

Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit)

The Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) - sometimes referred to as the Swiss Border Worker Permit or Swiss Frontier Worker Visa - allows foreign nationals to work in Switzerland while living abroad. This frontier worker route is the main Swiss work permit for foreign nationals seeking access to the Swiss labour market without relocating their residence.

This guide focuses on the immigration law requirements for the Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit), explaining who can qualify for a G Permit, how the application process works, and what frontier workers and cross-border commuters need to consider.

Introduction to the Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit)

The G Permit allows foreign nationals to work in Switzerland while living in another country, provided they maintain their primary residence abroad and return to their country of residence at least once per week. It is granted under different legal frameworks depending on the applicant's nationality.

- EU/EFTA nationals benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), allowing more liberal access to the Swiss labour market.
- Non-EU/EFTA nationals face more restrictive conditions in line with the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (FNIA), including a requirement to hold long-term residence in an EU or EFTA country that borders Switzerland and to have actually resided in the designated border zone of the neighboring country for at least 6 months before applying. An economic interest assessment also applies.

A G Permit may be granted for either employment or self-employment, but in both cases, the applicant must maintain their main residence abroad and meet the weekly return obligation.

Swiss G Permit Requirements for EU and Non-EU Nationals

EU/EFTA Nationals (Free Movement Frontier Workers)

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), EU and EFTA nationals can apply for a Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) if they:

- Maintain lawful residence in an EU/EFTA country (the foreign residence does not need to be in a neighbouring country or specific border zone);
- Have a valid Swiss employment contract or proof of self-employment within Switzerland (EU and EFTA nationals can work anywhere in Switzerland);
- Return to their residence abroad at least once per week.

There are no quota limits for EU/EFTA nationals and cantonal labour market testing does not apply. If the border commuters only return home once per week, they need to register their weekly residence address in Switzerland.

Non-EU/EFTA Nationals (Third-Country Frontier Workers)

Non-EU/EFTA nationals face stricter criteria. They may be granted a Swiss Border Commuter Work Permit (G Permit) only if:

- They hold permanent or long-term residence status in an EU or EFTA country that borders Switzerland (a temporary visitor or short-term visa in the neighbouring country is not sufficient);
- They have resided in the designated border zone of the neighbouring country for at least 6 months before applying;
- They provide a valid employment contract or evidence of legitimate self-employment in the corresponding border zone on the Swiss side;
- They are highly specialised;
- Their Swiss employer has undertaken a thorough labour market search and can demonstrate that no other suitable Swiss or EU candidate can be found for the role, the offered salary and terms are local market standard and their role is necessary for the company to continue thriving on the Swiss market. In the case of self-employed individuals, their employment must be of a certain economical importance for the region or Switzerland as a whole, their job cannot be easily undertaken by Swiss residents and there is an economical benefit for the canton to issue the G permit
- They intend to return to their foreign residence at least once per week.

There are no quota limits for Frontier Worker Permits (G permits) issued to non-EU/EFTA nationals. However, unlike EU/EFTA applicants, only non-EU nationals with an existing right of long-term residence in an EU/EFTA border state and prior 6 month residency in the designated border zone may obtain a G permit. G permits are limited to the border canton that issues the permit and to a specific employment.

The exact requirements you will need to satisfy in order to qualify for a Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) may vary depending on your nationality, personal circumstances and business requirements. We recommend consulting an immigration lawyer specialising in Swiss immigration law for expert advice.

To discuss your application for Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) with our immigration lawyers in Switzerland, contact us on +41 21 588 07 70 or complete an enquiry form.

Primary Residence Abroad

All G Permit holders must keep their primary domicile in another country. The primary residence is where the person's family and personal life is centered. Swiss authorities and tax offices verify this through documents such as foreign residency certificates, rental agreements and purchase contracts.

Since the Frontier Worker Permit (G Permit) is based on non-residency in Switzerland, if a G Permit holder decides to move their main residence to Switzerland, the G permit is no longer appropriate. The person should apply straight away for a residence permit (typically a B or L residence permit) rather than continue on a G Permit.

Residence in a Recognised Border Zone

EU/EFTA applicants can live anywhere in the EU/EFTA and qualify for a G Permit as a cross-border commuter in Switzerland. Because of daily commuting convenience, many EU frontier workers live just across the border (e.g. French citizens living in Ferney-Voltaire and working in Geneva or German nationals living in Loerrach and working in Basel). However, this is not a legal requirement.

