

SWISS DOMESTIC STAFF PERMITS

Switzerland offers a carefully regulated yet accessible framework for employing foreign domestic workers in private households and family offices. From live-in or live-out nannies, to housekeepers and personal assistants, these roles are subject to distinct permit rules depending on the staff member's nationality, the nature of employment, and canton-specific practices.

Hiring foreign domestic help in Switzerland involves navigating strict immigration regulations, which vary based on the worker's nationality (EU/EFTA vs. non-EU) and the specific role. Families and employers must ensure that they obtain the proper work authorisation for any non-Swiss household staff before work begins, and that salary and working conditions meet minimum standards.

This guide outlines the relevant permit types, eligibility criteria, employer obligations, and common challenges faced by those looking to bring domestic staff into Switzerland.

What Roles Are Covered Under Swiss Domestic Staff Permits?

In Swiss immigration law, the term "domestic staff" encompasses a wide range of household and estate roles carried out in a private home or family property. Common examples include:

- **Nannies and Childcare Providers** - Full-time or part-time, live-in or live-out, with responsibilities for the daily care, education, and well-being of children. This also covers specialised governesses or tutors if they live as part of the household.
- **Housekeepers and Home Assistants** - Including cleaners, cooks, and household managers responsible for the smooth functioning of the home.
- **Caregivers and Personal Nurses** - Providing non-medical in-home care and assistance for elderly family members or persons with disabilities.
- **Personal Assistants and Other Household Staff** - Personal assistants to high-net-worth families, private chauffeurs, cooks/chefs, gardeners, or any other staff employed in the running of a private household or family estate.

These roles, when filled by non-Swiss nationals, are subject to Swiss work and residence permit regulations.

Swiss authorities look at the real duties, not the job title. Calling a domestic role an "administrative assistant" or "property manager" will not change its immigration classification if the work remains household-based.

Hiring EU/EFTA Nationals as Domestic Workers in Switzerland

Hiring domestic staff from an EU or EFTA country is usually the most straightforward route available to private households and family offices in Switzerland. Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), EU/EFTA nationals benefit from streamlined access to the Swiss labour market, simplified registration requirements, and flexible work and residence rights. For families seeking nannies, housekeepers, caregivers, or other household staff, the process is largely administrative, provided that registration and employment rules are correctly followed.

Entry and Right to Work

EU/EFTA nationals do not require a work visa or prior authorisation to enter Switzerland for employment. They may travel to Switzerland freely and begin the registration process after arrival. Their right to take up employment is grounded in the AFMP, which grants both residence and occupational mobility without labour market restrictions or quotas. This means employers are not required to demonstrate that no suitable Swiss or EU candidates are available - a significant difference from the requirements for non-EU workers.

Employment for Up to 90 Days: Online Notification System

Short-term domestic employment of up to 90 days per calendar year is subject only to an online notification procedure. Before the work begins, the employer (or worker) must notify the authorities through an official electronic system - ideally at least one day before the first day of work. No physical residence permit is issued for these engagements.

This system is frequently used for temporary or seasonal domestic roles, such as:

- A part-time nanny working only a few months per year
- A short-term housekeeper assisting during a relocation
- Temporary support staff for events, holiday periods, or seasonal needs

Even though the process is relatively straightforward, employers must ensure that the total number of working days does not exceed the 90-day limit. If the EU/EFTA worker exceeds 90 workdays without switching to a residence permit, the household risks being in breach of registration rules even if the employment is otherwise lawful.

Employment Over 90 Days: L and B Residence Permits

Where domestic employment exceeds 90 days - whether for a full-time nanny, a live-out housekeeper, or a long-term caregiver - the worker must obtain a Swiss residence permit. The permit is issued on the basis of the employment contract and other standard requirements such as health insurance and suitable accommodation. There are no quotas, no labour market tests, and no salary benchmarking against domestic labour shortages.

After arriving in Switzerland, the worker must register at the local commune within 14 days and before beginning work. Depending on the contract duration, one of the following permits will be issued:

- **EU/EFTA L Permit** – For employment of up to one year or other short-term engagements
- **EU/EFTA B Permit** – For contracts longer than one year or for ongoing/indefinite roles

Permits can be renewed, and B permit holders may become eligible for a C permit (permanent residence) after five years of continuous, compliant residence.

