we imply it here, applies a welfare-political-economist paradigm and marries the social welfare economics considerations with political economy. We created the “Geneva Consensus Foundation” as a new institutional basis to contribute to managing globalization, by providing an analytical underpinning that is adept to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability of the global world to account for the resultant multidimensional adjustment costs.

Think global act local – from vision to action  
The time to move from Vision to Action has arrived! We suggest the DEA becomes a strategic

means of participatory decision-making processes, so that it will treat trade-offs, and enable all development stakeholders to make informed choices. And also, build a consensus on managing the process of globalization and plan future development policies towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Politician by desire to give the best for our canton and also by passion, I am currently pursuing my engagement as a Member of Geneva City Municipal Council. Today, I wish to be able to contribute to the deliberations of the Grand Council of Geneva Canton. The PLR party (The Liberal-Radicals), that I belong to, strives to establish a liberal order within the state, society and the economy.

Its objective is to develop a policy which respects and promotes fundamental rights, which strengthens the freedom of each person, which is based on individual responsibility, initiative and solidarity, while respecting federalism. PLR policy is based on the values of freedom, cohesion and innovation.

A progressive woman of liberal-radical convictions and human values, an award-winning author, I am ready to bring my ideas and visions to defend the interests of the Geneva community and to build a sustainable, equitable, prosperous and secure future for all.

During the coming years, Geneva will have to face many environmental, economic and social challenges which have been aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. We must support digitization, improve services to the population, and meet the needs of the innovative and sustainable economy. I am committed to ensuring that our beautiful canton remains dynamic, creative and good for living together, free and happy! My priorities:

- Accompany a life in dignity and humanity for our elderly
- Guarantee the best quality of life for our families
- Defend the purchasing power and health of our people
- Support environmentally friendly enterprises and decent employment
- Take advantage of new technologies and artificial intelligence

I should like to conclude with the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau in 1754 in Discourse on Inequality that he dedicated to the state of Geneva. He praised Geneva as a good, if not perfect, republic that ensures stability of its laws and institutions, the community spirit of its inhabitants, and its good relations with neighboring states, neither threatening them nor threatened by them, and the well-behaved women of Geneva:

“It is, perhaps, given to the city of Geneva alone, to produce the edifying example of so perfect a union between its clergy and men

of letters. It is in great measure on their wisdom, their known moderation, and their zeal for the prosperity of the State that I build my hopes of its perpetual tranquility.” ■

1 Founding President of the Geneva Consensus Foundation, Member of Geneva City Municipal Council, Candidate to Grand Conseil

2 <https://www.worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/9421#t=aboutBook>

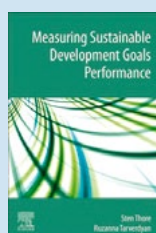
3 <https://www.elsevier.com/books/measuring-sustainable-development-goals-performance/thore/978-0-323-90268-7>

4 <https://proseawards.com/winners/>

**The approach proposed in our second book, entitled “Measuring Sustainable Development Goals Performance<sup>3</sup>”, Elsevier 2022, is an attempt to use DEA, a nonparametric decision-making alternative and a tool to political consensus building.**

The book:

- Includes novel tools, procedures, diagnostics, and metrics for evaluating the entire spectrum of SDGs in a wide variety of settings
- Ranks nations according to their social and economic performance, based on each nation’s unique resource and output indicators
- Examines international efforts toward shaping a new Social Contract between global partners
- Delivers a new Calculus of Consent: Logical foundation for forging Geneva Consensus for Sustainable Development



We propose a decision-making framework “Geneva Consensus”, as we call it, which integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development within a single optimization model.

And, it was an immense pleasure and with gratitude that we received the news of our book being named as a winner of the 2023 American Association of Publishers PROSE Category Award<sup>4</sup> – Single & Multivolume Reference and Textbooks in Social Sciences.



# Rencontre: Anne-Cécile Robert

Présidente internationale de l'Union pour la Presse Francophone (UPF)

Au détour d'une conférence de presse, qui s'est déroulée au Club suisse de la presse sous l'égide de Pierre Ruetschi, son directeur<sup>1</sup>, je rencontre Anne-Cécile Robert<sup>2</sup> pour une brève discussion à bâtons rompus.



CHRISTIAN DAVID, UNOG

## La francophonie

Bien que Genève soit une ville francophone, il est assez facile de constater dans les revues internationales une prédominance quasi écrasante de la langue anglaise. Une vraie bataille doit être menée avec volontarisme et je voudrais que l'UPF soit en pointe pour garantir une pluralité des sources linguistiques. Je déplore un manque de prise de conscience et de réactivité du monde francophone de ce caractère de bataille. Il s'agit donc de mettre en place des volontés et des moyens pour y remédier.

## Le rôle de la presse pendant les crises

Pendant cette conférence de presse, nous avons évoqué le rôle de la presse pendant les crises et

notamment des régressions de la liberté de la presse et le fait inquiétant que les journalistes deviennent des cibles car l'information est devenue un enjeu pour les pouvoirs en place. Il faut également y ajouter des formes de régressions liées au financement de la presse et la mainmise de groupes économiques, notamment en France, qui achètent des journaux et demandent même à certaines rédactions de changer leurs unes. Notre rôle est cependant de continuer à être présents sur le terrain pendant les crises en braquant les projecteurs et pour les décrypter et proposer une analyse basée sur des constatations objectives. Le citoyen est souvent un peu tétanisé voire effrayé. Il faut lui offrir des perspectives en prenant du recul historique et en se détachant de l'actualité brûlante et donner des contre poids pour que la crise soit comprise dans son entièreté. C'est vrai que la logique de concurrence des médias engendre une précipitation et le « nez collé sur la vitre » ne favorise pas l'analyse. Il faudrait plutôt s'arrêter et réfléchir.

## La Genève internationale

Le travail qui est effectué par la Genève Internationale, par les membres des organisations présents sur le terrain, est certes reporté dans des rapports objectifs, détaillés. Il est important de mieux le faire connaître au

public. Ce domaine international n'intéresse pas forcément et spontanément les gens. Il est nécessaire d'effectuer un travail de sensibilisation. Il faut trouver des moyens, par le réseautage, d'être au courant des informations disponibles sur les différents supports, des rapports sur les droits de l'homme, des reportages ou toute autre information. Des dizaines de rapports sont publiés en permanence et il convient donc déjà d'identifier et de savoir ce qui est publié et pour cela, créer les filières et les points d'alertes. L'un des rôles de l'UPF en Suisse serait de créer ces passerelles et de rencontrer de temps en temps des diplomates, des gens qui travaillent dans les services de l'information, se procurer les rapports qui sont souvent en libre accès. Il s'agit essentiellement d'un travail d'acclimatation et de contacts les uns avec les autres. Les journalistes francophones qui sont accrédités à l'ONU Genève ont su créer des réseaux qui franchissent les murs de ces citadelles que sont les organisations internationales. Il ne faut pas hésiter à proposer à Jean Philippe Jutzi, le président de la section suisse de l'UPF<sup>3</sup> de la tenue de réunions destinées à recueillir puis à présenter ces informations. L'UPF doit être un lieu et un espace de rencontres, il faut également que chacun continue à l'inventer.

