

Country Profile - Switzerland

Job market

What are my chances of getting a job?

In Switzerland, non-nationals typically work either as seasonal workers in tourism or in areas such as IT and financial services that require highly skilled workers.

- **Typical problems encountered:** Swiss employers often look for graduates with relevant degrees. Arts and social science graduates may find it more difficult than others to find graduate employment.
- **How to improve your chances:** it is useful to speak the language of the canton in which you wish to work. You are more likely to gain graduate employment in skilled areas such as IT. Work experience is valued by employers recruiting for graduate jobs.
- **Language requirements:** German, French, Italian and Romansch are all national and official languages. German is most widely spoken, particularly in the centre and some of the east of Switzerland. French is the second most widely spoken, especially in the western part of the country which borders France. Italian is spoken in the southern areas, and Romansch, the least spoken language, is spoken in pockets of eastern Switzerland. English may be used by multinational companies with offices/headquarters in Switzerland.

Where can I work?

- **Major industries:** banking and insurance, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, electrical and mechanical engineering, food processing and packaging materials, graphic machinery, machine and precision tools, telecoms, textile machinery, watches.
- **Major companies:** ABB, Adecco, Credit Suisse, Glencore, Nestlé, Novartis, Roche, Swatch, Swiss Re, UBS and Zurich Insurance Group.
- **Search for more companies:** [Swissfirms](#) (a website of the [Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Switzerland \(CCIS\)](#)), the [British-Swiss Chamber of Commerce \(BSCC\)](#), [Kompas Switzerland](#), [Local.ch](#) and [Wikipedia - List of Companies in Switzerland](#) also have details of companies operating in Switzerland.
- **Major cities:** Bern (capital), Zurich (largest city), Basel, Geneva and Lausanne.

What's it like working in Switzerland?

- **Average working hours:** the maximum working week for employees in offices, industrial businesses, technical personnel and other employees, including sales assistants in large retail stores, is 45 hours. For other salaried staff, the maximum is 50 hours a week.
- **Holidays:** four to five weeks paid annual leave per year. In addition, there are four statutory public holidays (New Year's Day, Ascension Day, Swiss National Day (1 August) and Christmas Day). The observance of other public holidays depends on the individual cantons.

- **Tax rates:** can vary considerably between cantons. Personal income tax is progressive and consists of federal, cantonal and communal taxes. Rates can rise to a maximum of 11.5% at federal level, and approximately twice that at cantonal level. The total rate does not usually exceed 40% and, in many cases, is much lower.
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Applying for jobs

Applications are most commonly made by CV and covering letter, with a photograph, appropriate certificates and work references attached.

You should create a CV in one of the main national languages (German, French or Italian) and an English CV. Multinational companies may accept applications in English.

The CV should be no longer than two A4 pages and should include:

- your full name, address, telephone number, date of birth and nationality;
- details of previous jobs and work experience - try to avoid gaps if possible;
- education (school, higher education and vocational training);
- languages spoken and proficiency;
- details of computer skills;
- special interests and skills, e.g., leisure activities, involvement in clubs and societies.

Work references and certificates of qualifications are important.

Covering letters should be typed and not exceed one A4 page in length. Give the reasons why you are interested in the job or the company as well as the skills and experience you have to offer.

Speculative applications are also quite common. When making speculative applications, make sure that your covering letter is targeted to the company you are interested in. Do not include references or transcripts of your qualifications at this stage.

See the [Success and Career](#) website for example CVs and covering letters (in French).

The [Swiss Labour Market Authority](#) has a downloadable booklet on working in Switzerland which includes information on how to apply for jobs. See also the [Federal Office for Migration](#) website.

Selection is normally by interview, but large organisations and multinational companies may employ a variety of methods from interviews to psychometric tests or assessment centres.

See the [EURES - European Job Mobility Portal](#) (Living and Working in Switzerland) website for general information on applying for jobs.

