

SWISS TRAINEE & APPRENTICESHIP PERMITS

Switzerland offers structured residence and work permits for young foreign professionals, trainees, and apprentices who wish to undertake career development or vocational training within the country. The Swiss immigration system provides two main routes for such temporary residence: trainee permits under bilateral exchange agreements (often referred to as the Swiss trainee visa or stagiaire permit), and apprenticeship permits primarily for EU/EFTA nationals.

This guide provides insights into the structure, requirements, and benefits of the Swiss trainee and apprenticeship permit schemes. It is particularly relevant for young professionals considering temporary training in Switzerland and for Swiss companies looking to engage international trainees or apprentices as part of their strategic workforce planning.

Overview of Trainee & Apprenticeship Permit Categories

Switzerland's immigration framework provides two key routes for temporary training and apprenticeship-related residence:

1. **Trainee Permits under Bilateral Exchange Agreements:** These permits allow young professionals from specific partner countries to undertake professional training placements in Switzerland for up to 18 months.
2. **Apprenticeship Permits:** EU/EFTA nationals may relocate to Switzerland to complete a recognised vocational apprenticeship with a Swiss host employer. Access for non-EU nationals is limited and typically restricted to individuals already residing in Switzerland.

Both categories offer strategic advantages for employers and trainees. Swiss companies gain access to diverse perspectives, early-stage talent, and future international partners by hosting foreign trainees and apprentices. For young professionals, these schemes offer access to Switzerland's high-quality work environment, multilingual exposure, and globally respected training systems.

While these programmes are temporary in nature, they can serve as stepping stones for future work in Switzerland or enhanced career opportunities abroad.

Young Professional Trainee Permits (Bilateral Exchange Agreements)

Switzerland has entered into bilateral trainee exchange agreements with a number of non-EU/EFTA countries, designed to facilitate cultural and professional exchange by allowing young people to undertake supervised, paid training placements in Swiss companies.

These programmes - often referred to as "stagiaire" or "young professional programmes" - create a streamlined process for temporary employment that bypasses the usual labour market restrictions typically imposed on third-country nationals.

Participating Countries and Eligibility Criteria

As of 2025, nationals of the following countries may apply for a Swiss trainee visa to undertake professional training in their field of study or vocational qualification under this scheme: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, San Marino, South Africa, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the United States.

To qualify for a Young Professional Trainee Permit, applicants must:

- Be between 18 and 35 years old (some nationalities are capped at 30);
- Have completed at least two years of vocational training or obtained a bachelor's degree or higher;
- Hold citizenship of a country with a bilateral agreement with Switzerland.
- Be seeking a position in a profession directly related to their previous education or training.

Trainee - or stagiaire - positions must be secured in advance. The Swiss government does not mediate placements. Therefore, individuals must independently obtain a suitable job offer that fits the scope and purpose of the trainee permit.

Training Purpose and Conditions of Stay

The Swiss stagiaire permit is strictly limited to roles that serve a professional training purpose. This means:

- The employment must provide structured learning, mentorship, or exposure aligned with the applicant's field.

- The job must correspond to the skills and qualifications of the trainee.
- The training period must be temporary, educational in nature, and not a substitute for ordinary employment.

The permit is typically issued for 12 months and may be extended once to a maximum of 18 months. The stay is non-renewable beyond that period, and the trainee must leave Switzerland unless a new status is secured through an entirely separate application process.

Work and Salary Conditions

Trainees must be employed full-time. Part-time work, freelance activity, and self-employment are prohibited under this permit category. The employer must offer a salary that meets or exceeds local wage standards for entry-level professionals in the relevant industry and canton. This is not merely a guideline; authorities review salary levels to ensure fair treatment and prevent wage dumping. Collective labour agreements (CLAs) or cantonal salary benchmarks are typically used as the reference point.

Authorities also require a signed employment contract that clearly outlines:

- Start and end dates of employment.
- Job title and description.
- Training objectives and structure.
- Salary, hours, and benefits.
- The name of the supervisor or mentor responsible for overseeing the training.