## Le rôle de l'UPF

L'UPF n'est ni un syndicat ni une organisation humanitaire, c'est un réseau de journalistes francophones, présent dans 52 pays, qui compte plus de 3000 adhérents. Sa vocation est de rassembler des professionnels des médias, toutes sensibilités et supports confondus, qui ont des liens et des problématiques et des points communs, notamment la langue française mais pas seulement. Il faut que l'UPF soit ce point de référence qui permette à chaque intervenant de trouver naturellement le collègue qui lui permettra de trouver les personnes ressources au bon moment pour accomplir son travail d'information dans un souci d'honnêteté intellectuelle et de respect de la déontologie. ■

<sup>1</sup> <https://pressclub.ch/quelle-liberte-de-la-presse-en-zone-de-conflit/>

<sup>2</sup> Anne-Cécile Robert est journaliste, directrice des relations et des éditions internationales du journal *Le Monde diplomatique*. Elle enseigne par ailleurs le journalisme et les relations internationales.

<sup>3</sup> Page de l'UPF Suisse: <https://presse-francophone.org/fr/suisse/article/la-section-suisse>



# Good food, pleasant company

## What's not to like about shopping to put sustainability into practice?

As the number of co-operative grocery shops grows in the region, this article takes a closer look at what makes them so attractive for the international community concerned with personal and planetary health.

### CAROLINE DOMMEN<sup>1</sup>

Food is the key issue of our time. The way in which our food is produced, transformed, processed, transported, stocked and sold contributes to almost a third of Switzerland's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and the picture is similar elsewhere in Europe.

It's all very well to state the problem, but better still to be part of the solution. Shoppers around the world are doing this through food co-ops.

### Food co-ops within your reach

In French-speaking Switzerland alone, hundreds of people have come together to set up participatory, co-operative grocery shops. Eighteen are already up and running, and others are in the pipeline.

Like their legendary big sister, the Park Slope Food Co-op in Brooklyn, Swiss food co-ops typically offer fresh, healthy food and household products. For the most part, goods are organic, local, minimally processed, and sold at affordable, fair and transparent prices. Beyond this, the co-ops foster a sense of community, not only by bringing producers and consumers closer together, but also by offering chances for

shoppers to meet – something that happened naturally before supermarkets and online shopping became the norm.

Step into any of the local food co-ops, and you will find a warm and friendly atmosphere. In fact, you're unlikely to finish your shopping without having had a conversation with a fellow shopper – or a local producer dropping off her wares – about a delicious way to prepare a seasonal vegetable, the best type of goat cheese to enjoy with honey or whether bicarbonate of soda is good for cleaning the kitchen.

### But why change my shopping habits?

But, you might ask, why bother changing my shopping habits when I can find healthy, organic and plastic-free food in Switzerland's main supermarket chains? Price and environmental impacts are just two of the many reasons why you might want to shop at a co-op.

### Price

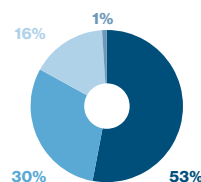
Supermarkets – even those that are nominally co-operative, like Switzerland's two orange giants Migros and Co-op – make huge profits based on exploitation of resources and labour. Retailers keep their pricing policies close to their chest; it took a hack of the Laiteries genevoises' website last year for consumers to learn that supermarkets' margins on milk products average around 50 percent.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, milk farmers in Switzerland struggle to earn a living wage. They ask to sell their milk for 1 franc per litre, but the large processors and distributors still pay them less than 65 cts.<sup>3</sup> In 2021 alone, 606 Swiss milk farms went out of business. And as we saw during Covid-19, we are all vulnerable if less of our food is produced locally.

Similarly, many people keen to buy organic are put off by the price. But the high prices come from retailers charging higher markups on organic than on

### Migros Organic cucumber

Production cost	0,96
Intermediary costs	0,28
Net producer margin	0,02
Net distributor margin	0,54

Source: FRC





non-organic products. Take organic cucumbers that Migros was selling in 2022 for 1.80 francs each. It cost 96cts to produce a cucumber, and Migros took a cut of 54 cts – much more than the 2 cts that the producer was making.<sup>4</sup>

Food co-ops address this by buying directly from producers and having a fixed and transparent markup (usually around 30%). Cutting out the middle-man cuts costs for consumers and enables better income for producers.

### Environmental health

Charging fair and accessible prices for organic food is just one way the co-ops contribute to environmental health. By working with producers and processors in the region, they support a resilient local economy and reduce the environmental impacts of importing food from faraway continents. Also, most offer the possibility of buying in bulk, encouraging reuse of containers and taking active steps to reduce food waste.

### Le Nid: A nest in central Geneva

We visited Le Nid<sup>5</sup>, Geneva's biggest and most central food co-op, to see how these objectives play out in practice.

Le Nid aims to support the local economy, and particularly local, sustainable and seasonal agriculture, by limiting intermediaries and giving preference to local producers. This keeps

prices down and makes shopping there accessible to a range of people, including those on a budget. Democratic ownership and decision-making are at the heart of Le Nid's DNA. Members own and govern the store. There are paid staff, but the bulk of the work is done by its members.

Le Nid is open to the public on Saturday once a month. On other days, non-members or prospective members are welcome to shop there once or twice, but afterwards are encouraged to join. This entails buying a share, paying a membership fee, and working a monthly shift. When asked whether this puts people off joining, answers vary. A member who works for an international organization mentions the playlist and the relaxed atmosphere, "I like doing the 7-9 p.m. shift. It's a great way to relax after a busy day in front of the computer at work, and to meet local people." Importantly, the members' work helps keep Le Nid's prices down.

A common misperception is that it is expensive. This prompted members to compare Le Nid's prices to those of supermarkets. "We looked at the Federal Statistics office representative sample of food products consumed by private households and found that we are very competitive and sometimes even cheaper than the two orange giants," says Maria Pia Mascaro, a journalist and active member of Le Nid. "Some products, such as our meats and cheeses, are far cheaper."

