

Careers in Switzerland for Foreign Graduates from Swiss Universities

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

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DISCLAIMER

This document is for informational purposes only and has no legal status. It may contain errors or misinterpretations. Only the original legal texts have force of law.

I. Legal aspects

Q1.1 I am a foreigner and I will obtain a degree from a Swiss higher education institution. What are the possibilities for me to work in Switzerland?

For a salaried job, there are two cases depending on your nationality:

1. If you are a citizen of an **EFTA** country (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein) or of the **EU** (all European Union countries), you may work freely in Switzerland and you will obtain a residence permit upon signature of your employment contract. Your employer must make the request for a permit to the Population Service (*Service de la population*). The permit will be short-term (type **L-EU/EFTA**) for a work contract with validity up to one year, or long-term (type **B-EU/EFTA** for five years) for a work contract of more than one year, **and is not subject to a quota**. While seeking work, you can stay in Switzerland for 3 months without any further formality. Beyond that, you must ask for a jobseeker residence permit. Overall, your stay in Switzerland as a jobseeker must not exceed one year after graduation
2. If you are a **third-country** national (any country other than those mentioned in Paragraph 1), you can work in Switzerland, but your access to the job market will be more restricted. Your future employer will need to request a permit for residence and gainful employment from the Employment Service (*Service de l'emploi*), and demonstrate either that your employment has a significant scientific or economic interest, or that a satisfactory candidate with priority status (Swiss, foreign residents in Switzerland, EU/EFTA nationals) could not be found. The permit will be short-term (L) or long-term (B for one year, renewable) according to the duration of your contract, and **will be subject to a quota** (i.e. the number of permits delivered each year is limited)¹. While seeking work, you can stay in Switzerland for six months as long as you have sufficient financial resources: you will need to ask for a residence permit for seeking work ("*titre de séjour pour recherche d'emploi*") (see Q 2.1).

If you are not seeking salaried employment in Switzerland but would like to work as an independent (freelancer) or to create your own company, see question Q1.3.

¹ UK nationals benefit from specific quotas. Nationals of all other third countries are subject to a common quota. Quotas are set each year by the Federal Council and are published in the [OASA](#) (annexes 1 and 2)

Q1.2 I will obtain a postgraduate degree from a Swiss university (MAS, Executive Master, etc.). What are my possibilities to work in Switzerland?

The same rules as mentioned in Q1.1 normally apply to postgraduate graduates of a Swiss University. However, there may be a margin of appreciation on the part of the authorities depending on the level and duration of the studies.

Q1.3 I would like to work as an independent (freelancer) or create my own company in Switzerland after my degree. What are the possibilities?

An independent gainful activity can generally take two forms:

- a. An activity under your own name (self-employed) or in a Partnership (*Société en nom collectif*, a formal partnership between self-employed individuals)
- b. An activity within a limited liability company (SARL) or a Limited Company (SA) in which you hold the majority of the shares and of which you will then be an employee.

Again, you need to distinguish between two situations, according to your nationality:

1. If you are a citizen of an **UE/EFTA** country, you will receive a 5-year residence authorization after providing proof that the basic requirements for engaging in such an activity are fulfilled (e.g. obtaining an independent status from a *Caisse de compensation AVS*, incorporating your company and registering it with the Commercial Registry, etc.). You should make your request to the Population Service (*Service de la population*).
2. If you are a **third-country** national, you will have, in addition to meeting the basic requirements above, to demonstrate to the authorities the viability of your business project, which will be evaluated based on its financial soundness, the credibility of its business plan, and the economic or scientific interest it presents for the canton and for Switzerland. Unlike the case of EU/EFTA nationals, the nature of the activity is therefore of great importance. The application should be addressed to the Employment Service (*Service de l'Emploi*). The permit is **subject to a quota** and its validity is usually linked to your reaching of **specific business objectives** (e.g. minimum turnover, number of jobs created, etc.) in a given timeframe.

Q1.4 What are the legislative changes in effect since January 1, 2011?

There are 3 of them which specifically concern third-country nationals who have graduated from a Swiss university

- They are no longer asked to commit to leaving the country at the end of their studies. On the contrary, they will now be able to stay in Switzerland for six months in order to seek work after obtaining their degree. To do so, they need to ask for a specific temporary residence permit for seeking work (*"Autorisation de séjour pour recherche d'emploi en Suisse"*). See Section II for further details
- Their future employer will now be able to derogate from the priority given to Swiss citizens, foreign residents in Switzerland and EU/EFTA nationals when the job to be filled has a **significant scientific or economic interest**. This somewhat vague notion has been clarified in the implementing Ordinance and related directives but its interpretation remains at the discretion of the authorities in charge of issuing the work permit.
- Years spent studying in Switzerland will now be taken into account for a settlement permit (C permit) if a long-term residence permit (B permit) was held for at least two consecutive years. This also applies to EU/ EFTA nationals.

II. Administrative aspects

The temporary residence permit for seeking employment – Third-countries

Q2.1 What are the steps to take to obtain a temporary residence permit for seeking employment in Switzerland?

The request must be made by the degree-holder to the *Contrôle des habitants* of his/her place of residence. He/she must be able to show that he/she has **successfully passed the final exams** and that he/she has sufficient revenue (either at least CHF 2,100 per month, or a total of CHF 12,600) and somewhere to live. This jobseeker permit is valid for a maximum of six months.

