FOR HR AND PEOPLE LEADERS

After a loss, work changes.

Bereavement in Swiss organisations: evidence, boundaries and practical choices for the people who shape working life.

Workplace care, with clarity.

Après · Switzerland

THE QUESTION FOR HR

Leave has an end date. A useful response does not.

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office's current table lists **71,904 deaths in 2025**. That number describes deaths, not how many employees, managers or teams experienced a loss. It cannot tell an employer how many people will need support.[1]

What an employer can see is the work around a loss: a conversation that needs care, tasks that must be redistributed, a return that may need adjusting, and colleagues who may also be grieving. This paper looks at those decisions. It does not put a price on a person's grief or offer a Swiss-wide cost estimate.

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THE WORKING DAY

A loss changes more than an absence.

An employee can be back at their desk while the arrangements around them still need attention.

In a Swiss guide written for company leaders, HR, managers and colleagues, the HETSL asks employers to recognise bereavement as an event that may affect both a person and their professional surroundings. Its advice is not to prescribe a single path. It is to prepare for the possibility of loss, communicate carefully and remain attentive over time.[2]

Work can offer familiar routines and connection. It can also become difficult to navigate when the employer assumes that presence equals readiness for an unchanged workload. Someone may want discretion. Another person may prefer colleagues to know. Their wishes can change. A policy should make room for those differences rather than require a performance of grief.

The effects do not stop with the bereaved employee. A manager may need to cover work without exposing private information. Colleagues may be uncertain how to speak to the person returning. If the person who died worked in the organisation, the team may need a coordinated response of its own. The problem is not that every loss produces the same outcome. The problem is that an unprepared organisation leaves too much to improvisation at the hardest moment.[2]

> A DISTINCTION THAT MATTERS
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> Support is not a prediction about how long someone will grieve. It is a set of choices the organisation can revisit with the person concerned.

This is also why a national “grief cost” would be misleading. A death count does not tell us who was employed, how they were related to the person who died, what support was available or what their work looked like afterwards. Those are different questions, requiring different evidence.[1]

AN ILLUSTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Three clocks, one workplace.

Many responses fail not through lack of goodwill, but because three kinds of time are treated as if they were the same.

POLICY TIME	LIVED TIME	WORK TIME
The formal clock	**The person's clock**	**The team's clock**
Leave, payroll, approvals, contractual rules and a scheduled return.	Needs and capacity that may shift, with no standard deadline for grief.	Projects, coverage, colleagues' reactions and decisions that cannot simply pause.

Après's illustrative framework; these are not measured variables or a clinical model.

The legal or contractual clock may offer necessary time away. It cannot, by itself, establish whether a person wants contact during the absence, how a workload should be shared or whether an arrangement still works a month later. HETSL recommends a named contact, flexible arrangements at the return and repeated opportunities to check what is needed.[2]

The person's clock should not become another deadline. An employee might welcome ordinary work, need reduced demands or change their mind. HR can ask instead of inferring. The team's clock still matters: tasks need owners, the manager needs a plan, and colleagues need guidance on what has actually been agreed. A good response holds these needs together without asking the bereaved person to manage everyone else's discomfort.

That makes the gap between the three clocks a **planning question**, not a diagnostic score. Organisations can adjust their own decisions. They cannot determine the correct length or meaning of someone else's grief.

THE SWISS FRAMEWORK

A legal minimum is not a care plan.

In private employment, Article 329 paragraph 3 of the Swiss Code of Obligations provides for the customary hours and days off. SECO names the death of a close relative as an example of a special occasion. The provision does not set one nationwide number of bereavement days. Contract terms, staff regulations, an applicable collective agreement and the individual circumstances matter. Public employment may follow different rules.[3] [4]

Nor is pay during every such absence uniform. SECO distinguishes what has been agreed or is customary, and it treats monthly and hourly remuneration differently. HR should check the applicable arrangement rather than make a promise on the basis of a national figure that does not exist.[4]

An organisation can choose to go further. A written policy may offer additional paid time, flexibility in when leave is used, or a wider understanding of relationships that mattered deeply to the person. Those are **deliberate employer choices**, not automatic claims about Swiss statutory entitlement. A good policy states what can be requested, who will respond and how exceptions are considered.

Privacy is part of care.