Third-country nationals applying for a Swiss Border Commuter Permit must reside in a designated border region of a country adjacent to Switzerland. These border zones are defined by bilateral agreements and cantonal regulations. Typically, these zones include municipalities within 20–30 kilometres of the Swiss frontier. Proof of foreign residence (e.g. lease agreements, property ownership documents, and municipality-issued certificates of residence) are mandatory.

Weekly Return to Residence Abroad

All G Permit holders are legally required to return to their foreign residence at least once per week. This 'weekly return rule' is designed to ensure that frontier workers remain commuters and do not become de facto Swiss residents.

The return requirement is strictly enforced, particularly for non-EU nationals. Cantonal authorities may request proof of border crossings to verify compliance. If the

applicant is found to be living in Switzerland without the appropriate residence permit, the Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) will be withdrawn.

How to Apply for a Swiss Frontier Worker Permit (G Permit)

To apply for a Swiss G Permit, the employer or self-employed individual must submit the application to the relevant cantonal authority in the canton where the work will be undertaken.

The G Permit application process and required documentation vary depending on whether the person is employed or self-employed, and on whether they are an EU/EFTA or non-EU national. EU/EFTA G permit applications are processed exclusively by the cantonal migration authority, whereas Non-EU G permit applications are processed by the cantonal labour and migration authorities, as well as by the Federal Office for Migration (SEM).

Employed Cross-Border Workers (G Permit)

For employed cross-border workers, the Swiss employer files the G Permit application with the competent cantonal authority where the workplace is located.

In the case of EU nationals, the application must be submitted before the individual begins work in Switzerland. In the case of non-EU nationals, the application must be submitted well in advance (ideally 2-3 months prior to the employment start date) and the employee must await the issuance of the G permit prior to starting to work.

EU/EFTA Nationals

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), the process is generally straightforward.

- For employment of up to 90 days per calendar year, no permit is required; an online notification to the authorities is sufficient.
- For employment exceeding 90 days, a G Permit must be obtained. EU/EFTA nationals may generally begin work as soon as the application is lodged. The permit is usually issued within two to four weeks after the filing of the application and it is valid for up to five years for open-ended or long-term contracts, or for the duration of the contract if it is shorter.

Non-EU/EFTA Nationals

For third-country nationals, the Cross-Border Commuter Work Permit procedure is more restrictive and can take 8 to 12 weeks.

The employer must demonstrate that:

- No suitable Swiss or EU/EFTA candidate could be recruited for the position (labour-market priority test);
- The job is important for the company;
- The applicant is well qualified for the role and
- The proposed salary and working conditions meet local standards.

Once approved, the employee will have to have their biometric information taken before the G Permit card is issued. The permit card will be valid for the approved duration of employment and confirm the right to work cross-border.

Self-Employed Cross-Border Workers (G Permit)

For individuals intending to operate their own business or independent professional activity in Switzerland while maintaining residence in another country, the self-employed G Permit offers a legal framework for cross-border entrepreneurship. The requirements and processing times differ significantly between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals.

EU/EFTA Nationals

Under the AFMP, EU and EFTA nationals can apply for a Swiss self-employed Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit), if they have, or will establish, a business presence in Switzerland and maintain their main residence abroad.

To obtain a G Permit, the applicant must demonstrate that the proposed self-employment is genuine and viable. This usually involves submitting:

- A credible business plan outlining the nature of the activity, client base (at least 2-3 clients), independent involvement in the managing of the business, financial self-sufficiency and financial projections;
- Proof of AVS registration as self-employed. Recognition of this status often depends on demonstrating activity for multiple clients and financial autonomy, ensuring that the work is not disguised employment.
- Evidence of a business presence in Switzerland, such as a commercial register extract, lease agreement, or domiciliation certificate; and

- Where relevant, professional authorisation or recognition of qualifications for regulated professions (such as medical, legal or certain technical services).

Cantonal authorities may also request proof that the applicant has Swiss clients or contracts and that the business will generate income. The application for a Cross-Border Commuter Permit is processed by the cantonal Migration office and the processing time is usually 2 to 4 weeks, but may be longer depending on the authorities' workload. Initial G Permits for EU/EFTA nationals are often issued for one year, and once continued activity is proven, they may be extended for up to five years. The permits are renewable.

Non-EU/EFTA Nationals

For third-country nationals, self-employment as a cross-border commuter is exceptional and subject to strict scrutiny. In addition to meeting the border-zone residence and daily or weekly return requirements, applicants must show that their planned business serves Switzerland's economic interests.

