

Family reunification: bringing your spouse and children to Switzerland

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Many relocations to Switzerland begin with one family member, who later wishes to bring the spouse and children. The rules on family reunification for non-EU/EFTA nationals are set out mainly in the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act, and the outcome depends heavily on the residence status of the person already living in Switzerland. Careful preparation and attention to deadlines can make a decisive difference.

1 Who counts as family

Family reunification under the Act covers the foreign spouse, or registered partner, and unmarried children under the age of eighteen. Parents, adult children and other relatives can generally be admitted only on other grounds, for example as persons of independent means or in exceptional hardship cases, and the requirements for those routes are considerably stricter.

2 The permit type of the family member in Switzerland

Swiss citizens and holders of a settlement permit (C permit) have a legal entitlement to family reunification for their spouse and children under eighteen, provided that the family lives together and the further conditions are met. Holders of a residence permit (B permit) have no such entitlement. For them, the cantonal migration authority decides at its discretion, and practice can differ from canton to canton. Holders of short-term permits face further restrictions. EU/EFTA nationals are subject to the more generous rules of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, which this article does not address.

3 Conditions for B permit holders

Where a B permit holder applies, the authorities will generally examine whether the family will live together, whether suitable accommodation is available for the size of the family, and whether the family has sufficient financial means without having to rely on social assistance. The spouse is also expected to be able to communicate in the national language spoken at the place of residence or to have registered for a language support programme. Cantons apply their own benchmarks when assessing the size of the flat and the level of income, so documentation such as a rental contract, salary statements and evidence of assets should be prepared with care.

4 Deadlines

The Act sets time limits for applications. As a general rule, reunification must be requested within five years, and for children over the age of twelve within a shorter period of twelve months. The period usually starts when the permit of the family member in Switzerland is granted or when the family relationship arises. After the deadline has expired, later reunification is possible only where important family reasons exist, and the authorities interpret this exception narrowly. Families who intend to bring older children should therefore act promptly.

5 Rights of family members after arrival

Spouses and children admitted under family reunification of B or C permit holders are generally permitted to work in Switzerland. Children of compulsory school age are enrolled in the local public school, and the family must register with the commune and take out Swiss health insurance within the statutory period. The residence permit of the family members usually remains linked to the continuation of the family relationship for a certain time, so a separation can affect the status of the spouse.

6 What pays off in practice

- **Diarise the deadlines from the outset** because the shorter period for older children is easily missed while the main applicant is settling in.
- **Choose housing with the family in mind** as a flat that is too small for the household can lead the canton to refuse the application.

- **Start language learning before arrival** since registration for a course or an early certificate supports the application and eases integration.

7 How Ressos Legal helps

I advise families on the timing, documentation and cantonal requirements of family reunification applications and accompany them in the procedure with the migration authorities. [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.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/family-reunification-switzerland