



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
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Eidgenössisches Justiz- und Polizeidepartement EJPD

Département fédéral de justice et police DFJP

Dipartimento federale di giustizia e polizia DFP

Staatssekretariat für Migration SEM

Secrétariat d'Etat aux migrations SEM

Segreteria di Stato della migrazione SEM

## Brief overview

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# **Welcome to Switzerland!**

You have been granted the status of a recognised refugee, a temporarily admitted refugee or a temporarily admitted person. Special rules apply to your status. The present brochure will provide you with detailed information.

You will be staying in Switzerland for quite some time. We expect you to integrate in Swiss life. For this reason, it is important that you gather information and actively start looking for work and education. Furthermore, this brochure provides useful tips and links to websites and other more detailed information.

We hope that you will quickly find your bearings in Switzerland.

State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

**This brochure is available in electronic format on the [www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch) website in the following languages: German, French, Italian, English, Arabic, Tigrinya, Kurdish, Tibetan, Farsi, Tamil, Somali, and Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian**

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch)





## Recognised refugees — B permit

**B** A recognised refugee is someone who, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or due to her/his political opinion, has fled her/his native country or country of last residence either because he/she has been subject to serious disadvantages or has a well-founded fear of being exposed to such disadvantages. This definition is based on the Geneva Convention on Refugees. Serious disadvantages include a threat of life, physical integrity or freedom as well as measures that exert intolerable psychological pressure. It is also considered that women have specific motives for seeking asylum. The Geneva Convention on Refugees also stipulates that no one may be expelled or returned to a country where he/she will be exposed to the above-mentioned risks.

### Legal basis

The legal status of refugees is set forth in the Asylum Act (Art. 58–62 AsylA). The current version of the Asylum Act may be viewed on the following webpage:  
[www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142\\_31.html](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142_31.html)

### Permits issued

Recognised refugees receive a one-year, renewable, B permit. However, renewal may be denied if there are important grounds for doing so (e.g. when the individual endangers Switzerland's internal or external security). After legally residing in Switzerland for 10 years, the individual may be issued a permanent settlement permit (C permit). For those who manage to successfully integrate in Switzerland, it is possible to apply for the C permit earlier, i.e. after 5 years of legal residence.

## Temporarily admitted refugees — F permit

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A temporarily admitted refugee is someone who qualifies for refugee status but whose status as a refugee came about by leaving his/her native country or country of origin or due to his/her conduct after departure. In some cases, a person who would normally qualify for asylum is deemed unworthy of it due to serious misconduct or if she/he has violated or endangered Switzerland's internal or external security. These individuals will not be granted asylum but are nevertheless temporarily admitted to Switzerland.

### Legal basis

The legal status of temporarily admitted refugees is set forth in the Geneva Convention on Refugees. Temporary admittance is governed by the provisions of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals (FNA, Art. 83ff). The current version of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals may be viewed on the following webpage: [www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142\\_20.html](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142_20.html)

### Permits issued

Temporarily admitted refugees receive an F permit, which is valid for up to 12 months and may be renewed by the canton of residence for a further 12 months. After legally residing in Switzerland for 5 years, the individual may apply for a B permit. When examining the application, the authorities consider the level of integration, family ties and the reasonableness of a return to his or her country of origin.

# Temporarily admitted persons

## — F permit

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A temporarily admitted person is someone whose request for asylum has been denied but whose expulsion or removal order cannot yet be enforced for one of three reasons: enforcement of the expulsion or removal order is **not possible** (e.g. because the individual does not have a passport or travel document), **not permitted** (e.g. when the expulsion goes against international law) or is **not reasonable** (e.g. when the individual is very ill and would not be able to receive adequate medical treatment in his or her country of origin).

### Legal basis

The legal status of temporarily admitted foreigners is set forth in the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals (FNA, Art. 83ff). The current version of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals may be viewed on the following webpage:  
[www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142\\_20.html](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/sr/c142_20.html)

### Permits issued

Temporarily admitted persons receive an F permit, which is valid for up to 12 months and may be renewed by the canton of residence for a further 12 months. After legally residing in Switzerland for 5 years, the individual may apply for a B permit. When examining the application, the authorities consider the level of integration, family ties and the reasonableness of a return to his or her country of origin.

# Brief overview and rules

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## Housing

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Recognised refugees, temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons are already assigned to a canton as asylum seekers. After the asylum decision is rendered, they will continue to reside in this canton and may freely choose where in that canton they wish to live. They must notify the corresponding cantonal authorities of their address of residence. The permit issued is only valid for the canton to which they have been assigned.

**Useful information for tenants in 15 languages:**  
[www.bwo.admin.ch/dokumentation/00106/00112/00121/index.html?lang=de](http://www.bwo.admin.ch/dokumentation/00106/00112/00121/index.html?lang=de)  
**Swiss Tenants' Association:** [www.mieterverband.ch](http://www.mieterverband.ch)

## Change of canton

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For recognised refugees, the general terms of the Foreign Nationals Act apply. If you wish to change cantons, you must submit an application to the immigration authority of the new canton. This application can only be denied if the applicant is unemployed or if there are grounds for revocation.