Application Procedure and Documentation

Applications for a Switzerland internship visa or trainee permit must be submitted abroad - typically through the Swiss embassy or consulate in the trainee's home country. The trainee cannot already be residing in Switzerland at the time of application. The employer must also submit relevant documents to the cantonal labour authority where the training will take place.

Typical documentation includes:

- Employment contract with training plan.

- Proof of qualifications (degree or vocational diploma).
- Valid passport.
- Application forms and biometric data.

Once approved, the trainee receives an L residence permit, which must be registered with the local municipal authorities within 14 days of arrival in Switzerland.

Employer Responsibilities

Swiss employers who host trainees under the Young Professionals Programme must:

- Provide a bona fide training position, not simply a standard job under a different title.
- Ensure salary compliance with cantonal and industry norms.
- Limit foreign trainees to no more than 5% of the total workforce at any one time.
- Supervise the trainee and provide meaningful learning opportunities.
- Comply with all reporting and registration duties under Swiss immigration and employment law.

Importantly, no labour market test (i.e. proof that no Swiss or EU/EFTA candidate could fill the role) is required under the trainee scheme, making it an accessible option for Swiss companies seeking to support international development partnerships.

Swiss Apprenticeship Permits

Switzerland is globally recognised for its dual-track vocational education system, which blends classroom instruction with practical work experience in a company. While apprenticeships are primarily designed for Swiss and EU/EFTA citizens, select foreign nationals may be admitted to such programs under specific circumstances.

Apprenticeship Permits in Switzerland for EU/EFTA Nationals

EU/EFTA Nationals enjoy facilitated access to Swiss apprenticeships due to the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons. An EU/EFTA citizen who secures a recognised apprenticeship contract with a Swiss employer is generally entitled to a residence permit (typically a B permit) for the duration of their training.

Key requirements for an EU/EFTA Swiss Apprenticeship Permit include:

- A signed apprenticeship contract with a Swiss employer.
- Approval of the contract and training plan by the cantonal vocational training office.
- Registration with the relevant migration authority.
- Proof of financial self-sufficiency, particularly where the apprenticeship salary is modest.

EU/EFTA apprentices are treated similarly to Swiss apprentices and must receive standard training remuneration in line with cantonal or industry-specific wage guidance. Their permits are renewed annually for the full duration of the programme, provided that training is progressing satisfactorily.

Apprenticeship Permits in Switzerland for Third-Country Nationals

For **non-EU/EFTA nationals** who are not already legally resident in Switzerland, obtaining a residence permit for vocational training is considerably more complex. Apprenticeship permits for non-EU nationals generally require a full work permit application process. This means that third-country nationals must:

- Be sponsored by a Swiss employer who demonstrates that no suitable local or EU candidate is available.
- Satisfy quotas for third-country admissions, which are limited and highly competitive.
- Prove that the candidate possesses unique qualifications or fills a specific skills gap.

In practice, apprenticeship permits are rarely granted unless the individual already resides in Switzerland on another legal basis (e.g. family reunification, asylum, or long-term education).

Employer Duties for Foreign Apprentices

Swiss employers sponsoring a foreign apprentice must:

- Register the apprenticeship contract with the cantonal vocational education authority.

- Adhere to cantonal and federal training standards.
- Ensure school attendance and supervision.
- Ensure compliance with working hours, wage, and labour law requirements.
- Maintain immigration compliance throughout the duration of the programme.

Foreign apprentices are entitled to the same employment protections as Swiss nationals, including working time limits, vacation entitlements, and safety measures.

Permit Duration and Transition to Long-Term Employment or Residence

Trainees

Trainee permits under bilateral agreements are strictly limited to a maximum of 18 months and are non-renewable. Trainees are expected to return to their home country at the end of the programme. However, a trainee who secures a standard employment contract upon completing their programme may apply for a regular **Swiss work permit**. This would require the new employer to comply with all standard third-country admission criteria, including the labour market test (proof that no suitable Swiss or EU/EFTA candidate is available), salary requirements, and quota availability.

If granted, the individual transitions to a B permit. After a qualifying period - usually 10 years for third-country nationals, or 5 years in some cases - they may apply for a C settlement permit, subject to integration, language proficiency, and legal compliance.

