

## SWISS WORK PERMIT FOR EMPLOYED WORKERS

Switzerland issues different types of residence permits for employed work. The appropriate Swiss work permit route depends primarily on whether you are an EU/EFTA national (benefiting from free movement rights) or a non-EU/EFTA national (subject to a quota-based and highly selective admission system).

In practical terms, EU/EFTA nationals typically secure a Swiss work permit (often a B permit) upon signature of a Swiss employment contract and after they take up residency in Switzerland. Non-EU/EFTA nationals require an employer-led work authorisation process approved by cantonal authorities and the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) prior to being able to take up residency and legally starting to work in Switzerland. Visa nationals also require a national (Type D) entry visa.

In this guide, we explain the key Swiss work permit routes for foreign nationals employed on the basis of a Swiss employment contract, including the main eligibility requirements for EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals, the available type of permits, the application process, supporting documentation and the practical issues that can affect long-term status, such as employer changes, renewals, family reunification and settlement planning. Where relevant, we also highlight how cantonal practice and federal approval requirements can influence timing and evidential expectations.

This page focuses on Swiss residence for foreign nationals employed on the basis of a Swiss employment contract. You may also wish to review our articles on other Swiss immigration routes, such as for **intra-company transfers (ICT)**, **posted workers/secondments**, **self-employment** and other categories. Our Swiss immigration lawyers can advise on the most appropriate route based on your nationality, role, type of employer and canton.

### At a Glance: EU/EFTA vs Non-EU/EFTA

EU/EFTA nationals usually obtain work authorisation in Switzerland through local registration once employed by a Swiss entity, whereas non-EU/EFTA nationals require employer-led work authorisation, typically subject to quotas, labour market considerations and canton/federal approvals.

- **EU/EFTA nationals (AFMP):** No quotas and no formal labour market test. The key requirements are a genuine employment relationship, registration in Switzerland

(if the employment lasts more than 3 months) and compliance with local administrative requirements.

- **Non-EU/EFTA nationals (FNIA):** Quota-based and selective. Employers must normally evidence recruitment efforts, demonstrate the economic interest in hiring the candidate, and show that salary and employment conditions meet Swiss standards. Approval requires both cantonal and federal authorisation.

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

## Key Benefits of a Swiss Work Permit

A Swiss work and residence permit provides a lawful basis to live in Switzerland and work for a Swiss employer, offering access to a stable economy and internationally recognised professional experience. Depending on your nationality and permit type, it can also provide:

- **A route to longer-term residence:** Many Swiss work permit holders may become eligible to apply for a C permit (permanent residence) after a qualifying period of lawful residence, subject to nationality, cantonal practice and integration requirements.
- **Family reunification options:** Eligible family members may be able to join you in Switzerland, with the applicable conditions depending on whether you are EU/EFTA or non-EU/EFTA.
- **Career and business continuity:** For employers, the Swiss work permit system enables recruitment of specialist skills where locally available candidates cannot meet operational needs.

## Swiss Work Permit Types

Swiss work authorisation is typically granted through one of the following permits:

- **90 day on-line notification:** May be used by EU/EFTA nationals locally hired in Switzerland on a limited 90 day employment contract. No communal registration is needed..
- **L Work Permit for 120 days / 4 months:** May be granted (depending on cantonal practice) to employees who have very short term Swiss employment contracts of up to four months or - despite a Swiss employment contract - only work in Switzerland sporadically. This type of work permit does not require individuals to take up residency in the country.
- **L Work and Residence Permit:** Usually granted for short employment periods of up to one year. Renewable for up to 2 years in case of extension of the employment duration.
- **B Work and Residence Permit:** Typically granted to employees who are hired for one year or longer. These permits are usually renewable, subject to continuous employment.
- **C Permit (settlement / permanent residence):** Available after a qualifying period of lawful residence (minimum 5 years, often 10 years), subject to integration and whether a settlement agreement is in place with the foreigner's home country.
- **G Permit (cross-border commuter):** For individuals who remain resident outside Switzerland and commute to work in Switzerland. Not suitable for those intending to relocate their principal place of residence to Switzerland.

Our Swiss immigration team can advise on the most appropriate permit category abased on your individual circumstances, contract terms and canton.

## Eligibility Requirements for EU/EFTA Nationals (AFMP Route)

EU/EFTA nationals benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP). They can obtain a Swiss work and residence authorisation on the basis of a valid Swiss employment contract and upon registration with the competent commune of residence in Switzerland. The registration requires the submission of a complete and accurate residence permit application at the communal authority competent for their place of residence in Switzerland. Local registration is mandatory prior to taking up employment. Holders of an on-line notification attestation (under the 90 day on-line notification procedure) and holders of a valid 4 month/120 day work authorisation are exempt from this mandatory post-arrival registration.