Cantonal and federal authorities will assess whether the venture:

- Creates employment for Swiss or EU workers;
- Introduces innovation, investment, or new technologies;
- Contributes to regional economic diversification; or
- Generates contracts or demand for Swiss suppliers or services.

The application is reviewed first by the cantonal labour and migration offices, and then forwarded to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) for federal approval. Processing commonly takes two to three months or longer.

If approved, the G Permit is normally issued for one year, renewable if the business continues to operate successfully and maintains compliance with all legal and economic requirements.

G Permit Duration, Renewal and Expiry

Validity Period of a G Permit

The duration of a Swiss G Permit depends on both the applicant's nationality and the length or nature of the employment or business activity.

For EU/EFTA nationals, the permit is normally valid for up to five years where the employment contract is open-ended or exceeds twelve months. If the engagement is shorter but lasts more than three months, the G Permit will be issued for the duration of the contract.

Where the activity is less than 90 days per calendar year, no permit is issued; the employer or self-employed professional simply uses Switzerland's online notification procedure for short-term work.

An EU/EFTA G Permit remains valid as long as the holder continues to carry out employment or self-employment in Switzerland while maintaining residence in a neighbouring country. The permit is portable within Switzerland - it is possible for an EU border commuter worker to change employer or canton, provided the authorities are notified of the change.

For non-EU/EFTA nationals, initial G Permits are typically granted for one year. They are normally restricted to a specific employer and canton and are valid only for the approved position within the defined border zone. A change of employer or workplace location requires new authorisation.

Renewal of a G Permit

Renewal applications should be submitted to the competent cantonal authority before the current Cross-Border Commuter Permit expires. Most cantons issue reminders, but the obligation to apply in time rests with the permit holder or, in the case of employed persons, their Swiss employer.

To renew a G Permit, the applicant must demonstrate that all qualifying conditions continue to be met:

- Residence abroad (in a designated border zone if a non-EU national), supported by a current certificate of residence, rental agreement or purchase contract;
- At least weekly return home to that residence; and
- Ongoing employment or business activity in Switzerland.

Renewal for EU/EFTA nationals is typically a formality, as their right derives from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP). The permit is renewed as long as employment continues and there is no abuse of rights.

Renewal for non-EU/EFTA nationals is subject to continued compliance with Swiss immigration and labour laws. After five years of uninterrupted employment, a non-EU

national acquires a conditional legal entitlement to renewal for subsequent two-year periods, provided no grounds for revocation exist.

Expiry or Lapse of a G Permit

A G Permit expires automatically at the end of its validity period if not renewed. It may also become invalid before expiry if:

- The holder moves residence into Switzerland;
- The Swiss employment or business activity ceases;
- The holder loses lawful residence in the neighbouring country; or
- The daily/weekly return obligation is no longer fulfilled.

Cantonal authorities must be notified of any material change in circumstances, including change of residence address or employer. Failure to do so can result in revocation and penalties for unauthorised employment.

Importantly, time spent in Switzerland on a Cross-Border Commuter Permit does not count towards the residence periods required for a permanent settlement (C Permit) or for Swiss citizenship, as frontier workers are legally resident abroad.

Rights and Obligations of G Permit Holders

The Swiss Cross-Border (G) Permit allows individuals to work in Switzerland while maintaining their main residence in another country. Upon approval of the application, it confers the right to work for a specific employer or undertake self-employment within Switzerland, but does not grant a right of residence in Switzerland. G Permit holders benefit from Swiss labour and social protections during work periods but remain legally resident abroad.

Employment Rights

Swiss G Permit holders enjoy full protection under Swiss labour law. They are entitled to:

- Swiss-level salaries and employment conditions,
- Paid annual leave and working-time protections, and
- Access to Swiss labour courts in case of employment disputes.

They are also covered by Swiss social insurance systems, including accident insurance and pension contributions (AVS/AHV). In some cases, they may receive Swiss family or parental benefits linked to their Swiss employment.

However, as the G Permit does not grant residence rights in Switzerland, G Permit holders are not entitled to Swiss social assistance or integration benefits; any welfare or support must come from their country of residence.

Mobility and Professional Freedom

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), EU/EFTA nationals benefit from full professional and geographical mobility within Switzerland. They may change employers or work in different cantons, provided these changes are notified to the authorities and they maintain their primary home abroad, returning home at least once per week.