Attention: *You need to obtain this temporary residence permit in order to stay in Switzerland after your studies. It is not issued automatically or tacitly, and may be refused if some of the above conditions are not met, or if the applicant falls foul of Article 62 of the Law on Foreigners (i.e. if he/she has made false declarations, if he/she has been sentenced to a prison term, if he/she has threatened public security or order, if he/she is dependent on social assistance, etc.).*

Q2.2 When does the six-month period start? What happens when the six months are up?

The six-month period starts **from the moment the student has been notified of the success of his/her final exams** by the Registrar's Office (*Service académique*), and not from the moment at which the degree is actually awarded. For EPFL Master graduates, success is usually notified in February or in July, whereas the degree is formally awarded the following October at the Graduation ceremony ("*Magistrale*"). For PhD graduates, a certificate of success established by the Registrar's Office is available on the student's IS-Academia account the day after the **private** defense.

Attention: *the six-month period runs from the date at which success was notified, even if the application for the permit is filed afterwards. In other words, if you file your application two months after being informed of your success, you will only get four months on your permit!*

This type of residence permit is not renewable. This means that you will need to leave the country when it expires, unless you have a legal right to stay in Switzerland.

Q2.3 My Student permit B is valid until after I obtain my degree. Can I stay on in Switzerland with this permit after my degree, and then request a temporary residence permit to seek employment?

No. If you complete your studies before your student permit expires, the outstanding period (up to 6 months) will in any case be included in the duration of the jobseeker permit, because, as explained in Q2.2, the 6-month period starts to run as soon as the successful completion of your studies is notified.

Q2.4 What are the obligations linked to this jobseeker permit?

You must hold sufficient financial resources and have somewhere to live. In addition, the permit holder cannot work more than 15 hours per week. Longer working hours are considered incompatible with your job search. On the other hand, there is no need for you to show proof of your job search, and you can enter and leave Switzerland without losing the permit.

Q2.5 If I leave Switzerland after I graduate, can I come back later and take up my right to this permit?

Not if you leave for more than six months, since the six-month period starts from the notification of success in your final exams. If you have been away for a shorter time, you can take advantage of the outstanding time up to the deadline of six months – provided that you applied for it before leaving the country.

Q2.6 If I take advantage of this permit, do I have any rights to unemployment insurance (including allowances, courses, etc.) during my job search?

In principle no, as you are not considered to be legally “eligible to work” (Art. 15 al. 1 of the Law on Unemployment Insurance) as long as you do not have a work permit. Nevertheless, your Regional Unemployment Office (*ORP*) will decide on a case-by-case basis.

The resident permit based on employment (“work permit”) – Third countries**Q2.7 If I find a job, what should I do to obtain a permit?**

Your future employer will take care of the application and will provide the required documents. Your role is limited to finding a job. As part of the application, an employment contract signed by both parties must be provided, which will only take effect if the permit is issued.

Q2.8 If I was denied a permit once, does that affect my chances of getting one for another job?

Theoretically not, since the permit is denied to the employer, not to you. The denial is often related to the position itself (not of significant scientific or economic interest, part-time work, salary too far below the usual conditions for that industry, etc.).

III. Practical aspects**Q3.1 As a foreigner, what are my chances of finding a job in Switzerland ?**

Generally speaking, they are fairly high. About [one third](#) of all jobs in Switzerland are held by foreigners of all nationalities (1 in 5 comes from a third country). This proportion is even much higher in some cantons such as Geneva or Vaud. The Swiss job market is therefore very open in this respect.

However, if you are a national of a third country, obtaining a work permit is not automatic. But as a graduate of a Swiss university, your chances of obtaining a work permit are nevertheless considerably better, first because your degree is nationally recognized and also because the law makes a permit easier for you to obtain. The main obstacle usually comes from the fact that many employers are not familiar with these easier conditions for obtaining work permits to Swiss university graduates and are consequently reluctant to hire a third-country national for fear of not obtaining one. Another obstacle is that the number of work permits is limited. If the annual quota is already exhausted at the time of application, it will be put on hold or refused, even if the authorities were willing to issue it.

Q3.2 Do you have any special advice to give to foreign graduates?

If you intend to work in Switzerland, it is important that you get familiar with the legal aspects of obtaining a work permit. As mentioned above, employers themselves are not always aware of them.

The other advice we can give you will unfortunately come a little late if you are already looking for a job:

- Take advantage of studying in Switzerland to acquire or improve your language skills in French, German, and even. Language requirements are very high on the Swiss job market, where 88% of job offers for university graduates require a command of at least two languages.
- Find out more as soon as possible about the companies active in the industry in which you would like to start your career. The knowledge you gain will tremendously help you in your search and will help you convince employers to hire you.

IV. Legal texts

- Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (RS 142.20)
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2007/758/en>
- Ordinance on the admission, residence and exercise of a gainful activity (RS 142.201)
https://www.admin.ch/ch/f/rs/c142_201.html (not available in English)

V. Other useful information

State Secretariat for migration:

- EU and EFTA nationals: [FAQ](#)
- Third-country nationals: [information and procedures](#)