Key requirements to obtain an EU/EFTA work and residence permit typically include:

- **A valid Swiss employment contract** with terms that are credible and sustainable (cantonal authorities may review whether the employment reflects Swiss standards).
- **Registration of a Swiss residence address with the local commune** is mandatory for all persons intending to work in Switzerland for more than 90 days and who do not hold a 120 day/4 month work authorization.
- **Confirmation of health and accident insurance arrangements** consistent with local requirements.

EU/EFTA nationals locally hired in Switzerland are not subject to annual quotas. Authorities scrutinise applications to ensure the documents submitted are genuine and in good order.

## Eligibility Requirements for Non-EU/EFTA Nationals (FNIA)

Non-EU/EFTA nationals are subject to much stricter admission rules. Key requirements typically include:

- **Employer sponsorship:** The application must be submitted by a Swiss employer or by an immigration lawyer/consultant acting on the employer's behalf.
- **Economic interest:** The position must support the sustainable operation, development or competitiveness of the Swiss employer through the provision of specialist expertise, the performance of a function that cannot be readily filled locally, or the maintenance of key business activities in Switzerland.
- **Role suitability:** The position must justify recruitment of a non-EU/EFTA candidate and often involves specialist skills, seniority or scarcity in the Swiss labour market.
- **Labour market considerations:** Employers are commonly required to evidence recruitment efforts and prove that no suitable Swiss or EU/EFTA candidate could be hired. In practice, recruitment evidence often includes job advertisement details including the applicant pool, interview and assessment records, and a clear explanation of why no Swiss or EU/EFTA candidates could be hired. The required depth of evidence may vary depending on various factors, such as the practice of the cantonal authorities, the type of role and sector etc.

- **Salary and working conditions:** Compensation and conditions must align with Swiss regional and industry standards. Authorities will typically assess salary levels against cantonal and industry benchmarks or against applicable collective labour agreements (CLAs/CCTs). Remuneration packages that fall below Swiss standards are a common reason for refusal.
- **Qualifications and experience:** Candidates are usually expected to demonstrate strong professional credentials for the specific role (degrees, diplomas, specialist experience and references).
- **Quotas:** Non-EU/EFTA work permits with a validity of more than 4 months/120 days are subject to the availability of quotas. Even strong applications can be delayed or refused if quota allocations are constrained.

Because requirements and evidential expectations may vary by canton and sector, careful presentation of the employer's business rationale and the candidate's profile in line with cantonal practice is critical. Factors such as local labour market conditions, salary benchmarks, sector priorities and administrative practice all influence outcomes.

**If you are a Swiss employer or a non-EU professional, we can assess whether your role is likely to meet the “economic interest” threshold for a Swiss work permit and advise on the strongest submission strategy.**

## Swiss Work Permits for EU/EFTA and non-EU/EFTA nationals

### EU/EFTA Work Permits

EU/EFTA citizens with a genuine Swiss employment contract and compliant registration documentation will qualify for an L or B residence permit for work under the AFMP. The length of the employment contract usually determines whether an L permit (shorter duration) or B permit (longer duration) is issued.

### Non-EU/EFTA Work Permits

Work permit applications for non-EU/EFTA nationals are always sponsored/filed by the employer. Successful candidates are typically specialists, executives, or highly qualified

professionals whose recruitment can be clearly justified by the employer. Applications tend to be stronger where :

- The employer is established;
- The role is clearly defined and senior;
- Recruitment evidence is well documented;
- There is a clear and credible business need for the hire with a strong alignment between the candidate's background and the role;
- Swiss-standard salary and employment conditions are satisfied.

## Who Is Unlikely to Qualify for a Swiss Work Permit

Whereas EU nationals have a relatively straightforward legal pathway to obtaining a Swiss work and residence permit under the AFMP, applications for non-EU/EFTA national employees are more complex and less likely to succeed in the following scenarios:

- Roles that are low-skilled or readily filled locally or by EU nationals, where an employer cannot credibly show economic interest or labour shortage;
- Insufficient or poorly evidenced recruitment efforts;
- Salary or working conditions below Swiss standards;
- Weak evidence of qualifications or role fit.

For non-EU national employment permit applications, a properly structured legal submission can make the difference between refusal and approval.