Antonin Calderon, an economist and one of Le Nid's founders, stresses the importance that the co-operative attaches to building a sense of community, welcoming people from all walks of life, and for being a place of awareness and sharing on food and related issues. "Last week I participated in a workshop to learn how to make kimchi," says Maëlle Quesne, a lawyer by training. "It was fun to spend time with other Le Nid members, and also a great opportunity to meet Emma, whose company 'Le Cri de la Carotte'<sup>6</sup> will soon be one of Le Nid's suppliers."

Le Nid regularly invites its producers to present their wares. "These are really special moments, because you learn about the personal story behind a product," says co-op member Sarah.

Le Nid also organizes a monthly welcome apéritif session for new members and people considering joining.

Feel free to drop in and take part in this effortless effort for a more sustainable economy! ■

- 1 Caroline Dommen is Senior Associate, IISD and Founder, Les Défricheuses
- 2 Guéniat et al., *Comment Migros et Co-op font leur beurre sur les produits laitiers*, 27 June 2022, <https://www.heidi.news/alimentation/exclusif-comment-migros-et-co-op-font-leur-beurre-sur-les-produits-laitiers>
- 3 Lait équitable suisse, <https://www.faireswiss.ch/fr/lait-equitable>
- 4 RTS, *Le bio est plus rentable, mais les intermédiaires se taillent la part du lion*, 7 November 2022, <https://www.rts.ch/info/economie/13.441.019-le-bio-est-plus-rentable-mais-les-intermediaires-se-taillent-la-part-du-lion.html>
- 5 Le Nid, 5 chemin du 23 août, 1205 Geneva
- 6 Le Cri de la Carotte (the Carrot's Cry)'s mission is, in its words, to save innocent, ugly vegetables from a sad death by transforming them into ready-made meals, <https://www.lecridelacarotte.ch>

### Some food co-ops in Suisse romande

- Geneva, *Le Nid*, <https://lenid.ch/>
- Geneva, *Les Jardins de cocagne*, <http://www.cocagne.ch>
- Geneva, *Tournerêve*, <https://www.tournerreve.ch>
- Geneva, Meyrin, *La Fève*, <https://la-feve.ch>
- Nyon, *Le Local*, <https://lelocal-nyon.ch>
- Aigle, *QAP co-opérative*, <https://qapco-op.ch/>
- Bex, *Le Radis*, <https://leradis.ch>
- Renens (near EPFL), *Le Vorace*, <https://levorace.ch>
- Lausanne, *La Brouette*, <https://labrouette.ch>
- Vevey, *Epico-op*, <https://epico-op.ch>



# Hommage Olga Cheremisina Venzi, un morceau de notre cœur



**CHRISTIAN DAVID, ONUG**

Quelques rayons de soleil brillent sur les dômes dorés de l'église orthodoxe russe de Genève en ce dernier jour de janvier. Une foule nombreuse, aux visages attristés et en pleurs, attend puis entre dans la nef pour rendre un dernier hommage à Olga.

Olga Cheremisina Venzi a travaillé à la Division de la gestion des conférences de l'Office des Nations Unies à Genève. Personne qui a eu le privilège de la rencontrer ne l'oubliera jamais.

Elle était brillante, souriante, gentille et attentionnée dès les premiers mots que nous avons

échangés. C'était si facile de devenir ami avec elle, il suffisait de la rencontrer et la connexion s'est tout de suite et naturellement établie.

Au cours de la cérémonie, le prêtre a trouvé les mots pour exprimer sa personnalité attachante, encourageant chacun à ne pas entrer dans des querelles vaines et futiles et ainsi passer à côté de moments précieux et importants. Ses amis proches, qui ont eu le courage de parler malgré l'émotion, ont expliqué à quel point elle était magnanime tant sur le plan personnel que professionnel.

Cette âme extraordinaire était encore plus évidente lors de nos répétitions au Music Club. Olga a chanté avec sa voix profonde et chaude qui a doucement percé l'espace. La musique et la performance d'un artiste émettent parfois des vibrations indescriptibles qui échappent à toute compréhension. Des connexions profondes sont établies sans avoir besoin de parler.

Olga était sans aucun doute une artiste.

Elle avait le sens du rythme et l'amour de la musique, et elle savait comment poser sa voix, bouger son corps et apporter son âme dans sa performance.

Elle était si vive d'esprit, si disponible et à l'écoute de tout le monde! Comment supporter qu'elle nous ait quitté si jeune quelques mois après avoir été transfigurée par le bonheur d'accueillir sa petite fille?

Pour Stefano, son mari, pour Mila, sa fille, pour sa famille, pour ses amis, pour les musiciens qui, au détour d'une note, se rempliront de sa présence bienveillante, nous lui envoyons ce message vers l'au-delà pour essayer de lui renvoyer un morceau de notre cœur. Elle a su si bien nous faire partager la sienne.

Tu restes présente, à nos côtés dans le temps et dans l'espace, dans nos cœurs, dans nos oreilles et dans nos vies, chère Olga. ■

# In Memoriam Ivo Petrov



## ALFRED DE ZAYAS, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

On 10 February 2023, Ivaylo Petrov, member of the Editorial Board of the *newSpecial* and of the UN Society of Writers died, victim of cardiac arrest. *Pulvis et umbra sumus* – we are but dust and shadow (Horace). Those who knew him recognized his intellect, his gift for poetry, his gentleness, his honour. We will miss him dearly. Ivo was barely 51 years old. I am 75. Is that fair? Why he and not I? We will never know what fate has in store for us. In any case, it is important to remember the humanistic warning: *sic transit gloria mundi* – thus pass the glories of the world.

