

# RatingsDirect®

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## Summary:

# Helvetia Insurance Group

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## Summary:

# Helvetia Insurance Group

**Credit Rating:** A/Stable/--

## Rationale

### Business Risk Profile

- Helvetia Insurance Group (Helvetia) has a solid multiline franchise in the Swiss market and multiple operations in other European countries.
- As the third-largest insurance carrier in Switzerland by premiums, Helvetia benefits from a strong competitive position, in particular in the attractive Swiss property/casualty (P/C) market.
- Helvetia is exposed to low insurance industry and country risk overall, but has significant exposure to the Swiss life market. Almost 43% of total group premiums are from life business in Switzerland.

### Financial Risk Profile

- We assess Helvetia's capital and earnings to be strong on the basis of its sustainably strong capital adequacy and high quality of capital.
- The group has kept a fairly risk-averse diversified asset allocation with about 65% of fixed-income assets rated 'AA' or better.
- We consider that Helvetia maintains adequate financial flexibility. The group has proven good access both to equity and capital markets, while financial leverage increased to still relatively conservative 22.9%.

### Other Factors

- Helvetia's strong business and financial risk profiles result in an 'a' anchor. We expect the group's capital position will remain strongly supported by its relatively stronger operating performance than that of peers.
- We consider Helvetia's management and governance as satisfactory. We expect that the group will maintain its solid track record, with a focus on delivering on its Helvetia 20.20 Strategy.

## Outlook

S&P Global Ratings' stable outlook on Helvetia's core operating companies Helvetia Schweizerische Versicherungsgesellschaft AG and Helvetia Schweizerische Lebensversicherungsgesellschaft AG reflects our base-case assumptions of sustained strong earnings and strong capital adequacy, supported by its well-diversified business model and relatively stronger operating performance compared with that of peers.

### Downside scenario

A downgrade is unlikely in our view, but we would consider lowering the ratings over the next 18-24 months if:

- The group's capital adequacy weakened below what we consider as commensurate with the 'A' rating level on a prolonged basis. This could result from either more aggressive capital management than we currently anticipate, business and capital requirements growth that cannot be financed through earnings retentions, or substantial additional risk-taking on the asset or liability side of the balance sheet;
- Against our base-case assumptions, relative operating performance weakened over a prolonged period, e.g. shown by deterioration of return on equity (ROE) or the group's P/C combined ratio; or
- Financial market conditions deteriorated, against our base-case assumptions, placing increasing pressure on investment returns. This would squeeze margins in the traditional life business with guaranteed rates.

### Upside scenario

We regard an upgrade as a remote possibility over the next 18-24 months. However, we would consider raising the ratings if Helvetia leveraged its international platform and materially increased its footprint in core markets without compromising group profitability while displaying further improved capital adequacy toward levels sustainably at least in the 'AA' range.

## Related Criteria

- General Criteria: Group Rating Methodology, Nov. 19, 2013
- Criteria - Insurance - General: Insurers: Rating Methodology, May 7, 2013
- Criteria - Insurance - General: Enterprise Risk Management, May 7, 2013
- General Criteria: Methodology: Management And Governance Credit Factors For Corporate Entities And Insurers, Nov. 13, 2012
- General Criteria: Criteria Clarification On Hybrid Capital Step-Ups, Call Options, And Replacement Provisions, Oct. 22, 2012
- Criteria - Insurance - General: Refined Methodology And Assumptions For Analyzing Insurer Capital Adequacy Using The Risk-Based Insurance Capital Model, June 7, 2010
- Criteria - Financial Institutions - General: Methodology: Hybrid Capital Issue Features: Update On Dividend Stoppers, Look-Backs, And Pushers, Feb. 10, 2010
- Criteria - Financial Institutions - Banks: Assumptions: Clarification Of The Equity Content Categories Used For Bank And Insurance Hybrid Instruments With Restricted Ability To Defer Payments, Feb. 9, 2010
- General Criteria: Use Of CreditWatch And Outlooks, Sept. 14, 2009
- Criteria - Insurance - General: Hybrid Capital Handbook: September 2008 Edition, Sept. 15, 2008

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