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**F**

Temporarily admitted refugees may apply to change cantons. This application can only be denied if the applicant is unemployed or if there are grounds for revocation. This application for a change of canton must be sent directly to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM).

**F**

Temporarily admitted persons may apply to change cantons. The application must be sent directly to the SEM. The SEM will then consult the cantons concerned and decide whether or not to approve the application. Applications will only be approved if the applicant is entitled to family reunification, or if both cantons concerned agree to the change of canton.

## Travel abroad

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Recognised refugees may apply for a travel document for refugees at the immigration office of their canton of residence. This travel document will allow them to travel abroad and back to Switzerland. In order to apply, they must go to the cantonal immigration office in person. The travel document will then be issued by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and is generally valid for a period of 5 years.

**Important: Recognised refugees or temporarily admitted refugees who travel back to their country of origin risk the revocation of their refugee status.**

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Temporarily admitted persons are not entitled to travel abroad freely. They must deposit their passports issued by their country of origin with the SEM. In justified cases (e.g. serious illness or death of family members), they may go to the cantonal immigration office in person and apply for a return visa. Individuals who are unable to obtain a passport issued by their country of origin may apply for a passport for foreigners, allowing them to travel. It is generally valid for a period of 10 months and may be used only for the approved travel.

## Family reunification

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Recognised refugees are permitted to bring family members (spouse, registered partner and children under the age of 18) to Switzerland. These family members will also be recognised as refugees and will be granted asylum provided there are no special circumstances that preclude this. Any children born in Switzerland to refugees will not be automatically recognised as refugees. For this reason, it is important that an asylum application is filed with the SEM as soon as possible after the child's birth so that the child's refugee status can also be granted.

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Temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons must wait for at least 3 years after temporary admittance is awarded by the cantonal immigration authorities before applying for family reunification. The person's spouse and (unmarried) children under the age of 18 may be brought to Switzerland through family reunification if the following conditions are met: all family members must live with the recognised refugee in the same household; the housing must be large enough to accommodate the family members; the family must be able to earn enough income to cover its basic needs (no dependence on social assistance). Family reunification must be applied for within a period of 5 years. For children under the age of 12, the application must be submitted within 12 months.

## Integration

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People who live in Switzerland for extended periods of time should integrate as quickly and lastingly as possible.

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We expect immigrants to gather information, learn the local language, look for work and take part in social life. Swit-

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zerland supports the integration process through programmes and projects and seeks to offer equal opportunities for all. The aim is to ensure that the values enshrined in the Swiss Federal Constitution are respected and that all people in Switzerland live together peacefully in a climate of mutual respect and tolerance.

**Further information on Swiss integration policy:**

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/themen/integration.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/themen/integration.html)

## Integration support

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Numerous governmental and private organisations offer courses and other forms of support to recognised refugees, temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons to facilitate their integration in Switzerland.

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We encourage you to seek advice and take advantage of these services. The necessary information can be found at a cantonal integration office or competence centre for integration.

**Further information on integration support:**

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/themen/integration/foerderung.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/themen/integration/foerderung.html)

## Education

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Like all other children living in Switzerland, the children of recognised refugees and temporarily admitted refugees may, and indeed must, attend school and pursue training. They attend kindergarten (i.e. pre-school) and 9 years of compulsory education. After this, they should either enrol in vocational education and training (VET), an secondary school, or attend a baccalaureate school in preparation for university studies.

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The children of temporarily admitted persons attend kindergarten (i.e. pre-school) and 9 years of compulsory education. Access to vocational education and training (VET), secondary schools and baccalaureate schools and subsequent university studies is regulated at cantonal level.

**Additional information about compulsory education and VET:**  
[www.ch.ch/en/compulsory-schooling](http://www.ch.ch/en/compulsory-schooling)  
[www.berufsbildung.ch](http://www.berufsbildung.ch)

## Continuing education

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On the Swiss labour market, workers are subject to stringent requirements both in terms of language mastery and technical skills. Often, the professional skills of foreigners do not meet the requirements of the Swiss labour market or their qualifications are not recognised in Switzerland. Language courses, continuing education and other courses should make it easier to find employment. The cantonal integration offices or competence centres for integration can provide you with all of the necessary information and advice.

**You may also contact a local vocational, educational and career counselling office where you live:**  
[www.kbsb.ch/dyn/19622.php](http://www.kbsb.ch/dyn/19622.php)



## Employment

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Recognised refugees, temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons require a work permit in order to take up gainful employment. The future employer must contact the corresponding cantonal authority to apply for this work permit.

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You may not begin to work until this work permit has been issued. The cantonal authorities will issue this permit only if salary and working conditions are adhered to. This requirement is intended to safeguard the labour rights of recognised refugees, temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons and prevent them from having to work at a lower salary than other workers.

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**B**

Recognised refugees and temporarily admitted refugees have unrestricted access to the labour market of their canton of residence and may work in all branches of economic activity. In fact, they should actively search for employment.

