

Cross-border giving: international donors and Swiss foundations

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Philanthropy is increasingly international. Families from Asia, the Middle East and Africa establish foundations in Switzerland to support causes in their home countries, Swiss foundations make grants all over the world, and donors in several countries want to support the same project. Each of these situations raises questions of tax deductibility, due diligence and compliance, which should be answered before the first transfer is made.

1 Foreign donors

A donor who lives outside Switzerland can give to a Swiss foundation without restriction. Whether the donation is deductible depends on the tax law of the donor's country of residence, which often limits deductions to domestic charities or to charities that meet domestic requirements. Some countries recognise foreign charities under certain conditions, and international networks of foundations, such as Transnational Giving Europe, help donors in participating countries to support foreign causes with a tax deduction in their own country.

2 Grants abroad

A Swiss foundation may pursue its purpose in any country. For its tax exemption and for its supervision, it must be able to show that its grants are used for the purpose. Good practice includes a written grant policy, the selection of partner organisations after checking their registration, governance and track record, grant agreements that define the use of funds and the reporting, and the monitoring of results.

3 Due diligence, sanctions and money laundering

Foundations that transfer funds to countries with high risks of corruption, terrorism financing or sanctions must take particular care. They should verify the identity and ownership of recipients, screen them against Swiss and international sanctions lists and document the purpose of each payment. Swiss banks apply the same standards to foundation accounts and will ask for this documentation, as explained in the article on [bankability](#). The applicable sanctions rules are described in the article on [US sanctions and the BIS Affiliates Rule](#).

4 Families giving back to their home countries

A Swiss foundation can be an effective vehicle for families who want to support education, health or development in their country of origin. It provides a neutral and respected base, a stable legal framework and state supervision that reassures partners and governments. Where local rules require a local entity, the Swiss foundation can work with a local partner or subsidiary, which should be structured so that the tax exemption and the supervision in Switzerland are not affected.

The conditions for the tax exemption of Swiss foundations are explained in the article on [tax exemption](#).

5 How Ressos Legal helps

I advise international families and foundations on cross-border giving, grant agreements, due diligence on recipients and the sanctions and anti-money laundering rules that apply to international grant-making. [Contact me](#) for a first conversation.

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

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