

The settlement permit (C permit): permanent residence in Switzerland

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For many families who have lived in Switzerland for some years, the settlement permit (C permit) is the step that turns a renewable stay into a lasting home. It is granted for an unlimited period and frees its holder from many of the conditions attached to the residence permit. For nationals of countries outside the EU and EFTA, the path to it is governed by the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act and by cantonal practice.

1 The general rule: ten years of residence

As a rule, a non-EU/EFTA national may be granted a settlement permit after at least ten years of residence in Switzerland on a short-term or residence permit, provided that the last five years were spent continuously on a residence permit (B permit). Periods spent in Switzerland for education or training, or on certain provisional statuses, may be counted only in part or under specific conditions, so the exact calculation should be checked against the applicant's permit history.

The C permit is not granted automatically when the period has been completed. The cantonal migration authority examines the application, and for third-country nationals the federal authorities are also involved. There is generally no legal entitlement to the permit for most applicants, although some bilateral settlement agreements give nationals of certain countries a stronger position.

2 Earlier grant after five years

The legislation allows a settlement permit to be granted after five years of uninterrupted residence on a B permit where the applicant is well integrated, which in practice requires a higher level of language skills than the ordinary route. In addition, Switzerland has concluded settlement

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agreements or reciprocity arrangements with a number of states whose nationals may qualify after five years. Which countries benefit should be verified in each case.

3 Integration criteria

The Foreign Nationals and Integration Act sets out the criteria by which integration is assessed. These include respect for public security and order, respect for the values of the Federal Constitution, language skills, and participation in economic life or in education. Applicants who depend on social assistance, who have significant debts or enforcement proceedings, or who have a criminal record may find their application refused or deferred.

4 Language requirements

For the ordinary settlement permit, applicants must demonstrate oral skills at level A2 and written skills at level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference in the national language spoken at their place of residence. For the early grant after five years, the required oral level is higher. Proof is normally provided by a recognised language certificate, and cantons apply their own lists of accepted certificates.

5 What changes with a C permit

Holders of a settlement permit are largely free to change employer and occupation, to take up self-employment and to move to another canton without the approvals required for B permit holders. They are generally no longer subject to tax deducted at source on their salary and are assessed in the ordinary procedure instead. The permit itself is unlimited, although the identity card must be renewed periodically. A settlement permit may be revoked or replaced by a residence permit if integration criteria are no longer met, and it lapses after a prolonged absence from Switzerland.

6 What pays off in practice

- **Keep a clean permit history** by retaining copies of every permit, renewal and change of address, as these documents form the basis of the residence calculation.
- **Start language preparation early** because a recognised certificate at the required level is often the item that delays an otherwise complete application.

- **Review debts and enforcement records** before applying, since an extract from the debt enforcement register is usually requested and open matters can weigh against the applicant.

7 How Ressos Legal helps

I advise families and entrepreneurs on the timing and preparation of settlement permit applications and on their communication with the cantonal 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.

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