



# VISAS, RESIDENCE PERMITS, AND WORK PERMITS

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Switzerland's prosperity is partly due to the immigration of foreign workers. Not only do they boost the economy, they also enrich the culture. Residence in Switzerland is now easier for EU/EFTA citizens thanks to bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU. In the labor market they have the same rights as Swiss workers. For people from other countries who wish to live and work in Switzerland, certain provisions apply.

## 6.1 ENTERING THE COUNTRY AND VISAS

The requirements for entering Switzerland differ depending on the purpose of the stay (for example, tourism, visit, employment, family reunification, or study) and the duration of the stay (short or long term). The State Secretariat for Migration publishes the current requirements on its website.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch)  
State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

### 6.1.1 Visa Requirements

Depending on your nationality and/or the duration of your stay, you may need a visa to enter Switzerland. As a rule, persons requiring a visa must submit the visa application to the Swiss representation responsible for their place of residence. The corresponding application can be downloaded from the website of the representation or the SEM. In addition to a valid, recognized travel document, the application must include proof of travel health insurance and additional documents that verify the reason for the journey. The representation's website provides information on visa fees and documents that have to be submitted. The Swiss representation abroad may require a letter of sponsorship to be submitted before it issues the visa if the applicant does not have sufficient financial funds or if there is some doubt on this point.

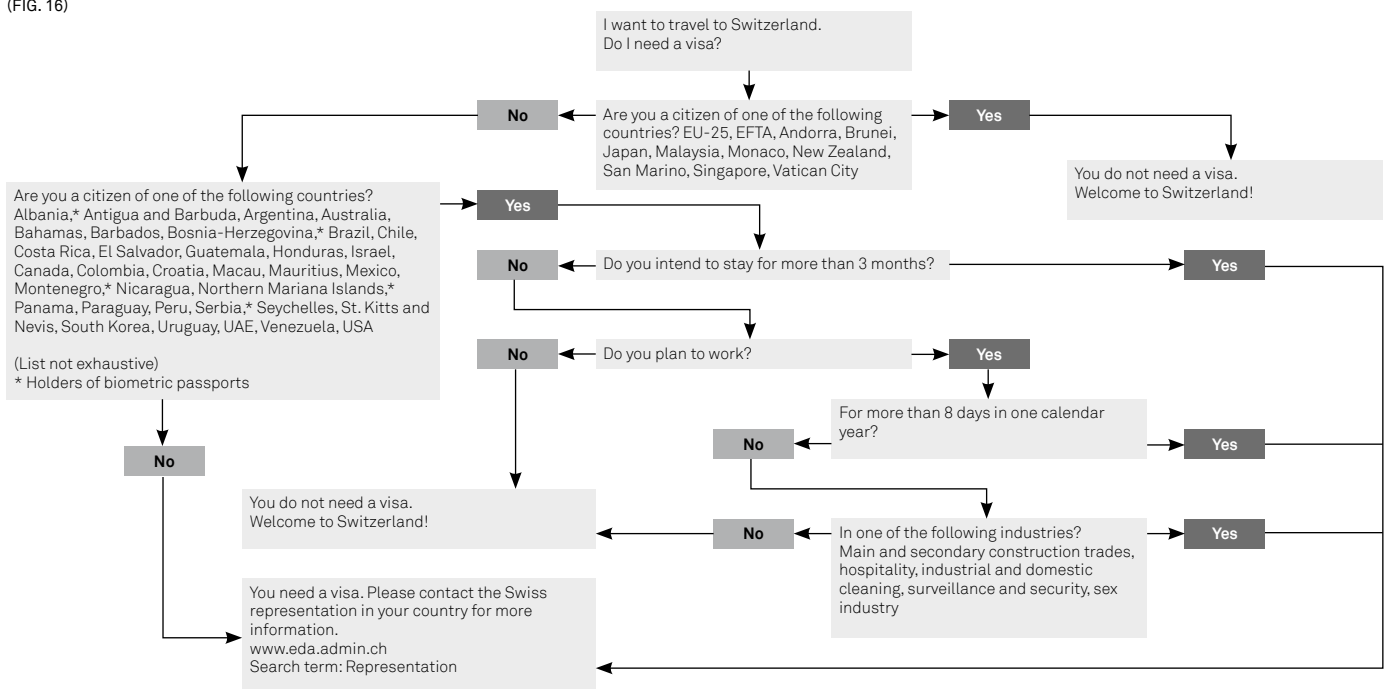
[www.swiss-visa.ch](http://www.swiss-visa.ch)  
Switzerland's online visa system