I wrote these lines to assuage my sorrow. ■

## Existential Rhyme

*Why have friends so young departed,  
leaving hopes and projects that they started,  
symphonies begun and then undone?  
Why this absence of Eleison?*

*How is it that I have so long survived?  
By grace – not virtue – have I thrived.  
How many lives await me? Nine like cats?  
Serene adventures in exotic habitats?*

*To think I could have died so long ago,  
so many close calls, touch and go.  
I could have gone, my worries would have ended,  
works, objectives, vanities left unattended...*

*I could have died a child, an adolescent,  
young adult, mature professional – and now senescent...  
Embolisms, dual pneumonias, road collisions,  
any could have sealed my missions and ambitions...*

*Much that was would not have been,  
inspiring concerts heard, impressive rainbows seen,  
few heartaches suffered, prizes won or lost,  
the summits climbed and rivers crossed.*

*Existence after trauma is indeed rebirth,  
a second chance to kiss the native earth,  
to take perspective from what lies behind,  
revise priorities to foster what is good and kind.*

*Now I perceive familiar things as truly awesome:  
Pine cones, apple trees, a cherry blossom...  
Simple things so wondrously complex: a leaf,  
a blade of grass, hibiscus petals quite beyond belief.*

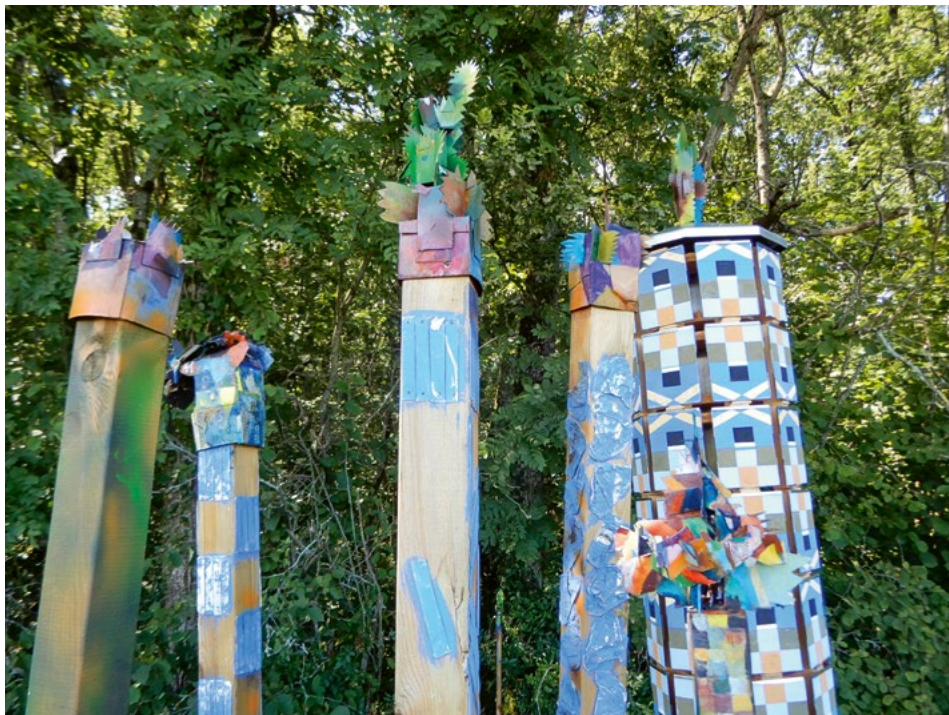
*I live in gratitude for all these bonus years,  
reborn each morning, savouring the joys and tears  
with optimism, cultivating friendship, settling strife,  
so keenly conscious of this daily gift of life.*

*Beholden for the bounties of extended time,  
I sing the sights, the sounds, the smells in existential rhyme,  
devoting time for building bridges, climbing mountain crests,  
still laughing at my new infatuations, whims and quests...*

*I revel in the funny details of each day and night,  
seize carpe diem, carpe noctem with delight.  
I know no taedium vitae – so much to discover still,  
each day a new epiphany – by Heaven's will.*







© Alfred de Zayas



© Alfred de Zayas

# Women artists in Geneva and neighbouring France

## ALFRED DE ZAYAS, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

For the ninth time, the traditional open-air exhibition “Art en campagne” is being organized in the Geneva countryside close to Ferney-Voltaire on the territory of the villages of Collex-Bossy (CH) and Ornex (F).

The 2023 edition of the renowned sculpture exhibit will be held this summer from 24 June to 3 September. Those women and men who have the gift of sculpture and painting are warmly invited to participate. Back in 2021 the very successful exhibition enjoyed an enormous number of visitors on foot and on bikes. It was Covid-19 time, and people wanted to be in the fresh air and not have to wear the blue Covid-19 masks.

At the 2021 exhibition, the visitors could admire along a 5 km footpath through fields and woods 47 exhibits by 33 artists. Twenty were ladies, 13 men and the rest the schools of the region. But some participants contributed two artworks – that explains the mathematics. Most of the lady artists resided in the Geneva area on the Swiss side of the border and in neighbouring France, but some of them live in Germany and Romania. The CVs of the artists,

who have participated in *Art en Campagne* over the years, show that they came not only from the “Grand Genève”, but also from other Swiss cantons, from Germany, France, other European and even African and Asian countries, the United States and Australia.

Art unites people, and it is important to celebrate human creativity, whether women or men of talent. It is in the spirit of the UN Charter and the UNESCO Constitution – building bridges between cultures and civilizations.

The deadline for submitting your projects is 15 March, so do hurry up if you wish to exhibit. Other important details and dates, as well as the relevant documents for participation you will find on [www.artencampagne.org](http://www.artencampagne.org). Otherwise, wait till June to enjoy the artworks and vote for your favourites. ■

The lady artists in 2021 were Mireille Aubert (Geneva), Ute Bauer (Thonex), Carmen Bayenet (Geneva), Angela Briffod (Grand-Saconnex), Sasha Broadhurst (Echenevex), Chantal Carrel (Douvaine), Marina Cavazza (Geneva), Catherine Glassey (Geneva), Cordelia von Klot (Bochum, Germany), Sophie Lambelet (Confignon), Susanne Lewest (Collonge), Andra Panait (Bucharest, Romania), Delia Perrois (Monnetier-Mornex), Nina Schipoff (Geneva), Florence Vial (Ornex), Corinne Violleau (Thoiry), Alexandra Winterberg (Geneva) and Nicole Zaffran (Cessy).





9th Cross-border art exhibition

## ART EN CAMPAGNE 2023

[www.artencampagne.org](http://www.artencampagne.org) [info@artencampagne.org](mailto:info@artencampagne.org)

24 June – 3 September 2023  
Collex-Bossy (CH) and Ornex (F)

### Invitation for participants

The communes of Collex-Bossy (CH) and Ornex (F) are jointly organising the 9th open-air art exhibition "Art en Campagne", which will take place on 24 June – 3 September 2023.

Artists are invited to participate by creating artworks for exhibition along a 5 km cross-border pathway (see map).

Primary and secondary schools in the region are also invited to take part.

**Are you interested?** The organising committee extend a warm welcome to Art en Campagne 2023 and hope that this exhibition will succeed in highlighting the ingenuity and creativity of your art projects around the theme of "CONTRASTS". Several cash prizes, including a "land art" prize, will be awarded by a jury at the end of the exhibition.