A manager may need to organise coverage without explaining a family history or a medical diagnosis to the whole team. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner explains that employee data in private employment must be relevant to the job or necessary for the contract, and processed proportionately. Access should be limited to those who need the information for their work.[5]

Ask the person what they would like shared, with whom and in what words. Then apply the legal test of necessity and proportionality as well. An employee's agreement is not a blank cheque to collect or circulate sensitive details in a dependent employment relationship. A simple operational message may be enough: the person is away, duties have been reassigned, and colleagues will hear more only if and when appropriate.[5]

Duty of care has a wider frame.

Swiss employers have general obligations to protect physical and mental health at work. SECO relates psychosocial risks to working conditions and organisation. This does not mean that the law prescribes a specific grief programme or that a personal loss is, by itself, a workplace-caused risk. It does mean that an employer should not ignore a harmful workload or poor working conditions while someone is navigating a loss.[6]

This is general HR information, not legal or clinical advice. A specific case may require specialist advice under the relevant contract, collective agreement or public-sector rules.

PRACTICE OVER TIME

A response that lasts.

The most useful policy is one a manager can use without turning a difficult conversation into a checklist.

HETSL's Swiss guide recommends preparing before a death occurs, identifying a contact person, asking about communication, offering adjustments at the return and listening over a longer period. None of these steps requires a fixed timetable for grief. Each is an opportunity to agree on the next workable decision.[2]

BEFORE IT HAPPENS Prepare the ground	Write a short policy, clarify who makes decisions about leave and coverage, and make managers familiar with a confidential route to HR or specialist support. Review the policy with people from different roles rather than assuming one family structure.
WHEN THE NEWS ARRIVES Choose one contact	Ask what immediate practical help is welcome, what contact feels right and what may be shared. Confirm the next point of contact without asking the employee to provide a complete plan while events are still unfolding.
BEFORE THE RETURN Adjust the work	Agree how tasks will be covered or paced, what the team has been told and when to revisit the arrangement. Keep the employee's voice central; a standard return date is not a measure of readiness for every task.
AFTER THE RETURN Stay in dialogue	Make room for check-ins in the following months. Review workload and support without imposing a “normal” endpoint. Offer access to appropriate external support where needed; a manager is not expected to act as a clinician.

A workable plan is explicit about responsibilities: HR checks rules and resources; the manager protects the day-to-day workload; the employee decides what they want to share within the relevant legal boundaries. Colleagues can be invited to help, but should not have to guess whether a message, silence or a public gesture would be welcome.

When an arrangement is not working, changing it is not a failure of compassion. The point of a check-in is to learn whether the agreed support still fits the situation. The organisation can adapt duties or timing, while the person can ask for more privacy, more normality or something else entirely.

THE WHOLE TEAM

When a colleague dies, the workplace grieves too.

A colleague's death can affect a team even when no one is formally on bereavement leave. People may need accurate information, space to acknowledge the person and an ordinary way to keep working without pretending nothing happened. Managers may need support themselves. HETSL advises organisations to include this situation in crisis planning and to consider both immediate and longer-term effects on colleagues.[2]

Start with facts, not a rapid announcement. Where possible, consult the family or the person designated to speak for them about what may be shared, then coordinate one respectful message. Do not circulate private medical information or assume that the circumstances of the death should be explained to everyone. The team needs a clear contact and an explanation of how work will be covered; it does not need speculation.[2] [5]

An optional moment of remembrance can be meaningful, but it should remain optional. Different colleagues may want to speak, to stay quiet, to attend a funeral or to work through the day. If the death occurred at work, was sudden or followed a suicide, the organisation should consider a proportionate crisis response and specialist psychological support. Avoid guessing at causes. A single memorial cannot replace follow-up when the initial attention fades.[2]

> **A QUESTION FOR MANAGERS**
>
> What has been agreed with the family or designated contact, what does the team need to know now, and who will check in again once the first days have passed?

Supporting colleagues is not the same as asking them to provide therapy to one another. It is an organisational choice to communicate carefully, distribute work fairly, make appropriate help available and allow grief to be present without making it compulsory to display.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE MODEL

Plan the response. Do not price the grief.

The organisation can account for decisions it makes. It cannot calculate the value, duration or depth of a person's loss.

The model below is a planning aid, not a Swiss statistic or an ROI calculator. It contains no default rates and produces no national figure in francs. It asks HR to use its own actual records for operational decisions and to ask the person about preferences rather than infer them from a category. The three clocks described earlier help show where an arrangement may need to change.

A worksheet for one organisation

Record only what is needed to plan support. Leave the values blank until your organisation has its own information.