Will my UK qualifications be recognised?

Switzerland has adopted the EU's system of mutual recognition of foreign qualifications issued by EU member states.

If your occupation is not regulated in Switzerland, you do not need to apply for recognition of your foreign qualification. It is up to the individual employer to decide whether they want to employ you. However, if your occupation is regulated, you will need to contact the relevant Swiss agency to apply for recognition of your qualifications. (Regulated occupations or professions are subject to legal restrictions and requirements.) The [Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology \(OPET\)](#) is the first point of contact for queries relating to the recognition of foreign qualifications. They have a list of Swiss agencies and occupations covered.

[Swiss ENIC-NARIC](#) provides recommendations of recognition for graduates with foreign degrees wanting to work in Switzerland. Recommendations only cover completed undergraduate degrees. Postgraduate qualifications, professional training or language courses are not evaluated.

The [UK National Europass Centre \(UK NEC\)](#) gives information on how to make your skills and qualifications easily understood in other European countries, including Switzerland.

Do I still need to pay UK tax and National Insurance?

If you are planning to live and work in Switzerland, check your UK tax and National Insurance position with [HM Revenue & Customs \(HMRC\)](#) to ensure that you are not losing any UK pension rights.

Vacancy sources

Job websites

- [Alpha](#) - management and specialist vacancies, mostly in French and German.
- [EURES - European Job Mobility Portal](#) - includes job vacancies, living and working conditions and labour markets in Switzerland, as well as a CV-posting service for jobseekers.
- [Jobs.ch](#) - vacancies in German.
- [JobScout24](#) - available in German or French.
- [JobsinGeneva.com](#) - English-speaking professional jobs.
- [JobsinZurich.com](#) - English-speaking professional jobs.
- [Jobup](#) - vacancies in French and English.
- [jobwinner](#) - vacancies in German.
- [Monster \(Switzerland\)](#) - available in French or German.
- [Stepstone \(Switzerland\)](#) - vacancies in German.
- [Success and Career](#) - vacancies in French, German and English. Includes advice on CV management and job search.
- [Swiss Labour Market Authority](#) - information on working in Switzerland available in English, French, German or Italian. Most vacancies in German and French.

- [telejob - jobs for academics](#) (including PhD student positions) - vacancies in German and English.
- Websites of individual companies - see the 'job market' section for details on where to find lists of companies in Switzerland.
- [Xpat Jobs Switzerland](#) - advertises jobs from agencies in Switzerland.

Recruitment agencies

The [Swiss Labour Market Authority](#) website has a list of licensed private employment agencies (*Arbeitsvermittlung* or *agence de placement*).

Newspapers

Vacancies are published in the supplements of the larger daily newspapers.

- *24 Emplois* in [24 heures](#) (French).
- [Corriere del Ticino](#) - (Italian).
- [NZZexecutive](#) - published by [Neue Zürcher Zeitung \(NZZ\)](#) (German).
- *Pages emploi* - in [Le Temps](#) (French).
- [Stellefant](#) - in the [Basler Zeitung](#) (German).
- *Stellen-Anzeiger* and *Alpha* - in [Tages Anzeiger](#) and [Sonntagszeitung](#) (German).
- *Stellenmarkt* - in the [Berner Zeitung](#) (German).

Other sources

Once you are in Switzerland you can register free of charge with your local regional employment centre (RAV). RAVs are responsible for supporting EU nationals in their search for a job and specialise in the labour market, job placement and unemployment. See the [Swiss Labour Market Authority](#) for contact details.

Hidden vacancies

Vacancies are often filled by employees from within the company itself or by those contacting the employer direct. Speculative applications are therefore quite common. Contact details for Swiss companies can be found on professional association websites, usually in the 'members' section. See, for example, the [Swiss Business Federation](#), [Swissmem](#) (the Swiss Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Industries), the [Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry](#) and [Science Industries Switzerland](#). Details on where to find lists of companies can also be found in the 'job market' section.

