

Swiss Intra-Company Transfer Permit (ICT Permit)

The Swiss Intra-Company Transfer (ICT) Permit is a practical route used by international companies or multinational groups to temporarily relocate key personnel to Switzerland to work for a Swiss group entity - typically a Swiss subsidiary, branch, or affiliate. It is often used where the Swiss operation needs access to senior leadership, management oversight, or specialist expertise that is already embedded within the wider corporate group.

Although the term “Swiss ICT permit” is widely used as a commercial label, in practice the transfer is implemented through Switzerland’s wider work and residence authorisation system, administered primarily at cantonal level (and, for many third-country cases, with federal approval). In other words, the outcome is usually a Swiss residence permit (L or B) that authorises work for the Swiss host entity for the duration of the assignment.

ICT applications must clearly evidence the commercial rationale for the transfer, the corporate relationship between the sending and Swiss entities, the scope and duration of the Swiss assignment, the individual’s credentials and compliance with Swiss requirements in terms of salary, working conditions, and (where applicable) labour-market and quota controls.

In this guide we explain who the Swiss ICT Permit is suitable for, the main legal and practical requirements, the application process and the key strategic considerations that can materially affect processing times and success rates.

To discuss your application for a Swiss Intra-Company Transfer Permit, contact our immigration lawyers in Switzerland on +41 21 588 07 70 or complete an enquiry form.

At a Glance: Key Features of the Swiss ICT Permit

The Swiss ICT pathway is commonly attractive because it can offer:

- **Mobility within a multinational group:** It supports internal reallocation of talent where Swiss operations need continuity, governance, or specialist know-how from within the group.
- **Facilitated access for non-EU/EFTA nationals:** It provides a pathway for the issuance of short-term or long term work permits for non-EU/EFTA nationals without the need of a labour market search.

- **Permit flexibility aligned to assignment length:** Short-term transferees are commonly issued an L Permit, while longer-term assignees may be issued a B Permit, subject to eligibility and canton practice.
- **Family relocation planning:** In many cases, a spouse/partner and dependent children can join the transferee, subject to the usual **Swiss family reunification** criteria and local practice.

What Is a Swiss ICT Permit?

In practice, a Swiss ICT transfer is a work authorisation and residence permission issued for an intra-group assignment. It is mainly used for non-EU/EFTA nationals, since EU/EFTA nationals are mostly hired locally to benefit from the work and residence pathway provided by the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP).

For all non-EU/EFTA nationals, or in the case of EU/EFTA nationals who remain on foreign contract and payroll during the duration of the assignment, the employing or Swiss group company applies to the competent cantonal authority for a work authorisation.

In assessing an ICT application, authorities will look in particular at whether the transferee is genuinely being transferred within a corporate group, has an appropriate level of seniority or specialist capability, will be employed on Swiss-standard terms and will perform a short or longer term assignment, usually limited in time.

Work permit applications are submitted to the cantonal authority competent for the location where the employee will work. Two applications with similar facts can be treated differently depending on canton, sector, and how the case is evidenced.

The admission of non-EU/EFTA workers, as well as of EU/EFTA nationals assigned to Switzerland and who are not locally hired, is governed by the Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA) and its implementing ordinances, in particular the Ordinance on Admission, Period of Stay and Employment (OASA). The intra-company transfer route described on this page reflects how such transfers are assessed in practice within that national framework; Switzerland is not part of the EU Intra-Corporate Transferee (ICT) Directive and applies its own domestic rules, quotas and policy criteria.

Position of EU/EFTA Nationals in an ICT Context

EU/EFTA nationals benefit from free movement rights if locally hired by a Swiss entity (on a limited or unlimited employment contract).

To benefit from the AFMP derived rights, in many cases, EU/EFTA transferees are issued a Swiss employment contract for the duration of the assignment, as this is often more efficient and less costly from a payroll, tax, or social security perspective. Swiss employment contracts for EU/EFTA nationals on an ICT assignment are accepted by the Swiss authorities, provided Swiss employment law standards are met.

Where an EU/EFTA national remains on a foreign employment contract and in the foreign social security system, the work permit application will be governed by the Swiss Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA), similar to non-EU/EFTA nationals. While authorities will still review the role, remuneration, and compliance with Swiss working conditions, requirements around prior group employment, role seniority, and assignment structure are applied more flexibly in practice. However, there are specific EU/EFTA work permit quotas in place for such assignments that last longer than 4 months and a work permit can only be issued if there is a work permit quota available, similar to non-EU/EFTA nationals.