## Swiss Work Permit Application Process: EU/EFTA Nationals

For EU/EFTA nationals, the Swiss work permit application process is generally administrative once employment is secured. In most cases, you will:

1. **Secure a Swiss employment contract.**
2. **Enter Switzerland** (EU/EFTA nationals are visa exempt).
3. **Register with the local commune** within 14 days after arrival in Switzerland and prior to starting to work. The required documentation for the registration commonly includes the employment contract, proof of accommodation and confirmation of health insurance arrangements.

4. **Biometrics registration.**
5. **Receive the residence permit** (often an L or B permit, depending on the contract duration).

Our immigration lawyers can advise on the commune-specific documentation and how to avoid administrative delays.

## Swiss Work Permit Application Process: Non-EU/EFTA Nationals

For non-EU/EFTA nationals, the employer typically leads the work authorisation process before the employee relocates to Switzerland. The application process for a Swiss employment permit commonly involves:

1. **Signature of a Swiss employment contract.**
2. **Employer submission to competent cantonal authority**, including the business rationale, recruitment evidence and supporting documentation for the role/candidate.
3. **Cantonal review**, assessing labour market considerations, salary/conditions and the candidate's qualifications.
4. **Federal (SEM) review** following cantonal endorsement.
5. **Type D entry visa (if applicable):** If the applicant requires an entry visa, the Swiss consulate issues the visa after authorisation is granted by the cantonal authority.
6. **Arrival, registration and biometrics appointment in Switzerland**, followed by issuance of the residence permit card (often L or B, usually renewable subject to ongoing employment and permit conditions).

Processing times and requirements may vary depending on the cantonal practice and authorities' workload.

## Work Permit Processing Times in Switzerland

Processing times vary by canton, permit category and case complexity. EU/EFTA nationals may legally start to work as soon as they complete post-arrival registration. The issuance

of the actual residence permit may take a few days or a few weeks, depending on the workload of the competent authorities. Non-EU/EFTA work authorisation applications commonly take several months, particularly where labour market testing or quota availability is a factor.

Early legal planning can help reduce delays and avoid quota-related bottlenecks.

## Work Permit Conditions and Employer Changes

- **EU/EFTA nationals:** benefit from full flexibility under free movement rules;
- **Non-EU/EFTA nationals:** are usually tied to the sponsoring employer, and unauthorised changes may result in permit revocation.

We can advise on employer changes, promotions, internal transfers, and restructuring scenarios to ensure continued compliance.

## Work Permit Renewals

Work permit renewals are normally assessed on the basis that there is continued justification for the role, the employment relationship continues on Swiss-standard terms, the permit holder remains compliant with residence requirements and, in the case of non-EU/EFTA nationals, any material changes to the role, salary or employer have been notified and approved where required.

## Residence and Absences: Maintaining Your Swiss Permit

A Swiss work and residence permit is granted on the basis that Switzerland will be the permit holder's principal place of residence (which does not apply to holders of on-line notifications, 120 day/4 month work permits or cross-border commuter permits). Maintaining your employed work permit requires continued compliance with the conditions stipulated in the cantonal and federal permit approvals and the residence requirements.

Extended absences can affect renewals and longer-term residence eligibility, and may also have tax implications. The tolerated level of absence varies by permit type. Where substantial travel or time abroad is anticipated, it is prudent to discuss the proposed absence in advance.

## Pathway to Permanent Residence (C Permit)

L or B type Swiss residence permits provide a route to settlement (C permit) after a qualifying period of lawful residence. Duration of residence for eligibility depends on whether the applicant is a citizen of a country with which Switzerland has signed a Settlement Agreement. Integration requirements such as language ability and compliance with Swiss legal and social norms also apply.

As a general guide, C permit eligibility is commonly assessed after 10 years of residence for many nationals, with earlier eligibility (after minimum 5 years) available for certain nationalities, subject to the applicable rules and integration criteria.

We can advise on long-term residence planning, including how permit category, canton and integration steps may affect the timeline.

## Family Reunification for Work Permit Holders

The rules for family reunion and evidential requirements differ depending on whether the permit holder is an EU/EFTA or non-EU/EFTA national. Below is a summary of the relevant rules. For more detailed guidance please visit our **Swiss Family Reunification Permit** pages.

- **EU/EFTA nationals:** Family members may typically join the main permit holder under AFMP rules, commonly including a spouse/registered partner and dependent children. In certain circumstances, financially dependent ascendants or descendants may also qualify under AFMP rules, subject to evidence of dependency. Upon registration with the commune of residence, family members usually receive a residence permit aligned with the main applicant's permit validity and generally have broad access to employment.
- **Non-EU/EFTA nationals:** Family reunification is available for children under 18 and legal spouses or registered partners. Spouse access to the Swiss labour market is available for B permit holders, whereas L permit holders may require cantonal approval.