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Temporarily admitted persons may obtain a work permit from the cantonal authorities. Issuance of this permit is not subject to prevailing economic or labour market conditions.

## Healthcare

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Switzerland offers a well-developed healthcare system. You should obtain information about how you and your family can live healthily and what offers are available. All people living in Switzerland, including children, are required to take out basic health insurance coverage. When it comes to health, being able to understand information and express yourself in a national language is important.

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) provides comprehensive information in various languages on the subject of prevention and treatment of physical and mental ailments:  
[www.migesplus.ch](http://www.migesplus.ch)

The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) offers medical care, psychotherapy and counselling to victims of torture and war and their families in Bern, Zurich, Geneva and Lausanne:  
[www.redcross.ch/de/organisation/ambulatorium-fuer-folter-und-kriegsopfer/hilfe-fuer-traumatisierte-menschen](http://www.redcross.ch/de/organisation/ambulatorium-fuer-folter-und-kriegsopfer/hilfe-fuer-traumatisierte-menschen)

The Centre for Psychotraumatology (GRAVITA) also offers medical care, psychotherapy and counselling to victims of torture and war and their families in St. Gallen:  
[www.gravita.ch/angebot](http://www.gravita.ch/angebot)

## Social insurance

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Switzerland has a well-developed social insurance network. As a recognised refugee, temporarily admitted refugee, or temporarily admitted person, you enjoy the same level of coverage as Swiss citizens. Social insurance benefits are paid to those who become unemployed or disabled. In addition, there are pensions for the elderly; women in employment may go on paid maternity leave; if a spouse or parent (of minors) dies, survivors' benefits are paid.

If you are gainfully employed, then you pay social insurance contributions to help fund this system (i.e. a fixed portion of your income is deducted from your salary). Employers are also required to take out occupational health and safety insurance for their workers.

More information about social insurance:

[www.bsv.admin.ch/themen/index.html?lang=de](http://www.bsv.admin.ch/themen/index.html?lang=de)

More information about unemployment insurance:

[www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/erste\\_schritte](http://www.treffpunkt-arbeit.ch/arbeitslos/erste_schritte)

More information about other types of insurance coverage:

[www.ch.ch/private/00029/00039/index.html?lang=de](http://www.ch.ch/private/00029/00039/index.html?lang=de)

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## Taxation and special charges

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Recognised refugees, temporarily admitted refugees and temporarily admitted persons must pay taxes in Switzerland. Taxes are withheld at source, i.e. directly deducted from the person's salary before it is paid (Art. 83 to 110 of the Federal Act of 14 December 1990 on the Federal Direct Tax). The level of taxation varies from canton to canton.

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Temporarily admitted persons who are gainfully employed pay the usual social insurance contributions as well as a special charge, which is also directly withheld by the employer and paid to the State Secretariat for Migration. This special charge amounts to 10% of the person's gross salary.

The obligation to pay this special charge ends either after 3 years of temporary admittance status, or 7 years after entering Switzerland, or once the maximum amount of CHF 15,000 has been reached.

The State Secretariat for Migration has produced an information sheet about this special charge.

This information sheet can be found here:

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/asyl/sonderabgabe.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/asyl/sonderabgabe.html)

## Social benefits

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Recognised refugees and temporarily admitted refugees have the same entitlement to social benefits as Swiss citizens if they are unable to earn enough income to cover their basic necessities.

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The entitlement to social benefits enjoyed by temporarily admitted person varies from one canton to another. Generally speaking, the provisions of Art. 80–84 AsylA for asylum seekers apply (Art. 86 FNA) and in many cantons, the entitlement is more restricted than for recognised refugees and temporarily admitted refugees.

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Funding for social benefits is drawn from taxes. Each canton has a different level of expenditure for social benefits. However, most cantons apply the guidelines on the calculation of social contributions established by the Swiss Association of Welfare Organisation (SKOS). This ensures that social benefits in Switzerland are awarded in a fair and effective manner.

Additional information can be found here:

<http://skos.ch/sozialhilfe-und-praxis/haeufig-gestellte-fragen>

All persons capable of working are expected to become independent of social benefits and to be able to provide for themselves and their family.

## Important addresses

Cantonal immigration and labour market authorities:

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/adressen\\_kantone\\_und.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/adressen_kantone_und.html)

Cantonal naturalisation authorities:

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/kantonale\\_einbuengerungsbehoerden.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/kantonale_einbuengerungsbehoerden.html)

Cantonal authorities for registration of employment:

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/Adressen\\_Meldeverfahren.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/Adressen_Meldeverfahren.html)

Cantonal and municipal integration offices:

[www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/kantonale\\_ansprechstellen.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/bfm/de/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/kantonale_ansprechstellen.html)

## Other useful links

Swiss authorities online:

[www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch)

State Secretariat for Migration (SEM):

[www.sem.admin.ch](http://www.sem.admin.ch)

Federal Commission on Migration (FCM):

[www.ekm.admin.ch](http://www.ekm.admin.ch)


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