[www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch)  
Swiss representations abroad

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence  
Information about entering Switzerland

## Do I Need a Visa?\*

(FIG. 16)



\*Information is for guidance only. A general visa waiver does not mean, for instance, that no permit is required for work. Please consult the responsible Swiss representation.

### 6.1.2 Visa Procedure

Persons requiring a visa must submit the visa application to the Swiss representation responsible for their place of residence. Travel documents and any other requested documents which explain the reason for the journey must be submitted along with the application. The representation's website will provide detailed information about the required documents and the relevant application forms. All documents, letters or certificates that are not in German, French, Italian, or English must be submitted with a translation.

In some cases, the representation abroad may require a declaration of sponsorship. Detailed information on this requirement can be found on the SEM's website:

- Information on entry to the Schengen area/visa procedures: [www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence > Do I require a visa > Entry to the Schengen Area
- Information on letters of invitation and declarations of sponsorship: [www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence > Do I require a visa > Letters of Invitation and Declarations of Sponsorship

If the visa request is declined, it is possible to appeal the decision by writing to the SEM (in German, French, or Italian) within 30 days of notification and explaining the reasons for the appeal. An advance on costs is payable to the SEM for handling the appeal. The appeal will not be processed unless the required advance on costs is paid.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence  
Visa application form

## Types of Permits

(FIG. 17)

<b>Permit B</b> Residence permit	For temporary residents (foreigners visiting Switzerland for a specific purpose for a longer period with or without employment).
<b>Permit C</b> Permanent residence permit	For permanent residents (foreigners who have been granted permanent residence after living in Switzerland for 5 or 10 years. Unlimited right to stay in Switzerland).
<b>Permit Ci</b> Residence permit with employment	This document is issued by the cantonal authorities for the employed spouses and children of employees of foreign representations or intergovernmental organizations (IO).
<b>Permit G</b> Cross-border commuter permit	For cross-border commuters (foreigners who live in the border zone of a neighboring country and work in the adjacent border zone in Switzerland).
<b>Permit L</b> Short-term residence permit	For short-term employment and other short stays.
<b>Permit F</b> Provisionally admitted foreigners	For provisionally admitted foreigners. This permit is issued by the cantonal authorities on the instruction of the Federal Office for Migration.
<b>Permit N</b> Asylum seekers	For asylum seekers. This permit is issued by the cantonal authorities following a decision by the Federal Office for Migration.
<b>Permit S</b> Persons in need of protection	For persons in need of protection. This permit is issued by the cantonal authorities following a decision by the Federal Office for Migration.

Source: State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), 2020

## 6.2 TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT RESIDENCE

Temporary and permanent residence permits are issued by the cantonal migration offices. It may be possible to work depending on the type of permit issued. Foreigners residing in Switzerland for more than three months receive a residence permit indicating which type of authorization has been granted (see Fig. 17).

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > About us > Contact > Cantonal authorities  
Cantonal migration and labor market authorities

[www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch) > Foreigners in Switzerland  
Information for foreigners in Switzerland

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence  
Overview of residence

### 6.2.1 Family Reunification

Citizens of Switzerland and EU/EFTA citizens with a residence permit or a short-term EU/EFTA residence permit are allowed to have their families join them, regardless of their nationality. The following are classified as family:

- Spouses and children who have not yet reached the age of 21 or who are considered dependents
- Parents and parents of the spouse, who are provided with sufficient financial support

Students are only allowed to be joined by their spouses and children who are their dependents.