We look forward to welcoming you to Art en Campagne 2023. Deadline for submission of application folder 15 March 2023 (for details see application form on website [www.artencampagne.org](http://www.artencampagne.org)).

*Note: The artworks will be exposed to the elements for two months and therefore must be weather-resistant (rain, sun and wind). The exhibition will not be supervised.*

Organising Committee: Cathy Biolay, Skander Chahlaoui, Willy Delavenne, Lou Jacquemet, Meike Noll-Wagenfeld, Jean-François Obez, Pablo Pfeiffer, Marie-Claude Roch



# Freddie Mercury and spice markets

Question: What do Freddie Mercury and spices have in common?  
 Answer... (drumroll) ZANZIBAR, TANZANIA, also nicknamed the spice island of Africa.



Slave Market memorial

## DEBORAH RANDOLPH TALON, WHO

The Zanzibar Archipelago of over 50 islands can be found on the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean. It consists of many small islands, with the two main being Zanzibar (Unguja) and the Pemba Island.

Due to its geographical location, it was a pivotal trade centre from the first century AD, providing a stop-over for Arabian, Persian and Indian traders. European influence was introduced in the late 1400s via the arrival of the Portuguese. The influence of Arabian, Persian and Indian cultures can be seen in the island's cuisine, culture and architect.

Located on the Western part of the Unguja island is the famous (or infamous) Stone Town, a UNESCO world heritage since 2000. It is known for its beautiful houses made of local stone, intricate gates reflecting the different cultures of the former traders, and above all its sad history as a slave market.

Our visit to the museum in Stone Town was not only informative, but was complemented by a visit to the rooms, or should I say "dungeons" where the slaves were kept. I think the most striking information for me was not the dungeons, but the history or description that went with





Swamp protecting Zanzibar island



Prison Island



Spice market at Unguja



Statue Freddie Mercury in Montreux

each snapshot of this sad slave history. I was also struck by how society at the time had legalized and ingrained slavery in the culture, even among the slaves themselves. Once released, many slaves aspired to buy their own slaves, sometimes with the same compensation monies they had received for being held as slaves.

From Stone Town, it is possible to go to Prison Island (Changuu Island). Formerly built as a prison in the 1800s, but virtually unused, it is now a sanctuary for giant Aldabra tortoises. With their ages written on their backs, it was nice to admire one and/or feed one (I chose to feed one the same age as

me, whilst my children fed those in their nineties.)

You cannot visit Zanzibar without going to the spice market. The history of Zanzibar and spices are so strongly entwined that it is said the first Portuguese actually stopped at the island because they were drawn from over the sea by the potent smell of spices.

Zanzibar earned its name as the spice island due to the many large spice plantations that were grown during the Arab occupation. Soon, Zanzibar became one of the world's biggest exporters of cloves. Today, Zanzibar is still renowned for its turmeric, clove, nutmeg,

cinnamon, vanilla, cardamom and chilies.

There is a spice island tour available, but even in any market, the high quality cloves, sweet smelling vanilla and saffron can be prepared for you in small sachets to take home.

So where does Freddie Mercury come in to all this?

Well, did you know that Freddy Mercury was actually born in Zanzibar's Government Hospital on 5 September 1946 in Zanzibar? His childhood home is now a museum and can be visited at Kenyatta Road in Stone Town.

There is even a Freddie Mercury tour available for fans.

From beaches, to spices, to historical tours all topped with a famous musician, Zanzibar was surely an island I planned on visiting more than once! ■





© Carla Edelembos

## Cols routiers de Suisse (2)

# Le col de la Furka

James Bond (incarné par Sean Connery) prend les courbes écharpées de la route de la Furka dans son Aston Martin équipée de gadgets dernier-cri dans le film *Goldfinger*. Sa poursuite folle se déroule avec une Ford Mustang dont il crève les pneus. Ce film de 1964 a toute suite confirmé le statut mythique du col de la Furka qui relie le Haut-Valais au canton d'Uri.

**CARLA EDELENBOS,**  
UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS

Conçue en 1866 et financée par la Confédération et les cantons de Valais et d'Uri, la route goudronnée actuelle est large et bien entretenue côté Valais. Aussitôt passé le col, sur le territoire d'Uri, la route est bien plus étroite, les virages sont plus serrés, les escarpements abrupts, et la conduite devient plus aventureuse.

Nous nous dirigeons vers le col depuis le Valais en commençant par le hameau de Gletsch, à l'origine un alpage devenu halte touristique. Autrefois, le glacier

du Rhône descendait jusqu'à ce village qui se situe à 1760 mètres d'altitude. Actuellement, il n'y a que le jeune Rhône qui le traverse, puisque le glacier s'est retiré presque jusqu'au sommet, pas loin du col.

Tout de même, la vue depuis Gletsch reste impressionnante, et une halte se mérite. On peut prendre le sentier pédestre pour longer le fleuve qui ici s'est réduit à un ruisseau.

Gletsch était d'abord uniquement un lieu de passage pour des bergers et quelques marchands qui

transitaient par les cols. En 1866 la construction de la route de la Furka marqua le col comme le plus haut col carrossable de la Suisse de l'époque. Elle attira des visiteurs du monde entier et à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, deux grands hôtels de luxe accueillirent à Gletsch des voyageurs venus pour admirer le glacier du Rhône. Que le lieu fut populaire chez des anglais se remarque grâce à l'existence surprenante d'une chapelle anglicane, construite par la famille hôtelière en 1908, à côté du Grand Hôtel Glacier du Rhône. Malheureusement, pour l'instant, le Grand Hôtel est fermé





© Carla Edelentbos



© Carla Edelentbos

pour rénovations, on espère qu'il rouvrira bientôt!

Dès 1915, on peut atteindre Gletsch par le train, et dès 1922 en car postal. Avec le recul du glacier, aujourd'hui Gletsch est plutôt redevenu un lieu de transit, fréquenté par des visiteurs désireux de s'aventurer sur les routes des cols environnants. On peut choisir entre deux cols à découvrir - au nord le Grimsel, qui mène au canton de Berne, Meiringen et Interlaken, à l'est le col de la Furka, le sujet de notre récit d'aujourd'hui.

À Gletsch se trouve aussi une gare du célèbre train de vapeur de la Furka, qui ne roule qu'en été. Le reste de l'année les voyageurs sont priés de prendre le train à Oberwald dans la vallée de Conches pour parcourir le tunnel de la Furka qui, depuis 1982, relie directement Realp dans le canton d'Uri. Le chemin de fer en crémaillère sur un trajet de 18 kilomètres entre Oberwald et Realp est la plus longue ligne non électrifiée de Suisse. Avant 1982, la ligne faisait aussi partie du trajet du Glacier Express de Zermatt à St. Moritz, le train panoramique

par excellence, qui maintenant traverse le tunnel ayant perdu un peu de sa magie.