Overall, ICT-style transfers involving EU/EFTA nationals are primarily set-up as local hires and thus assessed through the lens of free movement compliance and Swiss labour standards, rather than the more restrictive non-EU/EFTA national ICT criteria.

Eligibility Requirements for a Swiss Intra-Company Transfer Permit

In general, Swiss ICT applications need to show that the transfer is a genuine, high-value intra-group assignment that complies with Swiss employment and immigration laws. Key elements typically include:

- **Prior employment within the group:** ICT transfers are usually intended for employees who are already embedded in the organisation. In practice, for non-EU/EFTA nationals, it is a requirement that there is a prior group employment of 12 months. This supports the case that the individual has institutional knowledge and is being moved for genuine intra-company reasons. Where prior employment is shorter, either the evidential burden increases or a work permit may not be obtained via the ICT route, depending on cantonal practice.
- **Appropriate role level: executive, manager or specialist:** Authorities expect non-EU/EFTA national ICT transferees to hold roles where the Swiss entity benefits from leadership or expertise that is not easily sourced at short notice. Strong cases typically involve senior managers with decision-making authority and

governance responsibilities, executives overseeing Swiss operations or key Swiss functions or specialists with niche technical, operational or regulated skills that are genuinely material to Swiss delivery.

- **A clear corporate link between the sending and Swiss entities:** The Swiss host must be a genuine group company. Depending on the practice of each canton and how well-known the company is by the authorities, more or less detailed corporate documentation demonstrating the relationship will be required.
- **Swiss-standard salary and working conditions:** Salary and employment conditions must meet Swiss local standards for the relevant region and sector. This is a core element of Swiss work authorisation. Employers should expect scrutiny of gross salary and allowances, working hours, holidays and benefits and how the role and package compare to Swiss market benchmarks for similar positions.
- **A defined, temporary assignment:** A credible ICT case is usually framed around a clear assignment rationale and duration of up to 4 - 5 years - what the assignee will do in Switzerland, why it must be this individual and how long the assignment is expected to last.
- **Quotas:** All foreign nationals, including EU/EFTA nationals, who remain on a foreign employment contract and are affiliated to a foreign social security system during the duration of their assignment will be required to obtain a quota work permit if the assignment lasts more than 4 months/120 days. Work permits issued for assignments of up to 4 months/120 days are quota-free.

Who Can Qualify for a Swiss ICT Permit?

The Swiss ICT Permit route is generally intended for the following categories of personnel:

- **Executives and senior managers:** Individuals who will lead or manage a business line or department, take governance responsibility, or implement group strategy in Switzerland.
- **Highly skilled specialists:** Individuals with rare, proprietary or business-critical expertise that is directly relevant to the Swiss entity, particularly where knowledge transfer, continuity or time-critical delivery is required.

- **Other qualified employees of an established multinational group:** For example global graduates of an international group of companies undertaking an on-the-job rotation in Switzerland.

For short assignments, the 90-day notification procedure or a quota free 120 day/4 month work permit may be more appropriate. Our Swiss immigration lawyers can advise employers on how best to structure corporate assignments and what is the best fit for any planned deployment.

Who Cannot Qualify for a Swiss ICT Permit?

The Swiss ICT route is designed for intra-group transfers. Applications are generally weak or unsuitable where the core features of an ICT assignment are missing.

- **Individuals without a credible intra-group assignment profile:** This includes people who are not meaningfully established within the group.
- **Junior employees, trainees (with the exception of so-called “global graduate trainees”) or non-specialist staff:** If the role is not genuinely senior or specialist, Swiss authorities are more likely to treat it as a position that should be filled from the local or EU/EFTA labour market.
- **Contractors or external consultants:** ICT transfers are normally reserved for employees of the group. Third-party consultants and independent contractors will not generally fit within an ICT framework.
- **Employers without a Swiss group presence:** If there is no Swiss branch, subsidiary or affiliate, there is no intra-company element, and the case should be structured differently.

Application Process for a Swiss Intra-Company Transfer (ICT) Permit

Swiss ICT Permit applications follow a structured process, with applications submitted by either the Swiss host entity or the foreign sending entity:

Step 1: Work authorisation filing (cantonal stage)

The Swiss or employing entity (or their immigration lawyer) submits the ICT Permit application to the competent cantonal authority, enclosing evidence of the intra-group

relationship, such as group charts and corporate documents (unless the company is very well known to the authorities and/or the authority already has these documents on file), a Swiss role description, the transferee's CV, qualifications and proof of seniority or specialist status, the assignment letter (including salary, assignment allowances and working-conditions aligned with Swiss standards) and a clear business rationale explaining why the transferee is required in Switzerland. The canton then reviews the application, may request further information, and, where required, coordinates with the federal authority.