People from third countries with permanent residence permits (permit C) have the right to allow their children and husband/wife to join them. People with residence permits (permit B) have no legal right to this. The cantonal migration authorities can, however, permit the move if people from third countries can prove that they have a suitable place to live, sufficient income, and an established residence (a residence which has not caused any complaints). Husbands, wives, and children of Swiss nationals and people with permanent residence permits or residence permits can take up self-employed or employed work all over Switzerland.

[www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch) > Foreign nationals in Switzerland  
Family reunification – third countries

[www.ejpd.admin.ch](http://www.ejpd.admin.ch) > Topics > Immigration

**Temporary Residence and permanent residence permits are issued by the cantonal migration offices.**

## 6.3 RESIDING IN SWITZERLAND WITHOUT GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT

### 6.3.1 Stays of up to 3 Months

Switzerland has been an associate member of the Schengen Agreement, and thus part of the Schengen Area, since December 12, 2008. The provisions of the Schengen Agreement govern entry into Switzerland and stays of up to three months that do not require a permit.

Generally, staying in Switzerland without employment (e.g. for a visit, tourism) for up to three months does not require a permit. However, a visa is necessary for nationals of certain countries. Foreigners may stay in Switzerland for no more than three months within a six-month period calculated from the first time of entry. The reference period of 180 days is always calculated based on the inspection date and covers the 180 days preceding the inspection date. Persons requiring a visa must comply with the amount of time they are permitted to stay as stipulated on their visa.

To enter the country, foreigners must have a valid travel document that is recognized by Switzerland. For persons requiring a visa, Switzerland issues Schengen visas, which are generally valid for the entire Schengen Area for stays of up to three months.

### 6.3.2 Longer Stays

Stays of more than three months also require a permit for persons who are not gainfully employed (retirees, students, job seekers, and others). Permits are issued by the cantonal migration offices. A distinction is made between short stays (less than one year), temporary stays (of limited duration), and permanent stays (of unlimited duration).

Non-EU/EFTA nationals must submit the application for a residence permit (together with the visa application) to the relevant Swiss representation before entering Switzerland. Different documents will be required depending on the purpose of the stay (studying, retirement, medical purposes, etc.). If the conditions for a permit are fulfilled, then either a short-term permit will be issued (for a stay of less than one year) or a residence permit (permit B) valid for one year if the applicant is to stay longer than one year. After entering the country, the permit holder must register with the relevant municipality.

EU/EFTA nationals who are not gainfully employed are granted the right to stay in Switzerland based on the free movement of persons agreement. After arrival, a residence permit must be applied for in the municipality at the same time as registration and will be granted if the following requirements are met:

- The unemployed person must have sufficient funds to prevent them from becoming dependent on state aid so they do not become a burden on their new country of residence.
- They must have health insurance that covers all risks (including accidents).



The EU/EFTA residence permit is valid throughout Switzerland for five years and is automatically extended by the relevant authorities if the above-mentioned requirements continue to be met. Unemployed persons may be joined at a later date by their families if they have sufficient funds to support them.

### 6.3.3 Special Case: Students

The procedure described in 6.3.2 also applies to students. The following conditions also apply:

Students who are citizens of EU or EFTA states, the U.S., Canada, Australia or New Zealand must generally provide credible proof that they have sufficient funds to support themselves during stays of more than three months (at the relevant Swiss representation or municipality upon registration). Students must also prove that they are enrolled at a recognized educational institution in Switzerland and will be attending a course of general, vocational, or professional education. If these requirements are met, the student will receive a residence permit for the duration of their studies or for the period of one year if their studies last longer than one year. The permit will be extended until the student has completed their studies provided the requirements for the permit continue to be met.