En partant de Gletsch, on monte doucement pour arriver à l'ancien hôtel Belvédère, à 2300 mètres d'altitude. L'hôtel fut bâti en 1890, et en 1908 devient un hôtel de luxe très prisé à cause de sa proximité du glacier. Son apparence dans le film *Goldfinger* (on dit que Sean Connery lui-même logeait au Belvédère) lui donne encore une notoriété dans les années 1960, mais malheureusement l'établissement, comme d'autres hôtels dans la région, n'a pas pu survivre aux changements dans le secteur du tourisme et a dû fermer ses portes. En face de l'hôtel se trouvent un pavillon avec bistro, un magasin ainsi que l'entrée à la grotte de glace qui existe depuis plus de 100 ans et est restée dans les mains de la même famille, qui possède un droit d'usage traditionnel datant du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Après chaque hiver une nouvelle grotte est creusée à l'intérieur du glacier pour accueillir des visiteurs émerveillés en découvrant la féerique beauté éphémère de la glace. Avec le recul du glacier, creuser la grotte devient de plus



© Carla Edelentbos

en plus hasardeux, et en été le glacier est couvert de draps blancs pour retarder sa fonte.

Le col de la Furka, à une altitude de 2429 m, est le 4<sup>e</sup> plus haut col routier des Alpes suisses. Il marque la ligne de partage des eaux entre les bassins du Rhône et du Rhin, entre la Méditerranée et la mer du Nord, et forme la

frontière entre le Valais et Uri. Déjà utilisé à l'époque romaine et au haut Moyen Age, le col constituait la frontière entre le diocèse de Coire et de Sion. Au 12<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Walser de la haute vallée du Rhône passèrent par le col de la Furka pour émigrer dans la vallée d'Urseren dans l'actuel canton d'Uri. Il n'est donc guère étonnant qu'il y eût des liens étroits entre





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Urseren et le Haut Valais. Des habitants du val de Conches détenaient même des droits d'alpage à Urseren, de l'autre côté du col. Au 15<sup>e</sup> et 16<sup>e</sup> siècle, le transport de marchandise par le col s'est intensifié. Le Valais importait surtout du sel, et exportait du vin, des céréales et des peaux. Ce trafic faisait objet d'accords négociés entre Uri et Valais, et des droits de douane étaient prélevés des deux côtés du passage.

Parmi les personnages les plus connus, Johann Wolfgang Goethe et le comte Carl August von Weimar, le 12 novembre 1779, ont traversé le col par le chemin des muletiers, accompagnés de deux guides, bravant une tempête de neige. La reine Victoria d'Angleterre (incognito) y passa en 1868, et résida quelques jours à l'hôtel Furka sur le col même. Contrairement à Goethe, celle-ci a pu voyager confortablement

en calèche, la route ayant été rendue carrossable en 1866. Malheureusement l'hôtel historique fut démoli en 1982 (l'armée l'a fait exploser) et l'endroit est maintenant un parking. L'ancien hôtel Furkablick, construit en 1883 à côté de l'hôtel Furka, est actuellement occupé par l'institut de recherche alpine de l'université de Bâle.

Le seul hôtel qui reçoit encore des voyageurs est l'hôtel Tiefenbach, un peu plus loin du col en direction d'Uri, situé à 2110 mètres d'altitude. Étonnement, cet hôtel, établi depuis 1860, est aussi ouvert en hiver, même si la route est fermée. Les hôtes doivent donc faire le trajet depuis Realp à pied, à raquette ou à ski, ce qui donne l'occasion de contempler les magnifiques panoramas sur la région de la Furka. Par beau temps, (ce qui n'est pas évident, il fait souvent nuageux et froid sur la Furka, même en plein été) on peut découvrir un panorama époustoufflant, en direction de la vallée de Conches, les sommets enneigés des Alpes valaisannes comme le Weisshorn, le Mischabel et le Cervin, en direction du Grimsel, les parois des Lauteraarhorn, Finsteraarhorn et Schreckhorn de l'Oberland bernois. Et en direction d'Uri la vue s'ouvre vers le val d'Urseren et Andermatt, et le col d'Oberalp, où naît le Rhin.

Au bout de la route de la Furka se trouve Realp, à 1538 mètres d'altitude, avec la gare du Glacier Express, et le terminus pour le train de vapeur de la Furka. À l'origine une colonie romane, les Walser s'y établirent déjà au 12<sup>e</sup> siècle. Des capucins y dirigèrent un hospice de 1735 à 1876, et il n'est donc guère étonnant que Goethe y résidât en 1779. À cause d'un incendie, le village fut presque entièrement détruit en 1848 et ensuite reconstruit avec des dons venus de toute la Suisse. Avec la construction de la route sur la Furka le village profitait de l'augmentation des visiteurs.

À l'heure actuelle, la commune ne compte pas plus de 160 habitants qui travaillent surtout pour le chemin de fer ou à l'extérieur du village. Quelques kilomètres plus loin, avant Andermatt, se trouve le beau village d'Hospental, sur la rivière Reuss, et au sujet duquel nous avons écrit un récit de voyage dans le *New Special* de mars 2021.

La région de la Furka offre beaucoup de possibilités pour des sportifs: en été, la route est prisée par des cyclistes, mais attention, avec des passages de 11% de dénivelé il faut bien se préparer! L'offre pour les randonneurs est grande: d'abord il y a le haut chemin de la Furka, le *Furkahöhenweg*, qui mène en deux jours d'Oberwald au col de la Furka et ensuite à Andermatt. Depuis le col, on peut aussi monter en une heure et demi à la cabane du Sidelen du CAS, à 2707 mètres d'altitude. La cabane Albert Heim, qui ouvre aussi en hiver, est joignable depuis Tiefenbach, en été il faut compter une montée de 2 heures environ. Avec un peu de chance, on peut voir des bouquetins, des chamois et bien sûr des marmottes, sinon, il y a toujours des beaux moutons montagnards! En hiver, on peut suivre la route fermée et enneigée de la Furka à ski, raquette ou à pied, mais attention, le chemin n'est pas préparé. Plus loin dans le val d'Urseren, à Andermatt, 70 kilomètres de pistes préparés attendent le skieur. ■

Pour plus d'informations:

Le train vapeur: <https://www.dfb.ch/fr>

La grotte de glace: [www.gletscher.ch/eisgrotte](http://www.gletscher.ch/eisgrotte)

Hébergements:

[www.hotel-tiefenbach.ch](http://www.hotel-tiefenbach.ch)

[www.glacier-du-rhone.ch](http://www.glacier-du-rhone.ch)

[www.albertheimhuetten.ch](http://www.albertheimhuetten.ch)

<https://sidelen-huetten.ch>





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# La flamboyance de Miloš Karadaglić pour clore le 10<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l'ODN!



