

Recognition of foreign judgments and probate in Switzerland

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Many estates with Swiss assets are administered under foreign law and by foreign courts. Whether a foreign judgment, grant of probate or appointment of an executor will be accepted in Switzerland depends on the applicable legal framework and the documents presented.

1 The Lugano Convention for European civil matters

For civil and commercial judgments from states bound by the Lugano Convention, which include the member states of the European Union, Norway and Iceland, recognition in Switzerland follows a simplified regime with limited grounds for refusal. The convention, however, excludes wills and succession from its scope. Many trust disputes fall within it, while purely succession-related decisions do not.

2 The Private International Law Act for other cases

Judgments from other states, including those in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, are assessed under the Federal Act on Private International Law (PILA). The general rules in Art. 25 et seq. PILA require that the foreign court had jurisdiction from a Swiss perspective, that the decision is final, and that no ground for refusal applies, such as a violation of Swiss public policy or of fundamental procedural rights. Specific rules apply to particular fields, including succession and trusts, and they determine which foreign authorities are regarded as competent.

3 Probate documents and inheritance certificates

Swiss banks and land registries frequently receive foreign grants of probate, letters of administration, notarial certificates and court orders. Whether they are accepted depends on the recognition rules for succession

matters in the PILA and on the practice of the institution concerned. Documents usually need an apostille or legalisation and a certified translation. Where doubts persist, it may be necessary to obtain a Swiss certificate of inheritance or to have the foreign document formally recognised.

4 Authority of executors and administrators

A foreign executor or administrator may face questions as to whether their powers extend to assets in Switzerland. Swiss institutions will examine the appointment document and, in some cases, request confirmation of the executor's powers under the applicable law. Where Swiss courts have jurisdiction over Swiss assets, local measures may be required in addition to the foreign appointment.

5 What pays off in practice

- **Check the legal basis early** since the Lugano Convention and the PILA lead to different procedures.
- **Prepare the documents properly** with apostilles, certified translations and evidence of finality.
- **Ask the bank in advance** which documents it will accept, to avoid repeated submissions.

6 How Ressos Legal helps

I assist executors, heirs and beneficiaries in having foreign judgments and probate documents recognised and acted upon in Switzerland. [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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