Apprentices

Apprenticeship permits for EU/EFTA nationals are renewable annually for the length of the training contract. EU/EFTA apprentices can continue to reside and work in Switzerland without additional formalities once they complete their training, provided they obtain employment. Their residence permit may be renewed on the basis of salaried employment. Time spent as an apprentice typically counts toward permanent residence (C permit) eligibility.

Non-EU apprentices, if approved, may only remain in Switzerland post-training if they are offered a qualifying job and successfully obtain a new **work permit**. This requires sponsorship by a Swiss employer and full compliance with standard immigration rules. Time spent under a short-term permit may not always count toward settlement.

How to Apply for a Swiss Trainee or Apprenticeship Permit

The application process for a Swiss Trainee Permit or Swiss Apprenticeship Permit varies slightly depending on the applicant's nationality and the permit type. In general, it follows these stages:

1. **Eligibility Assessment:** Determine the applicant's suitability based on age, nationality, qualifications, and the nature of the training or apprenticeship.
2. **Host Organisation Engagement:** The applicant secures a training placement or apprenticeship contract with a Swiss employer.
3. **Document Preparation:** This includes a signed employment or apprenticeship agreement, a structured training plan, diplomas or vocational certificates, and evidence of financial means.
4. **Submission to Authorities:** Trainee permit applications are submitted abroad to the Swiss embassy or consulate. Apprenticeship contracts are submitted to the cantonal vocational authority and migration office.
5. **Decision and Registration:** Once the permit is approved, the applicant may enter Switzerland, register with local authorities, and commence their programme.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long can I stay in Switzerland as a trainee or apprentice?

Trainees may stay up to 18 months under bilateral agreements. Apprenticeship permits are typically renewed annually for 2–4 years, based on the training programme.

Is there a minimum wage for trainees and apprentices?

Yes. Employers must pay at least the cantonal or industry-standard entry-level wage. Swiss authorities verify that compensation meets legal and collective agreement thresholds.

Can trainees or apprentices bring family members to Switzerland?

Trainees on short-term L permits cannot bring dependents. Apprentices with B permits - typically EU/EFTA nationals - may apply for family reunification if income, housing, and other conditions are met.

Can I switch employers during my training?

Trainees must stay with the approved host or obtain new authorisation for a change. Apprentices may switch employers only if the cantonal authority approves the revised apprenticeship contract.

Can I apply for a Swiss work permit after my training ends?

Trainees and non-EU apprentices must meet standard work permit criteria, including a job offer, labour market test, and quota availability. EU/EFTA nationals can usually remain and work without restrictions.

Do I need to speak German, French, or Italian?

No language certificate is required to apply. However, basic language skills are strongly recommended and often essential for success in the workplace and long-term integration.

How Richmond Chambers Switzerland Can Help

At Richmond Chambers Switzerland, we specialise in advising both individual applicants and corporate sponsors on temporary and long-term residence pathways. Our immigration lawyers can assist with:

- Assessing individual and corporate eligibility under bilateral trainee programmes and the apprenticeship permit system.
- Structuring compliant training or apprenticeship contracts.
- Preparing and submitting documentation to cantonal and federal authorities.
- Ensuring compliance with wage and labour regulations.
- Advising on transition strategies to long-term residence or employment.

We offer a strategic, client-centred approach tailored to ensure regulatory compliance and successful outcomes. Contact our Swiss immigration team to discuss your goals and explore your eligibility.

Contact Our Immigration Lawyers In Switzerland

Swiss trainee and apprenticeship permits offer structured, time-limited access to work-based training opportunities for foreign nationals. These routes are highly regulated to protect both trainees and the integrity of the Swiss labour market. They require clear documentation, compliant employment practices, and proactive management by the host employer.

If you are an employer considering applying for a Swiss work permit for foreign apprentices or an individual seeking a Switzerland internship visa, we recommend seeking legal guidance to ensure eligibility, prepare persuasive applications, and avoid compliance risks. For tailored legal support on Swiss trainee or apprenticeship permits,

including permit renewals, contract structuring, and post-training transitions, contact our immigration law team at Richmond Chambers Switzerland.