Occupational Mobility and Flexibility

Once registered in Switzerland, EU/EFTA domestic workers enjoy full occupational mobility. They may change employers, roles, or cantons without requiring additional authorisation, provided they update their registration or permit details with their new employment information.

EU domestic staff may also work part-time, have multiple employers simultaneously, or combine domestic work with other roles, as long as each engagement is properly registered and complies with Swiss labour law.

Compliance with Swiss Labour Law

Although the immigration process is simplified for EU workers, employers must still adhere to all applicable Swiss labour regulations. Domestic staff must receive a compliant employment contract, including fair wages that meet cantonal minimum standards, appropriate working hours, social insurance coverage, occupational accident insurance, and tax withholding where required. EU nationals are entitled to the same protections under Swiss labour law as Swiss workers and non-compliance can trigger enforcement action.

Family Reunification

EU/EFTA domestic staff may be joined by their immediate family members under the AFMP family reunification rules, provided they hold a valid residence permit and sufficient accommodation. While many domestic workers relocate alone for live-in roles, the legal right to family reunification nonetheless applies.

Hiring Non-EU Domestic Staff in Switzerland

As a general rule, Swiss households and family offices cannot sponsor new non-EU/EFTA nationals for domestic staff roles such as nannies, housekeepers, cleaners, chauffeurs, or non-medical caregivers. Under Swiss immigration law, work permits for third-country nationals are reserved for highly skilled specialists who meet strict economic-interest and labour-market criteria. Standard household and caregiving jobs do not qualify, so applications for new non-EU domestic staff permits are almost always refused.

In practice, there are only two realistic exceptions to this rule:

1. **Executive relocation (long-standing employee) exception** – where a relocating family brings an existing domestic worker to Switzerland.
2. **Hiring a non-EU domestic worker already living in Switzerland** – where the person's current residence permit allows household employment.

Outside these limited scenarios, new Swiss work permits for non-EU domestic workers are not issued.

1. Executive relocation exception (bringing an existing employee)

A narrow, discretionary exception may apply if a family moves to Switzerland and needs to relocate a trusted long-serving domestic employee. Often used by senior executives, diplomats, and internationally mobile families, this route allows a non-EU household worker to obtain a Swiss work and residence permit only where the prior relationship is well-documented.

To qualify, the domestic worker must have:

- At least two years' prior employment with the family abroad;
- Strong documentary evidence of that relationship (employment contracts, payslips, payroll or tax records);

- A Swiss-compliant employment contract covering duties, salary, working hours, insurance, and accommodation, in line with the relevant NAV and Swiss labour standards.

If approved, the worker usually receives an employer-specific L permit (renewable) and, for longer assignments, may be eligible for a B permit. Cantonal authorities retain broad discretion, so carefully prepared evidence and a credible explanation of ongoing need are essential.

2. Hiring a non-EU domestic worker already in Switzerland

Families may employ a non-EU national who already resides in Switzerland if their current permit authorises domestic employment. Common examples include:

- Spouses of Swiss or EU/EFTA nationals
- Recognised refugees with work rights
- Students (within permitted working-hour limits)
- Certain B-permit holders whose permits are not tied to a specific employer

In these cases, no new work permit is required, but employers must verify the individual's permit conditions in advance - especially where a B permit restricts changes of employer or type of work.

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland we assist clients in assessing eligibility, preparing exception-based applications, and ensuring full compliance with Swiss immigration and labour rules when employing domestic staff.

Employer Obligations for Domestic Staff in Switzerland

Employing domestic staff in Switzerland - whether EU/EFTA nationals or non-EU workers admitted under an exception - brings mandatory legal duties. Swiss labour law, the Code of Obligations, and federal or cantonal Normalarbeitsverträge (NAVs) set minimum standards on pay, working conditions, and administration. In practice, employing domestic staff resembles running a small business and employers must be ready to meet these requirements in full.