Make use of any private or professional contacts, such as family, friends and previous employers with links to Switzerland.

Work experience

Work placements and internships

Traineeships are available through [AIESEC \(Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales\)](#), an organisation that offers young people the opportunity to participate in international internships in areas such as management, technology, education and development.

Science and engineering undergraduates may apply for a traineeship via [IAESTE \(The International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience\)](#).

Exchange programmes

Your institution may be involved in the [Leonardo da Vinci Programme](#) through which vocational training exchanges and work placements are arranged with partner organisations in other countries, including Switzerland. Contact your institution's international office or your careers service for more information.

Teaching schemes

The [British Council - Language Assistants](#) programme provides the opportunity for undergraduates and graduates of any discipline (as long as they have AS level French or German or equivalent) to work in Switzerland as an English language assistant.

There may be opportunities to teach English in private language or boarding schools. Some may offer summer courses or camps. Competition for teaching work in state schools is fierce. For information about teaching English in Switzerland and job opportunities visit the [English Teachers Association Switzerland \(ETAS\)](#) website.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a good way to gain experience and to learn more about Swiss society and culture, and will improve your language skills. The [Youth in Action](#) programme, for example, is funded by the European Commission and provides young people with a variety of opportunities to experience Europe. The [European Voluntary Service \(EVS\)](#) is part of this programme and offers young people (18-30) the opportunity to volunteer in a range of countries, including Switzerland, for a period of two to twelve months.

It is also possible to find volunteering opportunities via a range of volunteering websites. Research any opportunities thoroughly to ensure you are happy with the project and terms and conditions on offer.

Casual work

Opportunities for seasonal work exist in areas such as tourism, and hotel and catering, particularly for those with knowledge of French and/or German. See, for example:

- [Anywork Anywhere](#) - seasonal and temporary jobs abroad;
- [Natives](#) - ski resort jobs abroad;

- [Resort Work](#) - summer and winter resort jobs;
- [Seasonal Jobs 365](#) - seasonal work and holiday jobs abroad;
- Your university careers service - many services get summer jobs from organisations such as [Eurocamp](#).

Postgraduate study

How does the higher education system work?

Higher education in Switzerland is made up of the higher education sector (tertiary level A) and professional education and training (PET) sector (tertiary level B).

The higher education sector offers various academic or practice-oriented degree programmes at the following institutions:

- cantonal universities and federal institutes of technology;
- universities of applied sciences;
- universities of teacher education.

All the Swiss universities offer a range of postgraduate courses and continuing education and training. See the following websites for more information:

- [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities](#)
- [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences \(KFH\)](#)
- [Swiss Conference of Rectors of Universities of Teacher Education \(COHEP\)](#)

The PET sector enables professionals who have completed vocational education and training (VET) to specialise and to enhance their skills and knowledge. See the [Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology \(OPET\)](#) website for more information.

As part of the Bologna process, Swiss institutions are increasingly adopting the following model:

- Bachelor degree (generally three years of full-time study);
- Master's degree (a further one-and-a-half to two years of full-time study);
- Doctorate (writing a thesis to gain a PhD).

As part of this process, universities are increasingly redesigning their master's courses to attract foreign students.

See the [Swiss University](#) website for more information.

What courses are available?

The traditional cantonal universities offer courses in a wide range of disciplines including law, social science, mathematics, natural sciences and a range of arts subjects. Some also have a faculty of medicine. Courses at the federal institutes of technology generally relate to science, engineering and architecture.

Universities of applied sciences offer courses that provide students with practical skills in areas such as engineering, IT, architecture, construction and planning, chemistry, business, health, social work, music and physical education. The universities of teacher education train future teachers to teach within the Swiss education system.

Where can I study?