Formal arrangements	Which leave, contract or collective-agreement rules apply? What additional flexibility has the employer chosen to offer?
Work coverage	Which tasks were actually reassigned, for how long, and who is responsible for reviewing the load on colleagues?
Support offered	Which manager check-ins, specialist resources or adjustments were made available? Which were wanted by the employee?
Privacy choices	What information is genuinely necessary for work, who may receive it, and what communication has been agreed?
Review point	When will HR, the manager and the employee revisit what is working, without assigning grief a deadline?

If an employer needs to plan a support budget, it can use **its own observed coverage time and actual spending**. Those amounts describe organisational resources, not the cost of bereavement or the value of a human life. Avoid translating a country's total deaths into employees affected, and avoid attributing general Swiss workplace-stress estimates to grief. Neither conversion is supported by the evidence reviewed here.[1]

Small teams also require discretion: a dashboard of individual grief responses could disclose more than it helps. Aggregate information only when there is a legitimate purpose and enough people to protect privacy. The most valuable question may be qualitative: did the person and the team have an arrangement that could be changed when it no longer fitted?[5]

Illustrative model by Après. It is not an epidemiological estimate, a clinical screening tool or a financial valuation of grief.

FROM INTENTION TO PRACTICE

A more human response can be designed.

Many organisations already have caring people. What they may lack is a shared way to act when a difficult moment arrives. Après works in the workplace: building a common language through talks and workshops; shaping policies and practical pathways with employers; and bringing specialist human support to affected employees, managers and teams.

This is not an invitation to standardise grief. A useful framework makes decisions easier while leaving room for different relationships, preferences and ways of returning. It can sit alongside an existing employee assistance programme. It should connect managers to appropriate specialist care when a situation needs it, rather than expect them to become clinicians.

The point is continuity. Prepare before the moment comes. Respond to the person and the team in front of you. Revisit what was agreed. A workplace cannot remove a loss; it can choose not to make the person carry its organisational uncertainty alone.

> APRÈS'S PERSPECTIVE
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> What happens after matters. Even at work.

Après's focus is organisational life around loss and serious illness. At-home caregiving and inheritance or digital-estate administration are outside this remit. Its work is grounded in Switzerland; this paper does not imply that a nationwide service network is already in place.

References.

Published by Après in October 2026. This is a synthesis of publicly available sources and Swiss practice guidance, not an original survey of employees. The numerical context is attributed to the population and year it actually describes; the planning model is illustrative. Source links were reviewed for this edition.

[1] **Federal Statistical Office (FSO).** "Births and deaths," current key-figures table, 2025. The table lists 71,904 deaths in 2025; that is an event count, not a measure of employees in bereavement. View the FSO table ↗
Switzerland · demographic statistic · accessed 5 October 2026.

[2] **HETSL, Lausanne.** Bereavement in the workplace: A guide for companies (2022; current multilingual download page). Guidance for leaders, HR, managers and colleagues on preparation, communication, return to work and support over time. View HETSL and the English guide ↗
Swiss practice guide · recommendations, not a universal legal rule.

[3] **Swiss Confederation, Fedlex.** Code of Obligations, Article 329 paragraph 3, on customary hours and days off in private employment. Read the Code of Obligations ↗
Swiss law · consult the applicable current text and employment arrangement.

[4] **State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).** "Time off and public holidays" FAQ, including special personal occasions, pay and the distinction between private and public employment. Read the SECO FAQ (Italian) ↗
Official guidance · indicative, not a case-specific legal ruling.

[5] **Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC).** "Data processing by the employer" and "Different phases of the employment relationship" ↗. Read the employer guidance ↗
Swiss data protection · especially necessity, proportionality and access limits.

[6] **SECO.** "Health and stress at work: general information," explaining employers' general duties under Employment Act Article 6 and Ordinance 3 Article 2. Read SECO's workplace-health guidance (Italian) ↗
General health protection, not a bereavement-specific mandate.

[7] **Empathy.** The Grief Tax 2025. A US report used as a framing reference for invisible burdens, not as evidence of Swiss prevalence or costs. Its PDF does not disclose sample size and sampling method. No survey percentages from that report have been transferred into this paper. View the US report ↗
United States · 2025 · contextual inspiration only.

START A CONVERSATION

Make room for what comes after.

If your organisation is reviewing its response to loss, Après can begin with a conversation about the people, the work and the choices in front of you.

Contact: info@apres.contact · cal.com/apres/45min
Après is an initiative connected to the Adelma Association.