Core obligations include:

- **Written employment contract** stating duties, schedule, salary (including any legally permitted in-kind benefits), holidays, notice periods, and any NAV-permitted deviations. Mandatory NAV rules - especially minimum wage

and sick-pay protections - cannot be waived.

- **NAV minimum salary** (as set federally or by canton). For live-in staff, board and lodging may be credited only at the legally fixed value, and overall pay must still meet NAV minima.
- **Working hours and rest** consistent with NAV and Code expectations. Many cantons expect roughly 40–43 hours/week, clear off-duty time for live-in staff, at least one full day off weekly, and proper overtime compensation.
- **Social insurance registration and contributions**, including AHV/IV/EO, ALV, accident insurance (plus non-occupational cover for 8+ hours/week), BVG pension contributions where income meets the threshold, and family allowances if applicable. Employers must deduct the employee share and remit totals on time.
- **Withholding tax (Quellensteuer)** for foreign workers without a C permit, calculated and paid monthly.
- **Permit and registration compliance** before work begins, plus timely renewals and updates if duties, hours, or canton change.
- **Live-in housing standards**, including a private, habitable room provided free of charge, with privacy respected and working/off-duty boundaries clearly defined.

Failure to comply such as underpayment, missing insurance contributions, or employing without a permit can lead to fines, back payments, and criminal liability. Many families use payroll services or specialist agencies, but legal responsibility remains with the employer.

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland, we can advise households and family offices on compliant contracts, permits, social insurance, and tax obligations from the outset.

Family Offices and Domestic Staff in Switzerland

Many high-net-worth families use Swiss family offices to manage assets and household operations. A recurring question is whether the family office can employ domestic staff - such as nannies, housekeepers, chauffeurs, caregivers, or household managers - instead of individual family members. The short answer is yes, but the family office structure does not change the immigration rules that apply to domestic work.

A Swiss family office may legally hire domestic staff and assign them to the family's private residences. This can be practical where the family office already runs payroll, HR, and compliance systems. However, the employment relationship must still comply fully with Swiss labour law and the relevant cantonal or federal Normalarbeitsvertrag (NAV). Authorities assess the role based on actual duties, so a job remains "domestic" for regulatory purposes even if it sits on a corporate employment contract.

For EU/EFTA nationals, hiring through a family office is straightforward. The worker registers under free-movement rules in the usual way, and the corporate employer mainly provides administrative convenience rather than any immigration advantage.

For non-EU nationals, a family office cannot create a new permit route. Standard domestic roles (nannies, cleaners, housekeepers, non-medical caregivers) still cannot be sponsored. Re-labelling a domestic post with a corporate title will not succeed if the work remains household-based. The only situations where a non-EU domestic hire may be possible are the same as for private households:

- the executive relocation (long-standing employee) exception, where a relocating family brings an existing domestic worker with at least two years' prior employment abroad; or
- rare cases involving a genuinely senior, specialised household/estate manager role that meets skilled-worker criteria and can be clearly evidenced.

In summary, a family office can be the employer of domestic staff in Switzerland, and this often simplifies payroll and compliance. But immigration eligibility is unchanged: EU/EFTA domestic hires remain the easiest route, while non-EU domestic hiring is restricted to narrow exceptions.

Process for Hiring Domestic Staff in Switzerland

Hiring a nanny, housekeeper, caregiver, chauffeur, or other domestic worker in Switzerland follows a clear legal process. In most cases, the steps are:

1. Confirm the role and canton.

Define the duties (live-in or live-out, childcare, housekeeping, caregiving, estate support) and identify which canton will administer the permit and NAV rules.

2. Check the worker's nationality and permit route.

The process differs significantly for EU/EFTA nationals versus non-EU hires, where permits are only possible under limited exceptions.

3. Prepare a NAV-compliant employment contract.

Draft a written contract covering duties, hours, salary, overtime, holidays, notice, accommodation (if live-in), and any canton-specific NAV requirements.

4. File the correct authorisation.

EU/EFTA up to 90 workdays/year: submit the online notification before work starts.

EU/EFTA over 90 days: register at the commune and apply for an L or B permit.