There are ten cantonal universities and two federal institutes of technology in Switzerland:

- [Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne](#) (language of instruction - French).
- [Federal Institute of Technology Zurich](#) (language of instruction - German).
- [University of Basel](#) (language of instruction - German).
- [University of Bern](#) (language of instruction - German).
- [University of Fribourg](#) (language of instruction - French).
- [University of Geneva](#) (language of instruction - German and/or French).
- [University of Lausanne](#) (language of instruction - French).
- [University of Lucerne](#) (language of instruction - German).
- [University of Lugano \(USI\)](#) (language of instruction - mainly Italian).
- [University of Neuchâtel](#) (language of instruction - French).
- [University of St Gallen](#) (language of instruction - German).
- [University of Zurich](#) (language of instruction - German).

Universities are offering an increasing number of study programmes in English, particularly at master's level. See the [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities](#) for a list of master's courses taught entirely in English.

There are eight universities of applied sciences in Switzerland:

- [Bern University of Applied Sciences](#)
- [Fachhochschule Ostschweiz](#)
- [Kalaidos University of Applied Sciences](#)
- [Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts](#)
- [University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland](#)
- [University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland \(SUPSI\)](#)
- [University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland](#)
- [Zürcher Fachhochschule](#)

The [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences \(KFH\)](#) website has a list of Master's courses, including those taught in English. See the [Swiss Conference of Rectors of Universities of Teacher Education \(COHEP\)](#) website for a list of universities of teacher education.

Applying for postgraduate study

For admission to a master's programme, you will need to have successfully completed a Bachelor's level programme. It is up to the individual universities to decide if your Bachelor's degree is adequate and can be recognised.

Although an increasing number of universities are offering master's level programmes in English, a good knowledge of the language of the university you plan to attend can also help.

Each university sets their own application deadlines. See the [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities](#) website for a list of application deadlines for each university. Contact the universities that you would like to apply to well before the admissions deadline. Applications can usually be made online.

The [Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities](#) website has a downloadable series of guides on studying at universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education in Switzerland. See also the [Swiss University](#) website for full information on studying in Switzerland.

Fees and scholarships

Tuition fees are generally reasonably low. They vary depending on the university, but typically range from 1,000 to 2,340 CHF per academic year. There are some courses that are much more expensive, up to 8,000 CHF per academic year.

Although some universities charge more for foreign students, others charge the same fees for domestic and foreign students. See the [Swiss University](#) website for details.

Living expenses range from between 18,000 and 28,000 CHF per year, depending on the location of the university and personal expenditure. This covers expenditure on accommodation, health insurance, food, transportation and educational material.

The Swiss government awards a range of scholarships to foreign students. Check the [State Secretariat for Education and Research - Scholarships and grants](#) website to see whether your country of origin is part of the Swiss government's scholarship scheme.

Contact individual universities to find out whether they offer scholarships to foreign students.

Are there any exchange programmes?

UK students on undergraduate degree courses, master's programmes or some PhD programmes may be interested in spending time studying in Switzerland through the [Erasmus](#) scheme. This programme covers all subject areas, but check what links your university has with your university's Erasmus coordinator (usually based in the international office).

Will my qualification be recognised in the UK?

Details on comparing international qualifications are available from [UK NARIC \(National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom\)](#), which provides information

about the equivalency of qualifications and skills from overseas to the UK's national qualifications frameworks.

Visa and travel information

Visa requirements and applications

Most European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Area (EFTA) nationals may enter Switzerland to search for a job. No permit is required for stays of up to three months. If you have not found a job within this time, you must obtain a short-term residence permit (type L permit) from the appropriate local or cantonal authorities. This is valid for another three months' job search. If you are still unable to find a job during this time, you can apply for your short-term residence permit to be extended. Extensions can be granted up to one year.

Citizens of Bulgaria and Romania remain subject to restrictions until 31 May 2016 at the latest. See the [Federal Office for Migration](#) website for full information.

Citizens of the EU-8 member states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) should visit the [Federal Office for Migration](#) website for information on quotas for category B residence permits.