## ZAHİ HADDAD, ÉCRIVAIN

Le 7 février 2023, à 20 h, au Victoria Hall, l'Orchestre des Nations (ODN) a clôturé, en grandes pompes, les festivités de son 10<sup>e</sup> anniversaire avec Miloš Karadaglić, star mondiale de la guitare classique, autour d'un programme musical aux résonances latines et festives.

Le virtuose monténégrin ainsi que les membres de l'orchestre, tous amateurs-bénévoles, ont largement gagné le pari lancé par Antoine Marguier, fondateur et chef de l'ODN: envoûter le millier de spectateurs présents en présentant une fantastique harmonie autour du *Concerto d'Aranjuez* choisi par Miloš Karadaglić.

Ce dernier est apparu comme soliste au sein des plus grands orchestres de la planète et a récolté de nombreuses récompenses au cours de ses tournées. En juin 2022, il a porté, devant un Royal Albert Hall comble, des répertoires à cheval entre musique classique et musique pop, en reprenant des compositions de Bach et des Beatles. Un exercice qu'il affectionne tout particulièrement et qui lui a valu les louanges de la presse internationale.

Régulièrement classé dans les meilleures ventes de disque, Miloš Karadaglić incarne ainsi une certaine démocratisation de la musique classique.

Bienveillant, généreux, sincère, il joue avant tout pour son public et cherche à déclencher un large éventail d'émotions. La BBC l'a inclus dans sa liste des six meilleurs guitaristes classiques du dernier siècle! ■





Implantée sur les contreforts orientaux du massif du Jura, Gex est une étape incontournable pour les amateurs de tourisme vert.

## Pays de Gex (2/3)

# Des rives du Léman aux sommets du Jura

Près de 100 000 habitants répartis sur 27 communes vivent dans le Pays de Gex, principalement dans la zone frontalière avec la Suisse. Moins peuplée, la région située en altitude, au cœur du domaine skiable de la station Monts Jura, accueille les amateurs de glisse et les randonneurs venus profiter des magnifiques panoramas offerts depuis les crêtes du massif du Jura.

### CLAUDE MAILLARD

Avant d'emprunter les lacets du Col de La Faucille qui mène à la station Monts Jura, détour par Divonne-les-Bains, à une quinzaine de kilomètres de Ferney-Voltaire (*voir le précédent numéro du newSpecial*). Du nom de la déesse celte Divona, la ville de Divonne-les-Bains, située à l'orée du Parc naturel régional du Haut-Jura, est entourée d'une nature préservée. Plus de 30 sources jaillissent sur la commune et la qualité de ses eaux, comme son environnement, la prédisposait à devenir une station thermale.

À mi-chemin entre Ferney-Voltaire et Divonne-les-Bains, la commune de Cessy héberge le détecteur CMS (Compact Muon Solenoid) du CERN qui a permis à François Englert et Peter Higgs de découvrir le *boson de Higgs* en 2012. Les deux scientifiques auteurs de cette découverte majeure ont été récompensés par le Prix Nobel de physique. À deux pas de ce haut lieu technologique, le romantique étang de Cessy où il fait bon flâner est un paradis pour les pêcheurs, les joggeurs et pour les adeptes du pique-nique au bord de l'eau.

Divonne-les-Bains, pour se ressourcer  
Les Romains, au premier siècle de notre ère, ont capté les sources divonnaises et les ont conduites jusqu'à Noviodunum (actuelle Nyon), capitale de leur colonie, pour en alimenter les thermes au moyen d'un aqueduc souterrain long de 11 km. Divonne est devenue une station thermale lorsque le Docteur Paul Vidarty a installé, en 1849, un institut hydrothérapique. À partir de 1892 elle est appelée Divonne-les-Bains et vit alors au rythme fastueux des villes d'eau huppées de la belle





© Claude Mallard

Véritable havre de paix, l'étang de Cessy est le paradis pour les amoureux de la nature au bord de l'eau.



© Claude Mallard

Édifiée en 1868, la chapelle de Riantmont dominant le village de Vesancy abrite la dame de Riantmont, protectrice du Pays de Gex.



© Claude Mallard

La station Monts Jura accueille aussi bien les tout jeunes débutants qu'une épreuve du championnat de France de ski alpin.



© Claude Mallard

Niché au creux des vallons du pied du Jura, dans un magnifique parc arboré, le golf de Divonne-les-Bains offre un parcours de 18 trous.

époque. Dans la seconde moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, l'impulsion de Marcel Anthonioz, maire de la ville pendant 31 ans et Secrétaire d'État au Tourisme, donne à Divonne-les-Bains le visage qu'on lui connaît aujourd'hui. Station thermale spécialisée dans les affections psychosomatiques et les pathologies en rhumatologie, Divonne-les-Bains décline son savoir-faire pour des séjours remise en forme adaptés aux maux de notre temps: surmenage, stress, insomnie et fatigue passagère.

Mais différents problèmes techniques ont contraint la régie municipale des thermes de suspendre son activité au 31 décembre 2022. La mairie a pris la décision de ne pas rouvrir les thermes sous sa gestion, et la reprise par un partenaire privé pourrait ne pas se faire avant plusieurs années. Affaire bien

regrettable qui risque malheureusement de nuire au tourisme local.

Les nombreuses sources alimentent également la Divonne (rivière appelée Versoix côté suisse) qui va aussi favoriser le développement industriel de la ville. En 1857, on répertorie dix usines au centre de Divonne qui fonctionnent avec l'énergie de l'eau faisant tourner des roues à aubes: fabrique de papier, pressoir, scierie, forge... et moulin à blé, dont le Moulin David datant du Moyen-Âge. Il sera transformé en diamanterie en 1885 puis en usine hydroélectrique deux années plus tard. Aujourd'hui elle est devenue la plus ancienne usine hydroélectrique de France en état de fonctionnement, intégralement dans son site d'origine, et après restauration elle se visite gratuitement tous les dimanches matin.

