

Interview with Jean Laville, December 2023



Jean Laville, Partner Conser

Jean Laville retired from his position of SSF Deputy CEO at the end of November 2023. He was in this position for almost 10 years and has been active for over 35 years in the financial sector. Since 2012 he has also been partner at Conser, an independent ESG advisory and third-party verification firm for institutional clients.

Jean represented our organisation in Romandie, was responsible for the establishment of the SSF E-learning tools, and supported the team in many other projects with his extensive expertise. With his special focus on institutional asset owners, he helped SSF develop specific guidance for this member group and was also instrumental in the establishment of Building Bridges. We will miss working with him and would like to say goodbye by gaining his insights on the following four questions:

You've worked for SSF since its founding almost 10 years ago. What is the biggest progress in sustainable finance you've observed since then?

When I started at SSF in 2014 there was no comprehensive overview of the Swiss sustainable investment market. That changed in 2016 when we conducted our first Market Study. At that point the proportion of funds in Switzerland with an ESG component in their strategy was less than 5%, this year's Market Study reported 52%. That is a huge change. Sustainable finance has shifted from a niche idea, to a central topic.

A central part of your work at SSF was around engaging Asset Owners with sustainable finance, to drive the demand for sustainable investments. How have you seen their attitude change over time?

Pension funds are the only touch point to investing shared by everyone in the Swiss population, and in recent years the demand for environmental awareness applied within investments has increased. This demand is also reflected in the Swiss political landscape and on the level of pension fund management. The biggest questions I see from pension funds now is "how" to invest sustainably, rather than "why" to invest sustainably, as was the case several years ago. Alongside public demand, market initiatives such as Principles for Responsible Investments initiative (PRI), which was established in 2004, have also stimulated action and more and more institutions have demonstrated that decisive steps can be taken by the industry. The realisation of their role, as the biggest group of shareholders, in shaping and influencing the financial markets towards sustainability has been a positive shift in attitude.

Now that you are stepping away from SSF, what do you see as the most important space for activity for SSF and for its members going forward?

SSF has made a space for members with similar goals to pursue best practice and develop the sustainable finance market in Switzerland. The most important challenge now for SSF is to ensure that Swiss actors have developed the needed expertise to meet the expectations of a leading financial market place in the current climate. Transparency is good, but being able to show actual impact and demonstrating an understanding of the difference between impact generation vs. alignment in financial products is the next level of excellence needed for a leading market position. In order to effectively move forward, data collection and clear methodologies must be laid out by market actors to fill this gap.

After all these years, as Deputy CEO - are there any final thoughts you would like to share?

SSF was a great adventure in my professional life and I thank the Board, the team and the director, Sabine Döbeli, for having allowed this association to effectively reshape the Swiss financial market place towards more sustainability. It was very exciting to accompany the shift in market perception that has been influenced by SSF and its members. Next year, SSF will have its 10 year anniversary and I hope this will allow everyone to look back on the extent to which SSF has been able to mobilise different actors such as banks, asset managers, asset owners, universities, NGO and Federal authorities around its vision of a Swiss financial centre as a leading actor for a better world.

Thank you, Jean, for these insights and your long-year support for SSF!

Zurich, 14 December 2023