We can advise on eligibility, documentation, timing and how to coordinate family applications with the main work authorisation process.

## Common Refusal Reasons and How to Reduce Risk

In the case of EU nationals, usually only false declarations, inaccurate or false documentation or a criminal record will lead to refusal, whereas for non-EU/EFTA nationals work permit refusals can also result from:

- Insufficient evidence of labour market need or weak recruitment documentation;
- Unclear economic interest or a role profile that does not justify a non-EU hire;
- Salary/conditions that do not meet Swiss benchmarks;
- Mismatch between the role and the candidate's qualifications/experience;
- Incomplete or inconsistently presented documentation;
- Quota constraints.

A well-structured legal submission can address these issues by presenting the employer's business rationale, recruitment narrative and salary benchmarking clearly, while evidencing the candidate's specialist profile and role fit.

## Swiss Work Permit - FAQs

### Do EU/EFTA nationals need a Swiss work permit to work in Switzerland?

If their Swiss employment contract is limited to 90 days, an on-line notification will be sufficient. For employment contracts valid for more than 4 months, a work and residence permit will be necessary..

### Do I need a Type D visa to work in Switzerland?

Non-EU/EFTA nationals usually need a national (Type D) visa to enter Switzerland after the work authorisation is approved. Certain non-EU/EFTA nationals are exempt from this requirement, including citizens of the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Japan and Singapore. EU/EFTA nationals are also visa exempt.

### Can a non-EU/EFTA national apply for a Swiss work permit without a Swiss employer?

In most cases no, unless you are a **business founder or entrepreneur**. Non-EU/EFTA work authorisation for employed work is typically employer-led and requires a Swiss employer to sponsor the application and submit evidence supporting the hiring decision, including the business rationale and recruitment efforts.

## **What are the main reasons Swiss work permit applications are refused for non-EU/EFTA nationals?**

Common refusal reasons include insufficient evidence of labour market need or recruitment efforts, an unclear economic interest case for hiring a non-EU/EFTA candidate, salary or conditions below Swiss benchmarks, a mismatch between the role and the candidate's qualifications, incomplete documentation, and quota constraints.

## **How long does a Swiss work permit application take?**

EU/EFTA nationals may start to work upon registering in Switzerland, although the issuance of the permit may take a few days/weeks. Non-EU/EFTA work authorisation applications commonly take several months, depending on the workload of the authorities, the specificity of the case, documentation quality, labour market review, and quota availability.

## **Can I change employer after I receive a Swiss work permit?**

It depends on your nationality and permit conditions. EU/EFTA nationals have full flexibility under free movement rules. Non-EU/EFTA nationals are typically tied to the sponsoring employer, and a change of employer, role, or material working conditions commonly requires prior approval from the cantonal authorities.

## **Can my spouse and children join me in Switzerland on a Swiss work permit?**

In most cases, yes. EU/EFTA nationals holding a Swiss work permit can typically bring a spouse or registered partner and dependent children under AFMP rules, and family members often have broad access to employment subject to registration requirements. Non-EU/EFTA family reunification is usually more document-heavy and, depending on permit type, spouses of work permit holders may have to await labour market access approval.

## **How Richmond Chambers Switzerland Can Help**

Richmond Chambers Switzerland advises EU/EFTA nationals, non-EU/EFTA professionals and Swiss employers on compliant, well-evidenced Swiss work authorisation applications. Our focus is on reducing delay and refusal risk by aligning the application with cantonal practice and SEM expectations.

Our Swiss Work Permit services include:

- **Eligibility and risk assessment** based on nationality, canton, role profile and permit strategy.
- **Employer sponsorship support**, including recruitment evidence strategy, role framing and salary benchmarking.
- **Application drafting and submission**, ensuring documentation is complete, consistent and tailored to the authorities' expectations.
- **Quota and timing strategy** for non-EU/EFTA applications where allocation constraints are relevant.
- **Family reunification planning**, including sequencing and documentation.
- **Renewals and longer-term residence planning**, including route mapping toward settlement where appropriate.

## Contact Our Swiss Immigration Lawyers

If you are seeking to work in Switzerland, or you are a Swiss employer looking to recruit international talent, our immigration lawyers in Switzerland can provide clear advice and representation tailored to the relevant canton and permit category.

Contact Richmond Chambers Switzerland on +41 21 588 07 70 or complete our enquiry form to arrange an initial discussion.