If you are from a non-EU country, contact the Swiss embassy in the country where you are currently residing. If you are living in the UK, contact the [Swiss Regional Consular Centre](#) of the [Embassy of Switzerland in the UK](#).

You can apply for naturalisation if you have lived in Switzerland for at least twelve years.

For full information on visa requirements visit the [Federal Office for Migration](#) website.

Help in an emergency

The single European emergency telephone number, available everywhere in the EU (and Switzerland) free of charge, is 112. You can use this number when you require an ambulance, the fire brigade or the police. See [112 - The European emergency number](#) for more information.

In Switzerland you can also use:

- 144 - ambulance
- 118 - fire service
- 117 - police
- 1414 - Swiss rescue

Contact the [British Embassy in Switzerland](#) for help in an emergency.

Travel advice

Check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) website before travelling for up-to-date travel advice.

Country overview

Geography

- **Full country name:** Swiss Confederation.
- **Population:** 7.7 million (United Nations, 2011).
- **Border countries:** Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy and France.
- **Climate:** Switzerland's climate is broadly temperate, but as a mountainous country there is considerable variation. Summers can be hot, punctuated by often stormy rainfall. Snow is common in winter ([BBC Weather Country Guides: Switzerland](#)).
- **Terrain:** mainly mountainous, including both the Alps and the Jura. There is a central plateau, where the majority of the people live, which is characterised by hills, plains and lakes. It is the second most densely forested country in Europe.
- **Natural hazards:** avalanches at certain times of the year, particularly in the Alpine regions, landslides and flooding.

Living in Switzerland

- **Cost of living:** Switzerland is one of the most expensive countries in the world. In Europe, only Norway, Denmark and Finland are more expensive. The cost of living is especially high in the cities of Geneva and Zurich. Food, housing and utilities in particular are well above the European Union (EU) average.
- **Internet domain:** .ch
- **Health:** high standard of health and wellbeing. The Swiss healthcare system is expensive, and health insurance is compulsory for all residents. Before going to Switzerland make sure you obtain a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) to be eligible for emergency medical treatment. It is also important to take out comprehensive travel and medical insurance before travelling. Supplementary insurance is needed for those undertaking outdoor summer/winter sports.
- **Laws and customs:** smoking is banned throughout Switzerland in the workplace and in most enclosed spaces accessible to the public, including bars, restaurants, cinemas, schools, shopping centres and sports centres.

Economy and finance

- **Currency:** Swiss franc (CHF).
- **Type of economy:** market economy.
- **Health of economy:** the Swiss economy, in common with most West European economies, is experiencing the effects of the eurozone crisis. However, the country has relatively low unemployment, a highly skilled labour force and one of the world's highest per capita GDP. It is one of the world's most competitive economies.

See the [EURES - European Job Mobility Portal](#) (Living and Working in Switzerland) for more information.

- **Unemployment rate:** 3.1% (April 2012).
- **Main exports:** chemicals, machinery and electronics, precision instruments, watches.

Culture

- **People:** German, French, Italian, Romansch.
- **Major religion:** Christianity (Roman Catholic and Protestant).
- **History:** See [BBC Timeline: Switzerland](#).

Politics

- **Type of government:** Federal Republic with strong local governments (cantons). The Swiss government is made up of a seven-member Federal Council. Switzerland has a system of direct democracy, whereby citizens are invited to the polls several times a year to vote in national or regional referendums and people's initiatives. Constitutional proposals and major international treaties are voted on. Parliamentary decisions can also be subjected to a vote by collecting 50,000 signatures.
- **Major political parties:** Christian Democrats (CVP), People's Party (SVP), Radicals (FDP) and Social Democrats (SP).

More information

- [Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom](#)
- [BBC Country Profile - Switzerland](#)
- [The World Factbook](#)
- [XE Universal Currency Converter](#)

Written by AGCAS editors, June 2012

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