Students who are not citizens of EU or EFTA member states, the U.S., Canada, Australia, or New Zealand must also include the following documents together with their personal entry application, which they submit to the relevant Swiss representation:

- Letter of acceptance from the institution
- Proof of payment for tuition fees
- Proof of sufficient funding for living expenses for the duration of the course of study
- Diplomas/school certificates
- Written agreement to leave Switzerland after completion of studies
- Additional sheet documenting language proficiency. Language proficiency is judged based on a short interview at the consulate or other representation.

The Swiss representation sends the entry application, including documentation and assessment of language proficiency, to the relevant cantonal migration authorities for their approval.

## 6.4 RESIDING IN SWITZERLAND WITH GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT

People working in Switzerland during their stay in the country or people staying for more than three months need a permit from the cantonal migration office. A distinction is made between short stays (less than one year), temporary stays (of limited duration), and permanent stays (of unlimited duration).

The employer is responsible for obtaining a work permit from the migration or employment office (depending on the canton).

Since the bilateral agreements on the free movement of persons and the revised EFTA convention entered into force, different conditions have applied to EU/EFTA citizens than to people from other countries. EU-27/EFTA citizens are on equal footing with Swiss employees. Transitional provisions apply in the case of Croatian citizens. Citizens of non-EU countries are subject to entry restrictions, labor market checks, and priority treatment for EU/EFTA citizens. Foreign asylum seekers may stay in Switzerland in accordance with the provisions of asylum legislation.

The cantons are responsible for deciding whether foreigners may stay and reside in the country. The Confederation is consulted for permission and considers applications from the point of view of Switzerland as a whole. The cantonal migration authorities are responsible for the control of aliens. Foreigner nationals must register with the Residents' Registration Office in the municipality in which they reside within eight days.

For anyone intending to relocate to Switzerland, it can be advantageous to bundle the permit applications and to discuss them beforehand. The cantonal economic development agencies provide advice on how to proceed and how long the process takes.

### 6.4.1 Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

Certain professions, particularly in the health, teaching, and technical sectors and in the administration of justice, are regulated. To practice these professions it is necessary to possess a diploma, certificate, or professional qualification. Foreign qualifications have to be recognized by the responsible authorities. Different authorities may be responsible for recognition, depending on the profession. Normally the authorities which regulate training for a particular profession are also responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Within the scope of the agreement on the free movement of persons, Switzerland works closely with the EU and participates in the European qualification recognition system. People from third countries also have the opportunity to have their qualifications recognized in Switzerland.

[www.sbfi.admin.ch](http://www.sbfi.admin.ch) > Education > Recognition of Foreign Qualifications  
Regulated professions / recognition of foreign qualifications

[www.crus.ch](http://www.crus.ch) > Services > Recognition/Swiss ENIC > Regulated Professions  
Regulated professions / recognition of foreign qualifications

## Work and Residence Permits: Rules and Procedures

(FIG. 18)

