

Understanding Swiss Entry Visas and Residence Permits

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By **Christine Breitler**, 25th September 2026

Switzerland continues to attract internationally mobile individuals and families, given its political stability, quality of life, strong legal framework and favourable business environment. However, entry, residence and employment are governed by separate rules, which should be considered together when planning a relocation.

The applicable procedure depends primarily on the individual's nationality, country of residence, purpose of travel and intended length of stay.

Visas and Residence Permits

It is important to distinguish between a visa and a residence permit.

A visa authorises an individual to enter Switzerland for a particular purpose and period. It does not, in itself, necessarily grant the right to live or work in Switzerland. A residence permit and, where applicable, authorisation to work may also be required.

As Switzerland forms part of the Schengen Area, short stays are generally limited to 90 days in any rolling 180-day period across the Schengen Area as a whole. Time spent in other Schengen countries must therefore be included when calculating the permitted duration of stay.

Depending on nationality, an individual may enter Switzerland without a visa for a short stay or may be required to obtain a Schengen Type C visa before travelling. This visa is generally used for tourism, family visits, business meetings and other short-term activities. It does not automatically authorise employment in Switzerland.

For stays exceeding 90 days, permission to reside in Switzerland is generally required. Nationals who are subject to a visa requirement may also need a national Type D visa for a long-term stay, for example for employment, study or family reunification. The Type D visa allows entry with a view to taking up residence. It should not be confused with the Swiss residence permit issued through the relevant cantonal procedure.

- **Nationals of EU and EFTA States**

EU and EFTA nationals benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons and do not require a visa to enter Switzerland. The procedure for obtaining residence and work authorisation is generally straightforward.

For stays exceeding three months, EU and EFTA nationals must register with the competent local authority and obtain the appropriate residence permit. The type and duration of the permit will depend on the purpose of the stay and, in employment cases, the length of the employment contract.

For certain short-term employment or service arrangements, a notification procedure may be available instead of a formal permit application.

- **British Nationals**

British citizens do not require a visa for short visits of up to 90 days in any 180-day period, provided they do not undertake unauthorised employment.

Since the UK's departure from the EU, they have generally been treated as third-country nationals for immigration and employment purposes and may require prior authorisation to relocate or work in Switzerland. Special provisions apply to British nationals who acquired residence rights before 1 January 2021.

- **Other Non-EU and Non-EFTA Nationals**

Nationals of countries outside the EU and EFTA are subject to more restrictive admission requirements.

Whether a visa is required for a short visit depends primarily on the nationality rather than country of residence.

For employment, they are generally admitted if they are suitably qualified, such as managers, specialists or professionals with significant expertise. Permits are subject to annual quotas and applicable labour market requirements. Authorisation must generally be obtained before employment begins.

Business Travel and Work Authorisation

The right to enter Switzerland should not be confused with the right to work. An individual may be permitted to enter without a visa but still require authorisation before carrying out a professional activity. Conversely, obtaining a work permit does not necessarily remove the requirement for an entry visa where one applies.

Business travel requires particular attention. Attendance at meetings or conferences may be permitted as a short business visit. Operational work, the provision of services or activities performed for a Swiss entity may trigger notification or permit requirements.

The proposed activity should therefore be reviewed in advance and not solely by reference to the duration of the visit.

The Application Process

Visa applications must normally be submitted through the Swiss representation or authorised visa application centre responsible for the applicant's place of residence.

The supporting documentation will depend on the purpose and duration of the stay. It may include:

- A valid passport
- Details of the proposed visit
- Proof of accommodation and sufficient financial means
- Appropriate travel medical insurance
- Where relevant, an invitation letter and supporting business documentation

A Type D visa applications will normally be linked to a residence, employment, study or family reunification procedure involving the competent Swiss canton.

Processing times vary depending on the type of application, the country in which it is submitted and whether approval from the Swiss immigration authorities is required. As administrative practices may also differ between cantons, the process should begin well in advance of the proposed relocation or employment start date.

Strategic Relocation Planning

The visa or permit application is only one part of a successful relocation.

Immigration requirements should be coordinated with employment arrangements, tax residence, social security, health insurance and family circumstances. The choice of canton may also affect both the immigration process and the individual's future tax position.

The timing of the move may have significant consequences in Switzerland and in the country of departure. Existing companies, trusts, investment structures, anticipated capital gains, dividend distributions and succession arrangements should therefore be reviewed before Swiss tax residence begins.

Early coordination between Swiss and foreign advisers can help prevent delays, conflicting residence positions and unnecessary tax exposure.

Get in Touch

At [Dixcart Switzerland](#), we combine local knowledge with international expertise to advise individuals and families on immigration, residence permits, employment arrangements and pre-arrival tax planning.

If you or your clients are considering relocating to Switzerland or require tailored advice on Swiss residence, work permits or tax planning, please contact [Christine Breitler](#) at advice.switzerland@dixcart.com.