Divonne-les-Bains<sup>1</sup>, c'est tout le charme d'une petite ville de moins de 10 000 habitants agrémentée d'une vaste zone de loisirs et de divertissements (lac de 45 hectares, centre nautique, golf 18 trous, hippodrome, casino, théâtre, hôtels quatre étoiles...), implantée dans un cadre bucolique, environnement idéal pour se ressourcer.

Sur la route, entre Divonne-les-Bains et Gex, surplombant la commune de Vesancy, la chapelle Notre-Dame de Riantmont abrite depuis 1868 une statue de la Vierge érigée 14 années plus tôt par l'abbé Hipolyte Monet, curé de la paroisse. Par la suite, le pape Pie IX fera du lieu le sanctuaire de protection du Pays de Gex.

Gex, capitale régionale depuis le XI<sup>e</sup> siècle Traversée par plusieurs cours d'eau dont le Journans, la com-

mune de Gex<sup>2</sup>, implantée sur les contreforts orientaux du massif du Jura, est largement forestière. Si la ville s'est développée à 550 m d'altitude, son point culminant dépasse les 1600 m. Située au pied du Col de la Faucille, Gex s'est imposée très tôt comme un lieu d'étape privilégié.

Déjà habitée durant l'époque gallo-romaine, Gex apparaît dans les textes au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle comme le centre d'une circonscription administrative placée sous l'autorité du comte de Genève. En 1178, une seigneurie nouvelle est créée; Gex en est la capitale. De ces temps féodaux la postérité a retenu le nom de Léonette de Joinville, dame de Gex, emblème de l'indépendance gessienne. Femme de caractère, elle va consacrer sa vie à la gestion de la baronnie, récoltera l'argent, écouter les doléances, conseillera ses sujets et laissera





Depuis près de 500 ans, la «Fête de l'Oiseau» perpétue le souvenir de Léonette de Joinville, emblème de l'indépendance de Gex.

un souvenir vivace pour tous les Gessiens. Aujourd'hui encore, l'association «Les Chevaliers de l'Oiseau» perpétue son souvenir en organisant chaque année la «Fête de l'Oiseau de Gex» et son défilé historique dont ce sera bientôt la 500<sup>e</sup> édition.

En 1353, avec les communes voisines formant le Pays de Gex, la ville est annexée à la Savoie; Gex connaît alors son apogée. Les habitants savent tirer les bénéfices d'une nature riche en forêts et pâturages. Se fonde alors une société rurale qui se maintiendra jusqu'au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le rattachement au royaume de France en 1601 conforte Gex dans son rôle de capitale régionale. Chef-lieu de bailliage, Gex est aussi le siège de la subdélégation de l'intendant de Bourgogne. Lieu de pouvoir, la ville doit beaucoup à la présence de Voltaire à Ferney et concentre les familles fortunées des alentours. En 1815, avec la création de la zone franche, Gex est érigée en sous-préfecture et devient le siège de nombreuses administrations; la ville fait preuve de dynamisme.

Depuis les années 1960, Gex connaît un véritable essor lié à celui de Genève. L'implantation du CERN et, en Suisse voisine, des organisations internationales, a contribué à la densification de l'urbanisation de toute la zone frontalière dont Gex, qui compte actuellement 13400 habitants. Son extraordinaire environnement, aux portes du Parc

naturel régional du Haut-Jura et de la Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute Chaîne du Jura, et sa proximité immédiate avec la station Monts Jura en font une étape incontournable pour les amateurs de tourisme vert et de randonnée tout au long de l'année. Reste que l'attrait majeur de Gex, outre son authenticité, réside dans l'exceptionnel panorama sur la chaîne des Alpes, «l'un des plus beaux d'Europe» de l'aveu même de Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

**Monts Jura, terre de nature et de patrimoine**  
Implantée au cœur des plus beaux sommets du Jura, la station Monts Jura<sup>3</sup> saura, en toute saison, répondre aux attentes des amoureux de la montagne. Pour s'adonner aux joies de l'hiver, quatre sites sont offerts. Sur les domaines de Lélex-Crozet, Mijoux-La Faucille et Menthières, les amateurs de ski alpin disposent de pistes adaptées à tous niveaux. Grâce à ses nombreuses remontées mécaniques, ses 21 km de pistes très variées, ses «spots» de poudreuse, Lélex-Crozet est le site phare de Monts Jura dédié au «grand ski». Snowboarders, free riders et kitesurfers trouvent également ici un terrain d'expression sans limites. Un second domaine, celui de Mijoux-La Faucille, offre l'un des plus beaux panoramas d'Europe sur la chaîne des Alpes et le Mont-Blanc. Avec ses 17 km de pistes de ski alpin qui s'écoulent en pentes douces depuis le sommet



Plus de 550 km de chemins de randonnée balisés, comme celui qui grimpe au Turet, scillonnent le Pays de Gex.

du Mont Rond (1596 m), c'est le site idéal pour faire ses premiers «pas» à skis et pour progresser à son rythme et en toute sécurité. Menthières, pour sa part, est un stade de neige parfait pour la découverte et l'initiation aux sports d'hiver. Situé au pied du Crêt d'Eau, ce hameau est le lieu rêvé de détente et de vacances.

Quant au quatrième site, le domaine nordique de La Vattay-Valserine, les amoureux de nature peuvent s'y adonner à la pratique du ski nordique et de la raquette. Avec ses 130 km de pistes qui s'étirent depuis le Plateau de La Vattay jusque dans les forêts du canton de Vaud, en Suisse, ce centre nordique par excellence de renommée internationale est aujourd'hui l'un des plus importants de France.

Pour les amateurs de randonnée, le Pays de Gex et la Haute Chaîne du Jura cumulent plus de 550 km de sentiers balisés à travers montagnes et vallées, combes et crêtes. Du Mont Rond au Reculet en passant par le Crêt de la Neige (point culminant du massif du Jura avec 1720 m d'altitude) et le Colomby de Gex, ils peuvent découvrir une nature préservée et des paysages à couper le souffle au cœur de l'une des plus grandes et belles réserves naturelles nationales de France. ■

Réserve naturelle nationale de la Haute Chaîne du Jura à découvrir dans le prochain numéro du *newSpecial*.

1 [www.divonnelesbains.com](http://www.divonnelesbains.com)

2 [mairie@ville-gex.fr](mailto:mairie@ville-gex.fr)

3 [www.paysdegex-montsjura.com](http://www.paysdegex-montsjura.com)

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Aimeriez-vous partager votre opinion avec nous au sujet de newSpecial et de son contenu?

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Adressez vos commentaires à:  
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Would you like to share your opinion about newSpecial and its contents?

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