RULES FOR EU/EFTA CITIZENS		RULES FOR CITIZENS OF NON-EU/EFTA COUNTRIES
EU-27/EFTA	CROATIA	
<p><b>Short-term residence permit</b> (Permit L-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entitlement as long as proof is provided of employment in Switzerland lasting between 3 months and 1 year (for employment of less than 3 months in one calendar year: registration only).</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short-term residence permit</b> (Permit L-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entitlement as long as proof is provided of employment lasting up to 1 year. Renewal after 1 year if secure employment is obtained, subject to quota.</li> <li>- Quotas are redefined each year.</li> <li>- Priority for Swiss workers, inspection of remuneration and working conditions.</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Short-term residence permit</b> (Permit L)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For highly qualified individuals (forming a company, training new employees, specialists working for international companies): 12 months, can be extended to 24 months.</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> <li>- Quotas are redefined each year.</li> <li>- Trainees / interns: valid for 12–18 months, no provision for family reunification.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Residence permit</b> (Permit B-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valid for 5 years, after presentation of a certificate of employment with duration of 1 year or more or unlimited duration.</li> <li>- Full-time residence for specific purpose with main residence in Switzerland.</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> <li>- Entitlement to work in self-employed capacity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Residence permit</b> (Permit B-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quotas are redefined each year.</li> <li>- Permission required to become an employee.</li> <li>- Priority for Swiss workers, inspection of remuneration and working conditions.</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> <li>- Otherwise as EU-27.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Residence permit</b> (Permit B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Full-time residence in Switzerland for work purposes with main residence in Switzerland.</li> <li>- Priority for Swiss workers, inspection of remuneration and working conditions.</li> <li>- Family reunification possible.</li> <li>- Annual renewal of permit is a formality.</li> <li>- Quotas are redefined each year.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Permanent residence permit</b> (Permit C-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Normally issued on the basis of permanent residence agreements or agreements based on reciprocal rights once a person has resided in Switzerland for 5 years.</li> <li>- Holders have the same rights as Swiss workers on the labor market.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Permanent residence permit</b> (Permit C-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As EU-27</li> </ul>	<p><b>Permanent residence permit</b> (Permit C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can usually be applied for after 10 years' uninterrupted residence in Switzerland (five years for U.S. citizens).</li> <li>- Holders are no longer subject to employment restrictions. Entitlement to work in self-employed capacity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cross-border commuter permit</b> (Permit G-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unrestricted geographical mobility.</li> <li>- Holder must return with main residence in an EU/EFTA country every week.</li> <li>- Self-employment possible.</li> <li>- Period of validity depends on employment contract, but 5 years maximum, with possibility of extension.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cross-border commuter permit</b> (Permit G-EU/EFTA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Geographic mobility within all Swiss border zones.</li> <li>- Priority for Swiss workers, inspection of remuneration and working conditions.</li> <li>- Set-up time of six months for self-employed cross-border commuters.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cross-border commuter permit</b> (Permit G)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Valid for 12 months for border zone of canton in which permit issued; annual renewal required.</li> <li>- Applicant has been resident for at least 6 months with permanent residence permit in border zone of a neighboring country.</li> <li>- Weekly return to this place of residence.</li> </ul>

Source: State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), 2020

#### 6.4.2 Residence and Employment for EU/EFTA Citizens

EU/EFTA nationals are treated the same as Swiss nationals in the labor market as a result of the free movement of persons agreement. Job seekers may remain in Switzerland for three months without a permit. Unrestricted free movement of persons already applies to members of EU-27 countries; citizens of Croatia are subject to limitations during the first phase of transitional provisions (priority treatment of Swiss nationals, salary and work conditions, quotas). These permits can be extended subsequently. Anyone who enjoys full freedom of movement (EU-27) no longer requires a work permit but is still required to obtain a residence permit. This will be issued by the cantonal migration authorities upon presentation of confirmation of employment. If the work contract expires within three months, no permit is needed, but these workers are still required to register. Service providers (self-employed or posted workers) based in the EU-27 or EFTA region no longer require a license for activities in Switzerland lasting less than 90 work days per calendar year. They simply need to register, which can be done via the Internet. Exceptions are made for services requiring a license that are provided for companies based in Croatia in the following economic sectors: primary and secondary construction, gardening and landscaping, cleaning, and surveillance/security.

The introduction of the free movement of persons is being accompanied by a series of measures designed to prevent wage and social dumping, as well as by the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and the coordination of social insurance issues. This simplifies the recruitment of employees from EU/EFTA countries and the attendance and use of educational institutions in these countries, which boosts the efficiency of the labor market and increases the availability of highly qualified workers.

For more information about the free movement of persons, see 4.2.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > **Entry & residence**  
Free movement of persons Switzerland – EU/EFTA

[www.europa.admin.ch](http://www.europa.admin.ch) > **Services and publications**  
Brochure: "European Nationals in Switzerland"

#### 6.4.3 Residence and Employment for Non-EU/EFTA Citizens

Citizens from countries outside the EU/EFTA require a work and a residence permit. Holders of a long-term residence permit are free to change jobs and place of employment, and to be self-employed anywhere in the country without requiring special permission. In important cases, holders of a short-term residence permit may also work for an employer in another canton.