Step 2: Federal stage (where applicable)

For many non-EU/EFTA nationals, the file is then considered at federal level in addition to the canton. This stage can be critical where labour-market policy or broader migration priorities are engaged.

Step 3: Work authorisation approval and entry clearance (if required)

If the transferee needs an entry visa, the competent Swiss consulate issues a Type D or C visa (depending on the duration of assignment), once authorisation has been granted by the cantonal migration authority.

Step 4: Arrival, registration and permit issuance

After arrival in Switzerland, a transferee who will remain in Switzerland for more than 90 days and has been issued a work authorisation for more than 120 days/4 months, completes local registration with the competent communal authority including attendance at a biometrics appointment, following which the Swiss residence permit card is issued, confirming lawful residence and work authorisation. The employee can legally start to work after the registration.

ICT Residence Permit Types and Duration

Swiss intra-company transfers are usually implemented through either an L Permit or a B Permit, depending on the length and nature of the assignment.

L Permit (short-term transfer)

Typically used for defined, short-term assignments. An L Permit is granted for assignments of up to 12 months and may be extended to a maximum of 24 months. The issuance of a L permit card with a validity of more than 4 months/120 days is subject to the availability of a work permit quota, the registration of the assignee at the competent Swiss commune of

residence prior to taking up employment in Switzerland, and attendance at a biometrics appointment. For short term assignments of up to 4 months or 120 days per calendar year, work permits are quota-exempt and no registration at the local commune is required.

B Permit (longer transfer)

Issued for longer-term assignments of more than one year, provided that a quota is available. A post arrival registration at the competent Swiss commune of residence and a biometrics appointment are necessary for the issuance of a B residence permit card.

As practice varies between cantons, and the right permit strategy depends on factors such as role, duration of transfer and the availability of quotas at the time of filing, it is important to align permit planning with the assignment plan from the outset.

Family Reunification

Whether **family reunification** is possible, and on what terms, will mainly depend on the type of permit granted, the duration of assignment and the family relationship.

Family reunification should be planned from the outset. In practice, this means ensuring that suitable housing is available in Switzerland with sufficient space for all family members; demonstrating that the family can be financially supported, taking into account salary levels and local living costs; and confirming whether, and on what basis, a spouse or registered partner will be able to work in Switzerland, as this varies by permit type, nationality and canton.

Proactive planning in these areas can make the assignment more attractive for the transferee and significantly reduce the risk of delays or complications for accompanying family members.

Key Advantages of the Swiss ICT Permit

The Swiss Intra-Company Transfer framework offers a number of strategic advantages:

- **No need for a time-consuming and costly labour market search:** one of the main advantages of the Swiss ICT Permit pathway is the fact that it does not require a local labour market search, thus avoiding timely and costly procedures for the company.

- **Operational continuity and speed of deployment:** ICT transfers make it possible to mobilise trusted leaders and specialists to Switzerland relatively quickly compared to hiring a new employee locally, helping to maintain service delivery, provide on-the-ground governance and oversight, and execute time-critical strategic initiatives.
- **Alignment with Switzerland's skilled migration profile:** Where the transferee is genuinely senior or highly specialised, an ICT case often fits well within Switzerland's preference for selective, high-value labour migration, which can make the business rationale more compelling.
- **Business certainty through defined assignment planning:** A well-structured ICT assignment reduces operational risk for the Swiss entity by ensuring that appropriate leadership and capability are in place for the full duration of a project, transition period or business phase.
- **Family stability and retention through reunification options:** For long-term assignments, family reunification is usually available. The ability to relocate with a spouse/partner and dependent children can be a decisive factor in securing the transferee's agreement to the move and supporting longer-term retention.

The Swiss ICT permit provides multinational groups with a straightforward legal pathway to deploy key talent to Switzerland while maintaining control, continuity and predictability in their Swiss operations.

Key Challenges of the Swiss Intra-Company Transfer Permit

Despite its advantages, the ICT route also involves challenges that should be factored into early planning and internal stakeholder expectations.

- **Work permit quota limitations for permits valid for more than 4 months/120 days:** Work and residence permits issued to non-EU/EFTA nationals require the availability of a quota. Even EU/EFTA permits are subject to quotas if the assignees remain on a foreign employment contract and affiliated in their home social security system during the duration of the ICT.
- **Cantonal variability:** Requirements, evidential expectations and scrutiny levels differ between cantons; documentation that is acceptable in one canton may attract further questions or additional conditions in another.