For non-EU/EFTA nationals, mobility is initially restricted. Their G Permit is specific to one employer and canton. Any change of employer or work location requires prior approval from the authorities. After five years of continuous employment, non-EU G Permit holders may apply for broader mobility rights, provided wage and labour-market conditions continue to be met.

Residence Obligations

G Permit holders must maintain a permanent home in a border country and return there daily or at least weekly. They may rent accommodation in Switzerland for the work week, but this must be declared to the local commune as a secondary or weekly residence.

The G Permit does not confer the right to reside in Switzerland long-term, and holders are not eligible for family reunification. Dependents wishing to live or work in Switzerland must obtain their own separate residence or work authorisation.

Social and Civic Rights

Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) holders are treated as non-residents for civic and property purposes:

- They cannot freely acquire residential real estate under Switzerland's Lex Koller foreign ownership rules.
- They have no voting or political rights in Switzerland.

- They are not eligible for local integration measures such as language or settlement programmes.

Time spent in Switzerland under a G Permit does not count towards the residence requirements for a C Permit or Swiss naturalisation. If a G Permit holder later decides to move to Switzerland, they must apply separately for a residence permit (typically a B Permit) and will begin accumulating residence years from that date.

Practical Considerations

Border commuters must comply with Swiss tax and insurance obligations during their employment. They may continue using their foreign vehicle registration and driving licence, since they are not Swiss residents.

In summary, G Permit holders enjoy similar employment protections and obligations as Swiss workers but remain legally and socially connected to their country of residence. The status is ideal for those wishing to access the Swiss labour market without transferring their life and domicile across the border.

Compliance Tips and Common Pitfalls

Maintaining Swiss G Permit compliance is essential. Holders must observe the daily/weekly return rule, maintain residence in the border zone (if a non-EU national), and file correct Swiss and home-country tax documents each year. Failure to comply can result in G Permit revocation or tax penalties.

The following practical measures can help to ensure continued compliance:

- **Observe the daily/weekly return rule:** Maintain evidence of regular travel (fuel receipts, transport tickets, or toll records) in case of inspection.
- **Maintain valid residence abroad:** Either as an owner or as a tenant, maintain valid residence documents in the neighbouring country and, if a third-country national, ensure your domicile remains within the recognised border zone.
- **Register local accommodation:** If staying in Switzerland during the week, notify the commune of temporary residence to comply with local reporting rules.
- **Avoid “pseudo-residence”:** Spending most of the year in Switzerland or moving your family there without authorisation may be treated as unlawful residence. Always apply formally for a residence permit before relocating.
- **Report any change in employment:** EU/EFTA nationals should notify the canton when changing jobs; non-EU nationals must obtain new authorisation before

starting with a different employer or working in a different location.

- **Seek professional advice:** Taxation, telework arrangements, and bilateral agreements evolve regularly. Specialist immigration, social security and tax counsel can help prevent errors that might jeopardise your permit or result in back taxes.

By adhering to these obligations and maintaining clear documentation, G Permit holders can continue to benefit from Switzerland's employment opportunities while enjoying the advantages of cross-border living.

Converting a G Permit to a Swiss Residence Permit (B Permit)

Cross-border workers may eventually decide to relocate to Switzerland - whether to shorten commuting time, accommodate family changes, or for lifestyle purposes. Transitioning from a G Permit (frontier-worker status) to a B Residence Permit (resident status) is possible, but the process differs depending on nationality.

Because a G Permit is tied to residence abroad, moving to Switzerland requires a formal change of immigration status. The individual cannot hold both permits at the same time; upon registration as a resident, the G Permit automatically lapses.

EU/EFTA Nationals

For EU and EFTA citizens, the conversion from G to B status is usually straightforward under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP).

Once the individual moves their principal residence to Switzerland, they may apply for a B Residence Permit (EU/EFTA) by registering with the local commune. The process involves submitting, for example (not exhaustive):

- Proof of Swiss accommodation (rental agreement or property deed);
- A valid employment contract or proof of self-employment; and
- Health-insurance coverage in Switzerland (LAMal policy or equivalent).

The application is largely administrative and does not require labour-market approval or quotas. The B Permit grants full residence rights, including access to family reunification, integration measures, and participation in local life.

From the date of registration, the person usually becomes tax resident in Switzerland and is subject to Swiss health-insurance obligations. Their years for permanent settlement (C Permit) and naturalisation begin counting from this move.