Priority is given to highly qualified and specialized professionals, as well as to entrepreneurs and executives, recognized scientists and persons involved in cultural affairs, employees of internationally active corporations and key persons with international business relations. This approach aims to promote economic, scientific, and cultural exchanges and to support the transfer of decision-makers and specialists of international companies. In particular, it is designed to give qualified scientists the opportunity to continue working in Switzerland after completing their studies. It is ultimately in the interest of the Swiss economy that foreigners temporarily working in Switzerland be permitted to bring their family to Switzerland, and that partners and children of holders of a long-term residence permit have the right to be employed or self-employed in Switzerland.

##### Key regulations:

- Residence permit B: generally valid for one year. Option to change jobs and cantons with permission, tax at source, quotas. (Some exceptions: e.g. spouses of Swiss citizens have the same rights as Swiss citizens.)
- Permanent residence permit C: same rights as Swiss nationals in labor market, no tax at source.
- Cross-border commuter permit: possible to change jobs with permission, not possible to change cantons, tax at source.
- Short-term residence permit L: not possible to change jobs or cantons, tax at source.
- Trainee permit: maximum of 18 months, only for training purposes for young professionals.
- Asylum seekers: work permit one month following submission of application for asylum. Possible to change jobs with permission, not possible to change cantons. Tax at source, 10% of salary is retained as security.
- Transfer of managerial staff: essential management staff may reside in Switzerland for three years in accordance with the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The permit can be extended for one year.

The employer is responsible for checks and due diligence, as well as for ensuring that a foreign employee has permission to assume the position. In order to obtain an entry visa, the employer must prove that it was not possible to find a suitable candidate in Switzerland or the EU/EFTA region and that the training of a suitable employee within a reasonable period was not possible.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > **Entry & residence** > **Labour/Work permits**  
Employment for non-EU/EFTA citizens

#### 6.4.4 Trainees/Interns

Switzerland has negotiated agreements with numerous countries on the exchange of trainees/interns. These agreements make it easier to obtain residence and work permits of limited duration. Trainees or interns from countries which have no special agreement with Switzerland must follow the normal application procedure for work and residence permits.

Trainees/interns are defined as people who can provide evidence of being engaged in professional training or a course of study. The age limit is 35 years (exceptions: Australia, New Zealand, Poland, Russia and Hungary: 30 years). The job must be in the profession learned or in the area of study/training and may last no more than 18 months. Canadian students who would like to complete an internship as part of their education are also admitted, while for Japanese students only university graduates are permitted. There are special quotas for trainees/interns, and national legislation giving priority to Swiss nationals does not apply. There is no provision for trainees/interns to bring their families with them.

Because of the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU, citizens of EU-27 and EFTA countries only need a short-term residency permit for au pair employees. The permit can be extended to a maximum of 18 months.

[www.swissemigration.ch](http://www.swissemigration.ch) provides a guide for foreign trainees/interns and potential employers, as well as addresses, a standard employment contract, and an application form.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence > Labor/Work permits > Young professionals (trainees)  
Guide for foreign trainees/interns and Swiss employers

## 6.5 NATURALIZATION

The naturalization process consists of three stages. It is possible to apply for Swiss citizenship in your municipality or canton. Each municipality and canton has its own requirements for naturalization in addition to those imposed by the federal government (see below).

**The following requirements must be met to become a naturalized Swiss:**

- Resident for 12 years in Switzerland (years of residence between ages 10 and 20 count double)
- Integration into Swiss life
- Familiarity with the Swiss lifestyle, customs, and traditions
- Observance of Swiss laws
- No threat to the domestic or international security of Switzerland

Foreign spouses of Swiss citizens benefit from a simplified naturalization process (after five years of residence in Switzerland and after three years of marriage), as do children of a Swiss parent who are not yet Swiss citizens.

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) > Entry & residence  
Swiss citizenship/naturalization

[www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch) > Foreigners in Switzerland  
Naturalization: Information