- **Temporary limits and the need for forward planning:** Because ICT transfers are generally framed as temporary, employers should plan from the outset for what will happen at the end of the assignment if there is a wish to retain the individual in Switzerland.
- **Salary compliance and documentation risk:** Misalignment with Swiss salary, assignment allowances and employment standards, which are usually high compared to other countries - or unclear presentation of base pay, allowances and variable elements - is a frequent cause of delay or refusal, especially in complex assignment structures.

By recognising these challenges early and structuring the assignment, documentation and timelines accordingly, employers can significantly improve the prospects of a smooth, timely and compliant Swiss ICT transfer.

Swiss ICT Permit FAQs

Is the Swiss ICT Permit only for non-EU/EFTA nationals?

No. EU/EFTA nationals can also relocate intra-group, but they usually follow a different, more liberal residence and work framework by signing a Swiss employment contract with the Swiss entity. The “ICT” label is most often used for third-country nationals who require employer-led authorisation.

How long can I stay in Switzerland on an ICT transfer?

ICTs are usually designed to last for between 4 and 5 years. ICT transfers are commonly structured on an L Permit for 12 to 24 months assignments or a B Permit for longer assignments.

Does an ICT transfer lead directly to a Swiss C Permit (settlement)?

Yes it can. However, in practice, ICT transfers are often designed as temporary assignments for a limited duration of stay in Switzerland, which does not allow the assignees to accumulate sufficient residence time to apply for a settlement permit.

Can I change my role or employer while in Switzerland on an ICT transfer?

It all depends on the type of permit obtained and the nationality of the employee. For non-EU/EFTA nationals, a significant change in position, duties, salary level or employing

entity will usually require a new authorisation. Any proposed changes should therefore be reviewed in advance to avoid inadvertently breaching permit conditions.

Why are Swiss ICT applications refused?

Common reasons include weak evidence of the employee's specialist or managerial profile or of the necessity to employ the individual in Switzerland, an unclear intra-group link, salary or conditions below Swiss standards, inconsistent or incomplete documentation, and quota constraints.

Do I need to show that no Swiss or EU/EFTA national can do the job for an ICT transfer?

In principle no, if the application is well drafted and it is a genuine ICT case. This is one of the most significant advantages for non-EU nationals compared to applying for a standard non-EU work permit as a new local hire.

When should I start the Swiss ICT Permit process and how long does it take?

Employers should start planning several months before the intended assignment start date, especially for non-EU/EFTA nationals. Overall timing depends on the workload of the competent authorities and the complexity of the case. Early preparation allows the assignment structure, documentation and salary benchmarking to be aligned before filing and reduces the risk of avoidable delay.

How Richmond Chambers Switzerland Can Help

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland we advise multinational groups and senior professionals on Swiss intra-company transfers, including identifying the best legal and operational structure and preparing applications designed to meet cantonal and (where relevant) federal expectations.

Our professional support typically includes:

- **Eligibility assessment and transfer strategy.** We can review your corporate structure, role profile, assignment plan, and nationality considerations to confirm whether an ICT structure is appropriate or whether an alternative Swiss work authorisation route is more suitable.
- **Application drafting and documentation management.** We can prepare the full Swiss ICT Permit submission, including corporate-link evidence, seniority/specialist

justification, Swiss salary benchmarking narrative, and assignment documentation alignment.

- **Cantonal, Federal and Consular liaison.** We can manage authority engagement, respond to requests for information, and ensure the case remains coherent and compliant throughout.
- **Family relocation planning.** We can advise on family reunification sequencing and the practicalities of spouse work permissions and local registration requirements.
- **Forward planning for longer-term retention.** If your business intends to retain the transferee beyond the initial assignment horizon, we can advise on lawful options and timing so the company can plan proactively.

We provide practical, end-to-end support so that your transfer is structured correctly, evidenced properly, and progressed efficiently from initial strategy through to successful permit issuance and arrival formalities in Switzerland.

Contact Our Immigration Lawyers in Switzerland

If you are considering an intra-company transfer to Switzerland, or are planning to relocate a key employee to a Swiss group entity, our Swiss immigration lawyers can provide clear, strategic advice on the most appropriate permit structure and application approach. We regularly advise both multinational employers and senior professionals on Swiss ICT transfers, including eligibility, timing, documentation, and canton-specific requirements.

To discuss a Swiss Intra-Company Transfer (ICT) Permit application, please contact our Swiss immigration team on +41 21 588 07 70 or complete our online enquiry form.