Non-EU/EFTA Nationals

For third-country nationals, conversion is not automatic and is legally treated as a new residence-work permit application under the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (FNIA).

A Swiss employer wishing to retain or relocate a non-EU frontier worker must submit a work-permit application to the relevant cantonal authority. The case is then forwarded to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) for federal approval.

The application is subject to:

- Quota availability for non-EU residence permits;
- Labour-market and economic-interest criteria; and
- The applicant's professional qualifications, typically at a specialist, managerial, or highly-skilled level.

While existing employment on a G Permit may help demonstrate the person's value to the company, approval remains discretionary. Employers must provide a complete supporting file, including evidence of continued need for the applicant's on-site presence.

Non-EU G Permit holders may also qualify for residence under other provisions - for example, family reunification (through marriage to a Swiss resident), study, or other specific permit categories.

After Conversion

Once a B Residence Permit is granted and the individual registers with the local commune of residence, the individual becomes a Swiss resident and the previous G Permit ceases automatically. The change triggers new obligations:

- Taxation as a Swiss resident, rather than under the cross-border regime; and
- Mandatory Swiss health insurance (LAMal) within three months of arrival.

From this point, all residence-based rights apply - including eligibility for family reunification and accumulation of residence years towards long-term settlement.

Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) – FAQs

1. Who can apply for a Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit)?

The G Permit is available to foreign nationals who live outside Switzerland but work within its borders and return home daily or at least once per week. It is most commonly used by residents of France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Liechtenstein who work in nearby Swiss cantons such as Geneva, Vaud, Basel and Ticino.

2. What are the main differences between EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA applicants?

EU/EFTA nationals benefit from free movement rights under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), allowing them to obtain a G Permit without quotas or labour-market testing. Non-EU/EFTA nationals must hold long-term residence in an EU or EFTA country bordering Switzerland, have lived in a designated border zone for at least six months. They must also have either a sponsoring employer who can prove, through a labour market search, that they were the most suitable candidate for the job or, in case of self-employment, show that their business serves Switzerland's economic interests.

3. Do G Permit holders have to return home every week?

Yes. All G Permit holders must return to their foreign residence at least once per week to maintain commuter status. Authorities may request proof of regular travel such as train tickets or toll receipts. Failure to comply can result in revocation of the permit.

4. How long is a G Permit valid for and can it be renewed?

For EU/EFTA nationals, G Permits are normally valid for up to five years for long-term or open-ended employment, or for the duration of a shorter contract. For non-EU/EFTA nationals, initial permits are typically issued for one year, renewable upon proof of continued employment and compliance. Renewal applications must be filed before the permit expires.

5. Will a G Permit allow me to live in Switzerland and bring my family?

No. The G Permit is a work authorisation only and does not confer residence rights or eligibility for family reunification. Holders must maintain their main home abroad. Family members may join cross-border commuters in Switzerland only as visitors or if they obtain their own residence or work permit.

6. Can I later convert my G Permit into a Swiss residence permit (B Permit)?

Yes. Some frontier workers eventually relocate to Switzerland. For EU/EFTA nationals, conversion is largely administrative - they register with their Swiss residence address and apply for a B Residence Permit. For non-EU/EFTA nationals, conversion requires a new application by the employer and is subject to quotas, economic-interest criteria, and federal approval.

How Richmond Chambers Switzerland Can Help

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland, our Swiss immigration lawyers provide expert legal advice to individuals and employers navigating the Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) process. As a specialist Swiss immigration law firm, we combine legal precision with practical insight to help clients manage every aspect of cross-border employment and compliance in all cantons in Switzerland.

Our professional services include:

- Eligibility assessments for employed and self-employed applicants;
- Strategic legal advice for cross-border commuters and Swiss employers;
- Preparation and submission of complete G Permit applications;
- Direct liaison with cantonal and federal immigration authorities; and
- Guidance on converting a G Permit to a Swiss residence permit (B Permit).

Whether you are an EU or non-EU national wishing to obtain a G permit or a Swiss employer recruiting cross-border professionals, our team will ensure your application is compliant, accurate and efficiently handled.

Contact Our Swiss Immigration Lawyers

To discuss your Swiss Cross-Border Commuter Permit (G Permit) application with one of our Swiss immigration lawyers, call +41 21 588 07 70, or complete our online enquiry form.

Richmond Chambers Switzerland is a leading Swiss immigration law firm assisting cross-border workers and employers with all types of Swiss work permits and residence applications.