Non-EU executive relocation cases: submit a cantonal work/residence permit application with full supporting evidence.

5. Register as an employer and set up payroll compliance.

Complete AHV/ALV registration, arrange accident insurance (and BVG where required), set up Quellensteuer withholding if applicable, and issue compliant payslips.

6. Start employment and monitor renewals.

Employment begins only once authorisation is in place. Employers must track permit expiry dates, canton changes, and any contract updates to remain compliant.

Typical Timeline for Swiss Domestic Staff Permits

Timeframes vary by canton and case complexity, but the usual expectations are:

- **EU/EFTA domestic staff for up to 90 workdays/year:**
Notification must be filed before the first day of work. Authorisation is immediate once properly submitted.
- **EU/EFTA domestic staff for more than 90 days:**
The worker registers at the commune after arrival, and the L or B permit is processed following registration. Processing is typically straightforward, provided the contract and documentation are complete.
- **Non-EU domestic staff under the executive relocation exception:**
These applications are discretionary and evidence-heavy, so processing often takes several weeks to a few months, depending on the canton and the strength of the documentation.

FAQs: Swiss Domestic Staff Permits

1. Can I hire a foreign nanny or housekeeper in Switzerland?

Yes, but the process depends on nationality. EU/EFTA domestic staff can be hired relatively easily under free movement rules, subject to registration and labour-law compliance. Non-EU domestic staff cannot usually be sponsored for standard household roles unless a narrow exception applies.

2. What permits do EU/EFTA domestic workers need in Switzerland?

For EU/EFTA domestic staff in Switzerland, work of up to 90 days per calendar year uses the online notification procedure. Employment lasting longer than 90 days requires an EU/EFTA L permit (up to 1 year) or EU/EFTA B permit (over 1 year/indefinite), issued after local commune registration.

3. Can Swiss households sponsor non-EU domestic staff?

In most cases, no. Swiss work permits for non-EU domestic workers are almost never granted for roles like nanny, cleaner, housekeeper, or caregiver because these jobs do not meet Switzerland's "highly skilled specialist" criteria under the FNIA.

4. Is there any exception allowing a non-EU domestic worker to come to Switzerland?

Yes, in limited cases. The main route is the executive relocation (long-standing employee) exception, where a relocating family can bring an existing non-EU domestic worker who has worked for them abroad for at least two years, supported by strong documentary evidence and a Swiss-compliant contract. Approval is discretionary and canton-dependent.

5. Can I employ a non-EU domestic worker who already lives in Switzerland?

Often, yes. Non-EU nationals already in Switzerland may work as domestic staff if their current permit allows employment (e.g., spouses of Swiss/EU nationals, recognised refugees, some students, or permit holders not tied to one employer). Employers must check the conditions of the worker's permit before hiring.

6. What legal obligations apply when employing domestic staff in Switzerland?

Employers must follow Swiss labour law and the applicable cantonal or federal NAV. Key duties include a written contract, NAV-minimum salary, reasonable working hours and rest, registration for AHV/IV/EO, ALV, accident insurance, and BVG where

required, withholding tax for non-C-permit holders, valid permits/registration before work starts, and compliant housing for live-in staff. Non-compliance can lead to fines or criminal liability.

How Richmond Chambers Switzerland Can Help

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland, we support private households and family offices with Swiss domestic staff permits and full employment compliance. Our immigration lawyers can assess whether your nanny, housekeeper, caregiver, au pair, or household manager can be hired legally, and advise on the most suitable permit route for EU/EFTA and exceptional non-EU cases.

We handle the process end-to-end, including work and residence permit applications, liaison with cantonal authorities, and NAV-compliant employment contracts. We also guide employers on AHV/social insurance registration, withholding tax, payroll setup, and ongoing obligations, ensuring you remain fully compliant throughout the employment.

If you are relocating to Switzerland with long-standing household staff, hiring live-in domestic workers, or structuring employment through a family office, we can provide clear strategy and practical support to maximise approval and avoid compliance risk.

For tailored advice on hiring domestic staff in Switzerland, contact Richmond Chambers Switzerland on +41 21 588 07 70 or submit an online enquiry.